

LACC WRITING HANDBOOK



Greta Enszer
Los Angeles City College

LACC Writing Handbook

This text is disseminated via the Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project (<https://LibreTexts.org>) and like the thousands of other texts available within this powerful platform, it is freely available for reading, printing, and "consuming."

The LibreTexts mission is to bring together students, faculty, and scholars in a collaborative effort to provide an accessible, and comprehensive platform that empowers our community to develop, curate, adapt, and adopt openly licensed resources and technologies; through these efforts we can reduce the financial burden born from traditional educational resource costs, ensuring education is more accessible for students and communities worldwide.

Most, but not all, pages in the library have licenses that may allow individuals to make changes, save, and print this book. Carefully consult the applicable license(s) before pursuing such effects. Instructors can adopt existing LibreTexts texts or Remix them to quickly build course-specific resources to meet the needs of their students. Unlike traditional textbooks, LibreTexts' web based origins allow powerful integration of advanced features and new technologies to support learning.



LibreTexts is the adaptable, user-friendly non-profit open education resource platform that educators trust for creating, customizing, and sharing accessible, interactive textbooks, adaptive homework, and ancillary materials. We collaborate with individuals and organizations to champion open education initiatives, support institutional publishing programs, drive curriculum development projects, and more.

The LibreTexts libraries are Powered by [NICE CXone Expert](#) and was supported by the Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Project, the California Education Learning Lab, the UC Davis Office of the Provost, the UC Davis Library, the California State University Affordable Learning Solutions Program, and Merlot. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1246120, 1525057, and 1413739.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation nor the US Department of Education.

Have questions or comments? For information about adoptions or adaptations contact info@LibreTexts.org or visit our main website at <https://LibreTexts.org>.

This text was compiled on 05/20/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Reading Skills

- 1.1: The Reading-Writing Connection
- 1.2: Main Ideas and Supporting Details
- 1.3: Pre-reading Strategies
- 1.4: Annotation Strategies
- 1.5: Note-Taking Strategies
- 1.6: Questioning Strategies
- 1.7: Vocabulary Strategies

2: Writing Process

- 2.1: The Reading-Writing Process
- 2.2: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content
- 2.3: Prewriting Strategies
- 2.4: Outlining
- 2.5: Drafting
- 2.6: Revising and Editing

3: Essay Essentials

- 3.1: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking
- 3.2: Argument
- 3.3: Paraphrasing and Summarizing
- 3.4: Writing a Thesis
- 3.5: Elements of a Thesis
- 3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement
- 3.7: Resources

4: Writing Basics

- 4.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme
- 4.2: The Three-story Thesis- From the Ground Up
- 4.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument
- 4.4: Exercises
- 4.5: Verb Tense
- 4.6: Passive and Active Voice
- 4.7: Run-ons, Fragments, Comma Splices

5: Sentence Clarity

- 5.1: Sentence Variety
- 5.2: Coordination and Subordination
- 5.3: Parallelism
- 5.4: Writing Conclusions
- 5.5: Paraphrasing
- 5.6: Quoting

6: Multilingual Writers

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- [1.1: The Reading-Writing Connection](#)
- [1.2: Main Ideas and Supporting Details](#)
- [1.3: Pre-reading Strategies](#)
- [1.4: Annotation Strategies](#)
- [1.5: Note-Taking Strategies](#)
- [1.6: Questioning Strategies](#)
- [1.7: Vocabulary Strategies](#)

This page titled [1: Reading Skills](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

Importance of Reading

Reading stands at the heart of the process of writing academic essays. No matter what kinds of sources and methods you use, you are always reading and interpreting text. Most of us are used to hearing the word “reading” in relation to secondary sources, such as books, journals, magazines, websites, etc. But even if you are using other research methods and sources, such as interviewing someone or surveying a group of people, you are reading. You are ‘reading’ the subjects’ ideas and views on the topic you are investigating. When you study photographs, cultural artifacts, and other non-verbal research sources, you are ‘reading’ them by trying to connect them to their cultural and social contexts and to understand their multiple meanings. Principles of critical reading, which we are about to discuss in this chapter, apply to those research situations as well.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

The Reading-Writing Connection

Creating New Meanings

Reading and writing are not two separate activities, but two tightly connected parts of the same whole. That whole is the process of learning and the creation of new meaning. It may seem that reading and writing are complete opposites of one another. According to the popular view, when we read, we “consume” texts, and when we write, we “produce” texts. But this view of reading and writing is true only if you see reading as a passive process of taking in information from the text, and not as an active and energetic process of making new meanings and new knowledge. Similarly, good writing does not originate in a vacuum, but is usually based upon, or at least influenced by, other ideas, theories, and stories that come from reading. So if, as a college student, you have ever wondered why your writing teachers have asked you to read books and articles and write responses to them, it is because writers who do not read and do not actively engage with their reading, have little to say to others.

Engaging in a Dialog

As rhetorical processes, reading and writing cannot exist without the other. The goal of a good writer is to engage the readers into a dialog presented in their writing. Similarly, the goal of a critical and active reader is to participate in that dialog and to have something to say back to the writer and to others. Writing leads to reading, and reading leads to writing. We write because we have something to say, and we read because we are interested in what others have to say.

Reading what others have to say and responding to them helps us make that all-important transition from simply having opinions about something, to having ideas. Opinions are often over-simplified and fixed. They are not very useful because, if different people have different opinions that they are not willing to change or adjust, such people cannot work or think together. Ideas, on the other hand, are ever evolving, fluid, and flexible. Our ideas are informed and shaped by our interactions with others, both in person and through written texts. In a world where thought and action count, it is not enough to simply “agree to disagree.” Reading and writing, used together, allow us to discuss complex and difficult issues with others, to persuade and be persuaded, and, most importantly, to act.

Active Reading

Successful students approach reading with a strategy that helps them get the most out of their reading. These students read actively. They look for the main idea of the material, its themes, and for words they do not understand. The opposite of reading actively is reading passively. Passive readers simply skip over things they do not understand and have difficulty understanding the material as a result. In this course, we are going to practice active reading. You will find that active reading is more enjoyable, lets you understand more of what you have read, and leads to better test scores.

The first part of active reading is to read through the material once while making notes about anything you find interesting or important. It is okay to not understand everything the first time through. Make a note next to any words you may need to look up later. When you finish, stop for a few minutes and think about what you just read. What is your first impression? Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? What was the most memorable part of the reading? Did something in it surprise you? Take a few minutes to add these thoughts to the notes you took while reading.

Now, take a break and go do something else. Go for a walk, run an errand, or take care of some chores. Allow yourself to absorb what you read without thinking too much about it or worrying about what you did not understand. When you come back, use a dictionary to look up the definitions of the words you marked earlier because you were not sure what they meant. Look at any sections you did not understand the first time through and see if they make more sense now. If something is still unclear, review your notes and briefly read the material a second time. Any confusing parts will likely be much clearer now, and if they are not, talk to your teacher or a tutor about them.

? Exercise 1 1.1.1



Literacy4DS: "Active Reading"Page

Figure: Watch this twelve-minute video that walks you through different active reading strategies to improve your ability to understand and recall the material that you read. As you watch the video, try adopting the active reading advice you learned in the Active Reading Strategies article above.



Video 1.1.1

Video: [10 Active Reading Strategies//Study Smart Study Less](#) by Ana Mascara. *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

- As you watch the video, make brief notes of key ideas, as well as any words or concepts you don't understand well.
- Next, take a few moments to reflect on the video. Consider questions like: What was the most memorable part of the video? What is one new piece of information you learned? What questions do you have about the video?
- Review your notes. If you do not understand all of the main points, watch the video a second time. You don't have to watch the whole thing again – it's okay to just review sections that address the specific questions you have.
- Finally, add to or revise your initial notes. Were you able to answer your unresolved questions? Can you list the most important "take-aways" from the video? In other words, what are two or three things from this video that you want to remember?

Print vs. Online Reading

In an online educational environment, you're probably going to do more reading than listening. You may do some of your reading in printed form – say, an assigned novel or textbook – but some of it might also be online in the form of a webpage and forums. Reading online isn't the same as reading in print, so you should practice some strategies that will improve your online reading comprehension and speed. And some of the tactics you learn about here will help you with any kind of reading you might do, not just the stuff that's online.

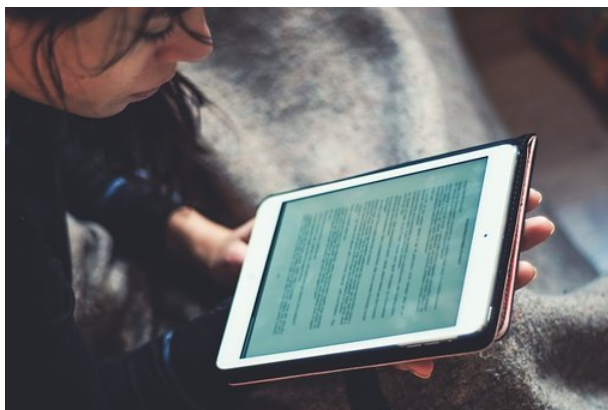


Figure: Image from Pixabay

So what do we mean when we say that reading print is different from reading online?

- First, when you read something – let's say, a book – that's been printed by a reputable publishing house, you can assume that the work is authoritative. The author had to be vetted by a publishing house and multiple editors, right? But when you read something online, it may have been written or posted by anybody. This means that you have to seriously evaluate the authority of the information you're reading. Pay attention to who was writing what you're reading – can you identify the author? What are their credentials?
- Second, in the print world, texts may include pictures, graphics, or other visual elements to supplement the author's writing. But in the digital realm, this supplementary material might also include hyperlinks, audio, and video, as well. This will fundamentally change the reading experience for you because online reading can be interactive in a way that a print book can't. An online environment allows you to work and play with content rather than passively absorb it.
- Finally, when you read in print, you generally read sequentially, from the first word to the last. Maybe you'll flip to an index or refer to a footnote, but otherwise the way you read is fairly consistent and straightforward. Online, however, you can be led quickly into an entirely new area of reading by clicking on links or related content. Have you ever been studying for class and fall down a Wikipedia rabbit hole while looking for unfamiliar terms? You might have started by investigating the French Revolution, but half an hour later you find yourself reading about the experimental jazz scene in 1970s New York. You can't really do that with a book.

The Why, What, How of Reading Comprehension

Now that you've heard about how reading online differs from reading print, you should know that this has some really practical consequences for reading comprehension – how to understand and apply what you're reading. Improving your online reading comprehension will save you time and frustration when you work on your assignments. You'll be able to understand your course subject matter better, and your performance on your quizzes and exams will improve.

Consider the "why, what, and how" of reading comprehension:

1. **Why?** *Why am I being asked to read this passage?* In other words, what are the instructions my professor has given me?
2. **What?** *What am I supposed to get out of this passage?* That is, what are the main concerns, questions, and points of the text? What do you need to remember for class?
3. **How?** *How will I remember what I just read?* In most cases, this means taking notes and defining key terms.

When you keep the "why, what and how" of reading comprehension in the forefront of your mind while reading, your understanding of the material will improve drastically. It will only take a few minutes but it will not only help you remember what you've read, but it will also help you structure any notes that you might want to take.

Purpose Of Academic Reading

Casual reading across genres, from books and magazines to newspapers and blogs, is something students should be encouraged to do in their free time because it can be both educational and fun. In college, however, instructors generally expect students to read resources that have particular value in the context of a course. Why is academic reading beneficial?

- **Information comes from reputable sources:** Web sites and blogs can be a source of insight and information, but not all are useful as academic resources. They may be written by people or companies whose main purpose is to share an opinion or sell you something. Academic sources such as textbooks and scholarly journal articles, on the other hand, are usually written by experts in the field and have to pass stringent peer review requirements in order to get published.

- **Learn how to form arguments:** In most college classes except for creating writing, when instructors ask you to write a paper, they expect it to be argumentative in style. This means that the goal of the paper is to research a topic and develop an argument about it using evidence and facts to support your position. Since many college reading assignments (especially journal articles) are written in a similar style, you'll gain experience studying their strategies and learning to emulate them.
- **Exposure to different viewpoints:** One purpose of assigned academic readings is to give students exposure to different viewpoints and ideas. For example, in an ethics class, you might be asked to read a series of articles written by medical professionals and religious leaders who are pro-life or pro-choice and consider the validity of their arguments. Such experience can help you wrestle with ideas and beliefs in new ways and develop a better understanding of how others' views differ from your own.

Active Learning When Reading

Many instructors conduct their classes mainly through lectures. The lecture remains the most pervasive teaching format across the field of higher education. One reason is that the lecture is an efficient way for the instructor to control the content, organization, and pace of a presentation, particularly in a large group. However, there are drawbacks to this “information-transfer” approach, where the instructor does all the talking and the students quietly listen: students have a hard time paying attention from start to finish; the mind wanders. Also, current cognitive science research shows that adult learners need an opportunity to practice newfound skills and newly introduced content. Lectures can set the stage for that interaction or practice, but lectures alone don't foster student mastery. While instructors typically speak 100–200 words per minute, students hear only 50–100 of them. Moreover, studies show that students retain 70 percent of what they hear during the first ten minutes of class and only 20 percent of what they hear during the last ten minutes of class.

Thus it is especially important for students in lecture-based courses to engage in active learning outside of the classroom. But it's also true for other kinds of college courses—including the ones that have active learning opportunities in class. Why? Because college students spend more time working (and learning) independently and less time in the classroom with the instructor and peers. Also, much of one's coursework consists of reading and writing assignments. How can these learning activities be active? The following are very effective strategies to help you be more engaged with, and get more out of, the learning you do outside the classroom:

- **Write in your books:** You can underline and circle key terms, or write questions and comments in the margins of your books. The writing serves as a visual aid for studying and makes it easier for you to remember what you've read or what you'd like to discuss in class. If you are borrowing a book or want to keep it unmarked so you can resell it later, try writing key words and notes on Post-its and sticking them on the relevant pages.
- **Annotate a text:** Annotations typically mean writing a brief summary of a text and recording the works-cited information (title, author, publisher, etc.). This is a great way to “digest” and evaluate the sources you're collecting for a research paper, but it's also invaluable for shorter assignments and texts, since it requires you to actively think and write about what you read. The activity, below, will give you practice annotating texts.
- **Create mind maps:** Mind maps are effective visual tools for students, as they highlight the main points of readings or lessons. Think of a mind map as an outline with more graphics than words. For example, if a student were reading an article about America's First Ladies, she might write, “First Ladies” in a large circle in the center of a piece of paper. Connected to the middle circle would be lines or arrows leading to smaller circles with visual representations of the women discussed in the article. Then, these circles might branch out to even smaller circles containing the attributes of each of these women.

The following video discusses the process of creating mind maps further and shows how they can be a helpful strategy for active reading engagement:



Video 1.1.1

[Video: How to Use a Mind Map](#) by Two-Point-Four. *Rights Reserved*. Standard YouTube license.

In addition to the strategies described above, the following are additional ways to engage in active reading and learning:

- Work when you are fully awake, and give yourself enough time to read a text more than once.
- Read with a pen or highlighter in hand, and underline or highlight significant ideas as you read (but only the significant ideas--overhighlighting can be counter-productive).
- Interact with the ideas in the margins (summarize ideas; ask questions; paraphrase difficult sentences; make personal connections; answer questions asked earlier; challenge the author; etc.).
- As you read, keep the following in mind:
 - What is the **CONTEXT** in which this text was written? (This writing contributes to what topic, discussion, or controversy? Context is **bigger** than this one written text.)
 - Who is the intended **AUDIENCE**? (There's often more than one intended audience.)
 - What is the author's **PURPOSE**? To entertain? To explain? To persuade? (There's usually more than one purpose, and essays almost always have an element of persuasion.)
 - How is this writing **ORGANIZED**? Compare and contrast? Classification? Chronological? Cause and effect? (There's often more than one organizational form.)
 - What is the author's **TONE**? (What are the emotions behind the words? Are there places where the tone changes or shifts?)
 - What **TOOLS** does the author use to accomplish her/his purpose? Facts and figures? Direct quotations? Fallacies in logic? Personal experience? Repetition? Sarcasm? Humor? Brevity?
 - What is the author's **THESIS**—the main argument or idea, condensed into one or two sentences?
- Foster an attitude of intellectual curiosity. You might not love all of the writing you're asked to read and analyze, but you should have something interesting to say about it, even if that "something" is critical.

Planning and Managing Your Reading for Optimal Comprehension

Your college courses will sharpen both your reading and your writing skills. Most of your writing assignments—from brief response papers to in-depth research projects—will depend on your understanding of course reading assignments or related readings you do on your own. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to write effectively about a text that you have not understood. Even when you do understand the reading, it can be hard to write about it if you do not feel personally engaged with the ideas discussed.

This section discusses strategies you can use to get the most out of your college reading assignments. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

1. **Planning strategies** to help you manage your reading assignments.
2. **Comprehension strategies** to help you understand the material.
3. **Active reading strategies** to take your understanding to a higher and deeper level.

Planning Your Reading

Have you ever stayed up all night cramming just before an exam? Or found yourself skimming through a detailed memo from your boss five minutes before a crucial meeting? The first step in handling college reading successfully is planning. This involves both

managing your time, and setting a clear purpose for your reading.

Managing Your Reading Time

You will learn more detailed strategies for time management in Section 1.4, but for now, focus on setting aside enough time for reading and breaking your assignments into manageable chunks. If you are assigned a seventy-page chapter to read for next week's class, try not to wait until the night before to get started. Give yourself at least a few days and tackle one section at a time.

Your method for breaking up the assignment will depend on the type of reading. If the text is very dense and packed with unfamiliar terms and concepts, you may need to read no more than five or ten pages in one sitting so that you can truly understand and process the information. With more user-friendly texts, you will be able to handle longer sections—twenty to forty pages, for instance. And if you have a highly engaging reading assignment, such as a novel you cannot put down, you may be able to read lengthy passages in one sitting.

As the semester progresses, you will develop a better sense of how much time you need to allow for the reading assignments in different subjects. It also makes sense to preview each assignment well in advance to assess its difficulty level and to determine how much reading time to set aside.

Tip:

College instructors often set aside reserve readings for a particular course. These consist of articles, book chapters, or other texts that are not part of the primary course textbook. Copies of reserve readings are available through the university library, in print, or online. When you are assigned a reserve reading, download it ahead of time (and let your instructor know if you have trouble accessing it). Skim through it to get a rough idea of how much time you will need to read the assignment in full.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Setting a Purpose

The other key component of planning is setting a purpose. Knowing what you want to get out of a reading assignment helps you determine how to approach it and how much time to spend on it. This helps you stay focused, especially when you are tired and would rather relax.

Sometimes your purpose is simple. You might just need to understand the reading material well enough to discuss it intelligently in class the next day. However, your purpose will often go beyond that. For instance, you might also read to compare two texts, to formulate a personal response to a text, or to gather ideas for future research. Here are some questions to ask to help determine your purpose:

- **How did my instructor frame the assignment?** Often your instructor will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading:
 - Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current teaching practices in elementary math.
 - Read these two articles and compare Smith's and Jones's perspectives on the 2010 health care reform bill.
 - Read Chapter 5 and think about how you could apply these guidelines to running your own business.
- **How deeply do I need to understand the reading?** If you are majoring in computer science and you are assigned to read Chapter 1, "Introduction to Computer Science," it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts that you will be expected to master. However, for some reading assignments, you may be expected to form a general understanding but not necessarily master the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.

- **How does this assignment relate to other course readings or to concepts discussed in class?** Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections on your own. (Needless to say, it helps to take detailed notes-- when in class and when you read.)
- **How might I use this text again in the future?** If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

Improving Your Comprehension

You have blocked out time for your reading assignments and set a purpose for reading. Now comes the challenge: making sure you actually understand all the information you are expected to process. Some of your reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others, however, will be longer or more complex, so you will need to plan how to handle them.

For any expository writing—that is, nonfiction, informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to these main points. Because college-level texts can be challenging, you will also need to monitor your reading comprehension. That is, you will need to stop periodically and assess how well you understand what you are reading. Finally, you can improve your comprehension by determining which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

Responding, Not Reacting, to Texts

As stated earlier in this chapter, actively responding to difficult texts, posing questions, and analyzing ideas presented in them is the key to successful reading. The goal of an active reader is to engage in a conversation with the text that he or she is reading. In order to fulfill this goal, it is important to understand the difference between reacting to the text and responding to it.

Reacting to a text is often done on an emotional—rather than on an intellectual—level. It is often quick and shallow. For example, if we encounter a text that advances arguments with which we strongly disagree, it is natural to dismiss those ideas out of hand as flawed and unworthy of our attention. Doing so would be reacting to the text based only on emotions and on our pre-determined opinions about its arguments. It is easy to see that reacting in this way does not take the reader any closer to understanding the text. A wall of disagreement that existed between the reader and the text before the reading continues to exist after the reading.

Responding to a text, on the other hand, requires a careful study of the ideas presented and the arguments advanced in it. Critical readers who possess this skill are not willing to simply reject or accept the arguments presented in the text after the first reading right away. To continue with our example from the preceding paragraph, a reader who responds to a controversial text rather than reacting to it might apply several of the following strategies before forming and expressing an opinion about that text.

Writing in the Reading Process

If you want to become a critical reader, you need to get into the habit of writing as you read. You also need to understand that complex texts often require multiple close readings. During the second and any subsequent readings, however, you will need to write, and write a lot. The following are some critical reading and writing techniques which active readers employ as they work to create meanings from texts they read.

Overall Strategies

- Read the text several times, taking notes, asking questions, and underlining key places. Look for “starring sentences,” or those phrases or passages that use language in creative, memorable ways to underline key points.
- Study why the author of the text advances ideas, arguments, and convictions, so different from the reader’s own. For example, is the text’s author advancing an agenda of some social, political, religious, or economic group of which he or she is a member?
- Study the purpose and the intended audience of the text.
- Study the history of the argument presented in the text as much as possible. For example, modern texts on highly controversial issues such as the death penalty, abortion, or euthanasia often use past events, court cases, and other evidence to advance their claims. Knowing the history of the problem will help you to construct a more comprehensive meaning of a difficult text.
- Study the social, political, and intellectual context in which the text was written. Good writers use social conditions to advance controversial ideas. Compare the context in which the text was written to the one in which it is read. For example, have social conditions changed, thus invalidating the argument or making it stronger?
- Consider the author’s (and your own) previous knowledge of the issue at the center of the text and your experiences with it. How might such knowledge or experience have influenced your reception of the argument?

Taking all these steps will help you to move away from simply reacting to a text and towards constructing an informed and critical response to it



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Reading Responses

Writing students are often asked to write one or two page exploratory responses to readings, but they are not always clear on the purpose of these responses and on how to approach writing them. By writing reading responses, you are continuing the important work of critical reading, which you began when you underlined interesting passages and took notes on the margins. You are extending the meaning of the text by creating your own commentary to it and perhaps even branching off into creating your own argument inspired by your reading. Your teacher may give you a writing prompt or ask you to come up with your own topic for a response. In either case, realize that reading responses are supposed to be exploratory, designed to help you delve deeper into the text you are reading than note-taking, or underlining, will allow.

When writing extended responses to the reading, it is important to keep one thing in mind, and that is the purpose of writing a response. The purpose of these exploratory responses, which are often rather informal, is not to produce a complete argument, (with an introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion). It is not to impress your classmates and your teacher with “big” words and complex sentences. On the contrary, it is to help **you** understand the text you are working with, at a deeper level. The verb “explore” means to investigate something by looking at it more closely. Investigators get leads, some of which are fruitful and useful and some of which are dead-ends. As you investigate and create the meaning of the text you are working with, do not be afraid to take different directions with your reading response. In fact, it is important to resist the urge to make conclusions or think that you have found out everything about your reading. When it comes to exploratory reading responses, a lack of closure and the presence of more leads at the end of the piece is usually a good thing. Remember to always check with your teacher for standards and the format of reading responses.

Try the following guidelines to write a successful response to a reading:

- Remember your goal—exploration. The purpose of writing a response is to construct the meaning of a difficult text. It is not to get the job done as quickly as possible and in as few words as possible.
- As you write, “talk back to the text.” Make comments, ask questions, and elaborate on complex thoughts. This part of the writing becomes much easier if, prior to writing your response, you had read the assignment with a pen in hand and marked important places in the reading.
- If your teacher provides a response prompt, make sure you understand it. Then try to answer the questions in the prompt to the best of your ability. While you are doing that, do not be afraid of bringing in related texts, examples, or experiences. Active reading is about making connections, which will help the reader understand the text better.
- While your primary goal is exploration and questioning, make sure that others can understand your response. While it is OK to be informal in your response, make every effort to write in clear, error-free language.
- Involve your audience in the discussion of the reading by asking questions, expressing opinions, and connecting to responses made by others.

Talk about the Text

In addition to talking about the readings in class, talk with classmates, or a tutor, outside of class. This can help you clarify and deepen your understanding of the text.

Get into the habit of composing extended responses to readings. Writing students are often asked to write one or two-page exploratory responses to readings, but they are not always clear on the purpose of these responses and on how to approach writing them. By writing reading responses, you are continuing the important activities of critical reading, which you began when you

compiled notes on the salient points of the text you are analyzing. You are extending the meaning of the text by creating your own commentary to it and perhaps even branching off into creating your own argument inspired by your reading. Your teacher may give you a writing prompt, or ask you to come up with your own topic for a response. In either case, realize that reading responses are supposed to be exploratory; they are designed to help you delve deeper into the text you are reading than mere note-taking or underlining will allow. Sometimes, parts of your reading responses may wind up in an essay you write.

Monitoring Your Comprehension

Finding the main idea and paying attention to text features as you read will help you figure out what you know. Just as important, however, is being able to figure out what you do not know and developing a strategy to deal with it.

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, stop occasionally to answer these questions, on paper or, in your head. Use the questions and your answers to identify sections you may need to reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later.

Even when a text does not have built-in comprehension features, you can actively monitor your own comprehension. Try these strategies, adapting them as needed to suit different kinds of texts:

1. **Summarize.** At the end of each section, pause to summarize -- in your own words -- the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, revisit that section.
2. **Ask and answer questions.** When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. Write down your questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why. Is the answer buried in that section of reading but just not coming across to you? Or do you expect to find the answer in another part of the reading?
3. **Do not read in a vacuum.** Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with your classmates. Many instructors set up online discussion forums or blogs specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as your peers'.

These discussions can also serve as a reality check. If everyone in the class struggled with the reading, it may be exceptionally challenging. If it was a breeze for everyone but you, you could seek out your instructor for help.

? Exercise 1

Choose any text that that you have been assigned to read for one of your college courses. In your notes, complete the following tasks:

1. Summarize the main points of the text in two/ three sentences.
2. Write down two or three questions about the text that you can bring up during class discussion.

TIP

Students are often reluctant to seek help. They sometimes feel that doing that marks them as slow, weak, or demanding. The truth is, every learner occasionally struggles. If you are sincerely trying to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek out help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your university learning center for assistance.

Deal with the problem as early in the semester as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning. Most instructors will work hard to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Contributors

- Adapted from [EDUC 1300: Effective Learning Strategies](#). **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)
- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. [LCC-NC-SA 3.0](#).

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled [1.1: The Reading-Writing Connection](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [3.1: The Reading-Writing Connection](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Analyze Thesis or Main Ideas of Texts

Being able to identify the purpose and thesis of a text, while you're reading it, takes practice. Questioning the text you're reading is a good place to start. When trying to isolate the thesis, or main idea, of your reading material, consider these questions:

- What is the primary subject of this text?
- Is the author trying to inform me, or persuade me?
- What does the author think I need to know about this subject?
- Why does the author think I need to know about this subject?

Sometimes the answer to these questions will be very clearly stated in the text itself. Sometimes it is less obvious, and in those cases, the techniques on the following page will be useful.

Implicit vs. Explicit Main Idea/ Thesis Statements

According to author Pavel Zemliansky,

Arguments then, can be explicit and implicit, or implied. Explicit arguments contain noticeable and definable thesis statements and lots of specific proofs. Implicit arguments, on the other hand, work by weaving together facts and narratives, logic and emotion, personal experiences and statistics. Unlike explicit arguments, implicit ones do not have a one-sentence thesis statement. Instead, authors of implicit arguments use evidence of many different kinds in effective and creative ways to build and convey their point of view to their audience. Research is essential for creative effective arguments of both kinds.

Even if what you're reading is an informative text, rather than an argumentative one, it might still rely on an implicit thesis statement. It might ask you to piece together the overall purpose of the text based on a series of content along the way.

The following video defines the key terms explicit and implicit, as they relate to thesis statements and other ideas present in what you read. It also introduces the excellent idea of the **reading voice** and the **thinking voice** that strong readers use as they work through a text.

To help keep you on your toes, the author of this video challenges you to find her spelling mistake in one of her cards along the way!



Video 1.2.1

Explicit v. implicit. Authored by: Michele Armentrout. All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube license.

Take the [quiz about implicit and explicit thesis statements](#) to see how well you have understood the information.

Thesis and Topic Sentences

You'll remember that the first step of the reading process, **previewing**, allows you to get a big-picture view of the document you're reading. This way, you can begin to understand the structure of the overall text. A later step in the reading process, **summarizing**,

allows you to encapsulate what a paragraph, section, or the whole document is about. When summarizing individual paragraphs, it's likely that your summary ends up looking like a paraphrase of that paragraph's **topic sentence**.

A paragraph is composed of multiple sentences focused on a single, clearly-defined topic. There should be exactly one main idea per paragraph, so whenever an author moves on to a new idea, he or she will start a new paragraph. For example, this paragraph defines what a paragraph is, and now we will start a new paragraph to deal with a new idea: how a paragraph is structured.

Paragraphs are actually organized much like persuasive papers are. Just like a paper has a **thesis statement** followed by a body of supportive evidence, paragraphs have a topic sentence followed by several sentences of support or explanation. If you look at this paragraph, for example, you will see that it starts with a clear topic sentence letting you know that paragraphs follow a structure similar to that of papers. The next sentence explains how a paragraph is like a paper, and then two more sentences show how this paragraph follows that structure. All of these sentences are clearly connected to the main idea.

The topic sentence of a paragraph serves two purposes: first, it lets readers know what the paragraph is going to be about; second, it highlights the connection between the present paragraph and the one that came before. The topic sentence of this paragraph explains to a reader what a topic sentence does, fulfilling the first function. It also tells you that this paragraph is going to talk about one particular aspect of the previous paragraph's main idea: we are now moving from the general structure of the paragraph to the particular role of the topic sentence.

After the topic sentence introduces the main idea, the remainder of the sentences in a paragraph should support or explain this topic. These additional sentences might detail the author's position on the topic. They might also provide examples, statistics, or other evidence to support that position. At the end of the paragraph, the author may include some sort of conclusion or a transition that sets up the next idea he or she will be discussing (for example, you can see this clearly in the last sentence of the third paragraph).

The Three Parts of a Paragraph

1) Topic

The topic is the subject of the paragraph. It can be:

- A few words long
- These words (or words related to the topic) are typically repeated throughout the paragraph
- Answers the question: *What is this paragraph about?*

2) Main Idea

This is the writer's overall point. It can be:

- A complete sentence
 - If stated in the paragraph, it's called a "topic sentence"
 - If unstated in the paragraph, the reader must figure it out (infer it) from details
- General enough to cover the more specific supporting details
- Usually (but not always!) near the beginning of the paragraph
- Answers the question: *What is the overall point being made about the topic?"*

3) Supporting Details

These are the details in the paragraph that support the main idea. They can be either major or minor supporting details.

Tips for Identifying Main Ideas

Although you are learning to put the main idea first in your own paragraphs, professional writers often don't. Sometimes the first sentence of a paragraph provides background information, poses a question, or serves as a bridge from a previous paragraph. Don't assume it is the main idea. Use these tips instead:

- Look for a general statement that appears to "cover" the other information.
- Figure out the general topic of the paragraph first. Then ask yourself, "*What point is the writer trying to make about this topic?"*
- Look for clue words. Main ideas sometimes have words such as "some" or plural nouns like "ways" or "differences" that signal a list of details to come.
- Check your guess! Once you think you've found the main idea, ask yourself:
 - *Is this statement supported by most of the other information?*

- If I turn this statement into a question, does the other information answer it?

SPECIAL NOTE: Sometimes a main idea covers more than one paragraph. This may happen in newspaper articles or when the writer has a lot to say about one topic.

Difference Between the Topic and Main Idea

To understand the difference between a main idea and the topic, imagine that you are listening to your friends talk about their pets. The TV is on, so all you can make out are the name of their pets. If someone asked you what the topic was, you would say “pets.” But because you couldn’t hear the whole thing, you didn’t understand the “main idea” was whose pet was the best. The topic is very broad – the main idea is more specific. The sentences that follow in the paragraph exercise offer examples or descriptions to illustrate or explain the main idea. Note the reading-writing connection--while we are finding the main idea as readers, we will be using the main ideas to write topic sentences in paragraphs.

? Exercise 1.2.1

Read the following paragraph and then decide what the main idea is.

One myth about exercise is that if a woman lifts weights, she will develop muscles as large as a man’s. Without male hormones, however, a woman cannot increase her muscle bulk as much as a man’s. Another misconception about exercise is that it increases the appetite. Actually, regular exercise stabilizes the blood-sugar level and prevents hunger pangs. Some people also think that a few minutes of exercise a day or one session a week is enough, but at least three solid workouts a week are needed for muscular and cardiovascular fitness.

Choose the Main Idea:

- a) Women who lift weights cannot become as muscular as men.
- b) There are several myths about exercise.
- c) Exercise is beneficial to everyone.
- d) People use many different excuses to avoid exercising.

Explain why you did or did not choose each possible answer above.

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

- d) _____

? Exercise 1.2.2

Read the following paragraph and then decide what the main idea is.

“To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer--excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results.”

Answer

The main idea of this paragraph is the first sentence. The first sentence identifies the two characters that the rest of the paragraph is going to describe, and suggests at their relationship. Each sentence that follows either describes the woman, Sherlock Holmes, or how he felt about her or her effect on him.

? Exercise 1.2.3

Here is another example from the same story, see if you can find the main idea:

One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again.

- a. One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street.
- b. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers
- c. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind.
- d. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him.

Answer

The correct answer is a. The first sentence gives you the point-of-view, or who is the person explaining what is happening, and it lets you know that this person is going into a particular place. Each of the other sentences describes the place where he, Dr. Watson, entered, what it looked like, and who was in there.

B is not as strong a choice as a, because it refers to *Study in Scarlet* and Holmes' powers, which are not described in the rest of the paragraph. Choice B is too specific to be the main idea of this paragraph. Choices c and d are not correct because they are describing Holmes' actions, and his walking is not what the whole paragraph is about.

? Exercise 1.2.4

Let's try one more. Read the following and select which one is the main idea from the list below:

"At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own. Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head."

- a. At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned.
- b. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning.
- c. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be
- d. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own.

Answer

The way to figure out that the answer, this time, is d, is to look at each sentence that follows and ask, does this refer back to the location, Baker Street? Do they refer back to the landlady? Do they refer back to Dr. Watson's waiting? Or, do they refer back to the case? They both refer back to the current investigation, by talking about Holmes' way of untangling mysteries, and that Watson's belief that the investigation would be a success.

The introduction to this paragraph may have thrown you off so be careful to read through the entire paragraph each time, and look at each sentence and its role within the paragraph. Mostly the main idea comes right up front – but not always!

Reading-Writing Connection: Thesis Statements

? Exercise 1.2.5

I. Develop a paragraph. Your paragraph must include the following:

- Between 7-9 sentences
- A main idea sentence
- Each sentence must be developed, and checked for correct spelling and grammar
- Have at least three of the four different types of sentences (simple, complex, compound, compound-complex)
- Attach your pre-writing practice after the paragraph, to identify which sentences are major and minor detail sentence

Supporting Details

Earlier we covered what a main idea sentence was: a sentence that names the topic, and allows the reader to understand the focus of the paragraph to follow. It is logical then that the rest of the sentences in the paragraph support the main idea sentence. Support means that they either explain something about the topic, or they offer an example.

We've examined the relationship between a text's thesis statement and its overall organization through the idea of topic sentences in body paragraphs. But of course body paragraphs have a lot more "stuff" in them than just topic sentences. This section will examine in more detail what that "stuff" is made of.

First, watch this video that details the relationship between a topic sentence and supporting details, using the metaphor of a house. The video establishes the difference between major and minor details, which will be useful to apply in coming discussions. (The video has instrumental guitar for audio, but no spoken words, so it can be watched without sound if desired.)



Video 1.2.1

Video: [Supporting Details](#). **Authored by:** Mastering the Fundamentals of College Reading and Writing. *All Rights Reserved.*
License Terms: Standard YouTube license.

The following image shows the visual relationship between the overall thesis, topic sentences, and supporting ideas:

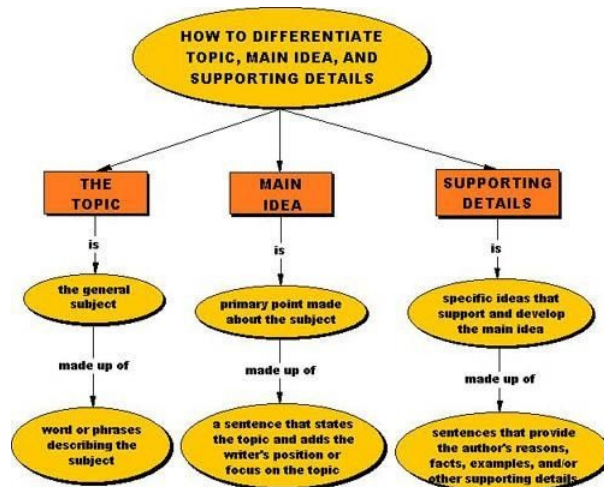


Figure: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

This next image shows where a topic sentence might reside in the paragraph, in relation to the rest of the supporting details:

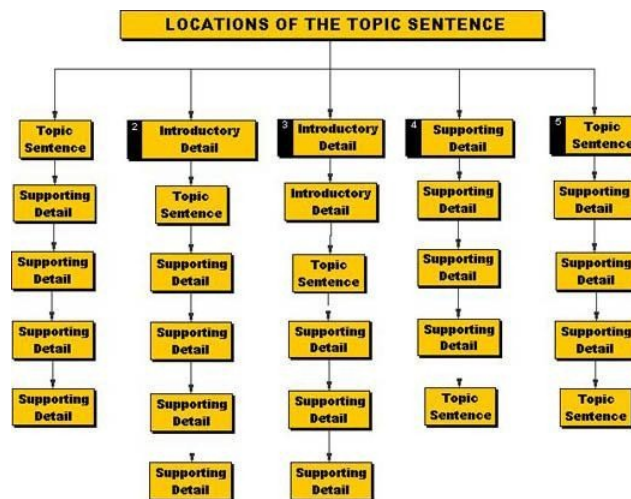


Figure: CC BY-SA

In #5 of the sequence above, the topic sentence is rephrased between the opening and closing of the paragraph, to reinforce the concept more strongly.

Point, Illustration, Explanation (P.I.E.)

Many authors use the PIE format to structure their essays. PIE = point, illustration, explanation to structure their body paragraph and support their thesis. The point furthers a thesis or claim and is the same as the main idea, the illustration provides support for the point, and the explanation tells the audience why the evidence provided furthers the point and/or the thesis.



Figure: CC BY-SA

For example, in his argument against the +/- grading system at Radford, student-writer Tareq Hajj makes the **Point** that “Without the A+, students with high grades in the class would be less motivated to work even harder in order to increase their grades.”

He **Illustrates** with a quote from a professor who argues, ““(students) have less incentive to try”” (Fesheraki, 2013).

Hajj then **Explains** that “not providing [the most motivated students] with additional motivation of a higher grade ... is inequitable.”

Through his explanation, Hajj links back to his claim that “A plus-minus grading scale ... should not be used at Radford University” because, as he explains, it is “inequitable.” The PIE structure of his paragraph has served to support his thesis.

All Claims Need Evidence

Ever heard the phrase “everyone is entitled to his opinion”? It is indeed true that people are free to believe whatever they wish. However, the mere fact that a person believes something is not an argument in support of a position. If a text’s goal is to communicate effectively, it must provide valid explanations and sufficient and relevant evidence to convince its audience to accept that position. In other words, “every author is entitled to his opinion, but no author is entitled to have his opinion go unchallenged.”

What are the types of evidence?

Any text should provide illustrations for each of its points, but it is especially important to provide reliable evidence in an academic argument. This evidence can be based on **primary source material or data** (the author’s own experience and/or interviews, surveys, polls, experiments, that she may have created and administered). Evidence can also stem from **secondary source material or data** (books, journals, newspapers, magazines, websites or surveys, experiments, statistics, polls, and other data collected by others).

Let’s say, for example, that you are reading an argument that college instructors should let students use cell phones in class. Primary source material might include a survey the author administered that asks students if policies forbidding cell phone usage actually stop them from using their phones in class. Secondary sources might include articles about the issue from *Faculty Focus* or *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Logos, Ethos, Pathos

Writers are generally most successful with their audiences when they can skillfully and appropriately balance the three core types of appeals. These appeals are referred to by their Greek names: **logos** (the appeal to logic), **pathos** (the appeal to emotion), and **ethos** (the appeal to authority). All of these are used in one way or another in your body paragraphs, particularly as it relates to the support or information in the paragraph.



Figure: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

Logical Appeals

Authors using logic to support their claims will include a combination of different types of evidence. These include the following:

- established facts
- case studies
- statistics
- experiments
- analogies and logical reasoning
- citation of recognized experts on the issue

Authoritative Appeals

Authors using authority to support their claims can also draw from a variety of techniques. These include the following:

- personal anecdotes
- illustration of deep knowledge on the issue
- citation of recognized experts on the issue
- testimony of those involved first-hand on the issue

Emotional Appeals

Authors using emotion to support their claims again have a deep well of options to do so. These include the following:

- personal anecdotes
- narratives
- impact studies
- testimony of those involved first-hand on the issue

As you can see, there is some overlap on these lists. One technique might work simultaneously on multiple levels.

Most texts rely on one of the three as the primary method of support, but may also draw upon one or two others at the same time.

Check your understanding of supporting details by doing this [quiz](#).

? Exercise 1.2.6

Read the paragraph below and find the main idea and supporting details.

My parents were very strict when I was growing up. My mother in particular was always correcting my behavior. One day when I forgot to look both ways when I was crossing the street, my mother made me go back home; she said that I could not go out at all if I could not be safe. My father was more concerned with my grades. Every night he would make me go to my room before I could watch television.

Answer

Let's examine the pattern for this paragraph. The first sentence (1) presents the main idea, that my parents were strict. The second sentence (2) explains what I mean by "strict," by saying that my mother was strict in correcting my behavior. The third sentence (3) offers an example of how she would correct my behavior. The fourth sentence (4) explains further, that my father was strict when it came to schoolwork, and then the fifth sentence (5) offers an example of how he was strict.

If we were going to diagram the paragraph above, it would look like this:

MAIN IDEA

EXPLAIN (2)-_____EXPLAIN (4)

EXAMPLE (3) EXAMPLE (5)

Major and Minor Supporting Details

One way to talk about whether a sentence directly supports the main idea (the second level), or indirectly supports the main idea (the third level) is to call them MAJOR detail sentences or MINOR detail sentences. Major details directly explain something about the topic, while minor details offer examples for the Major detail that came right before.

? Exercise 1.2.7

Read the paragraphs, and then identify each sentence as either a main idea, a major detail, or a minor detail sentence.

Single parents have to overcome many obstacles to return to school. If the child is very young, finding quality babysitting can be difficult. Many babysitters are unreliable and that can mean that the parent has to miss many classes, which can hurt their grades. It is also hard to find enough time to study. Children require a lot of attention and are also noisy, and that can interfere with a parent's ability to complete their homework.

Finally, raising children is expensive. Many single parents discover that they can't meet the costs of both raising children and paying for tuition, books, and fees.

Sentence #1:

Sentence #2:

Sentence #3:

Sentence #4:

Sentence #5:

Sentence #6:

Sentence #7:

My grandmother turned 70 last year and celebrated by going skydiving. She said she always wanted to try and figured it was now or never. Many people think that when you get older you can no longer do fun things, but this is not true. The senior center in town offers dance lessons and also takes groups to the art museum. The classes are always full because so many people want to try new things. Towns are even developing senior living communities around activities such as golf and tennis. Those communities are very popular because people like to live with others who share their interests.

Sentence #1:

Sentence #2:

Sentence #3:

Sentence #4:

Sentence #5:

Sentence #6:

Sentence #7

? Exercise 1.2.8

Below you will find several main idea sentences. Provide appropriate supporting sentences following the pattern of Major-Minor-Major-Minor.

1. It is not a good idea to watch a lot of television.

Major:

Minor:

Major:

Minor:

2. Coaches have good reasons to be firm with the players on their team.

Major:

Minor:

Major:

Minor:

3. Many people believe it is a bad idea to spank children.

Major:

Minor:

Major:

Minor:

4. There are several steps I can take to be successful in college.

Major:

Minor:

Major:

Minor:

Reading-Writing Connection: Supporting Details

? Exercise 1.2.9

Return to the Thesis exercise you did previously. As part of that exercise, you identified two topic sentences from your selected reading. Now, look more closely at the paragraphs where those two topic sentences came from.

1. Write a paragraph that identifies the type of support that each paragraph from the reading uses to reinforce each of those two topic sentences. Are they narrative or personal examples? Are they facts or statistics? Are they quotes or paraphrases from research materials?
2. Write another paragraph that compares the effectiveness of the supporting claims of one of the selected paragraphs against the other one. Which seems more successful in its goal? Why do you feel that way?

Contributors

- Adapted from [English 9Y Pre-College English](#). Provided by: Open Course Library. CC BY 3.0
- Adapted from [Thesis Statements and Topic Sentences](#). Provided by: Lumen Learning. CC-BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from [Methods of Discovery: A Guide to Research Writing](#). Authored by: Pavel Zemliansky. Provided by: Libretexts. [CC BY: Attribution](#)

This page last updated June 6, 2020.

This page titled [1.2: Main Ideas and Supporting Details](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [3.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

1.3: Pre-reading Strategies



Figure 1.3.1 - Sherlock Holmes Statue, by Juhanson is licensed under CC-BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

When you're ready to settle in with a text, it's a good idea to begin with "pre-reading." With pre-reading, you'll turn into a temporary sleuth, examining the text for visual clues as to its meaning. Here's how it's done:

Start by Reading and Considering the Title

A good title will inform you about the text's content. It's always nice if titles are also interesting, catchy, or even clever, but the most important job of a title is to let the reader know what's coming and what the text will be about.

For instance, imagine you're reading a magazine article entitled "Three Hundred Sixty-five Properly Poofy Days."*

Reading that, do you have any idea what this article is going to be about?

- It could be written by a meteorologist, reporting on a year of observing cloud formations.
- It might be a biopic (a biographical story) about an eccentric salon that specializes in "big hair" dos, retro-style.
- Or perhaps it's a set of guidelines for using poofy cotton balls to apply cosmetics.

Would you be surprised to discover it's a story about a dog groomer who does show grooms for poodles, the poofiest of dogs?

See my point? The title should, hopefully, give you clues to the article content. (Keep this in mind when you're writing your own titles.)

- **Look at the author's name** Have you heard of the author? Do you know anything about them? Sometimes you'll find a short bio about the author at the beginning or end of a text. You can always Google them to look for more details. Ideally, the author should be an acknowledged expert on the subject or should have degrees, training, or credentials that make them an expert. (Learn more about the CRAP method for evaluating sources in the information literacy section titled "Finding Quality Texts.")
- **Skim through the article, looking for headings or "pull-outs"** (content that is pulled off to one side or highlighted in a box). Headings, if present, will often give you clues as to the text's content as well as showing you how the subject has been divided into sections.
- **Look for any images: photographs, charts, graphs, maps, or other illustrations.** Images—and their captions—will often give you valuable information about the topic.
- **If working with an e-text, you may also find embedded web links.** Follow these: they'll often lead you to resources that will help you better understand the article.
- **Here's a seriously expert level suggestion:** most academic texts and essays follow a fairly similar structure—including beginning every paragraph with a strong, focused topic sentence—you can often get a quick summary or understanding of a written text by simply reading the first sentence in every paragraph. Some authors may use the second sentence as their topic sentence, and if you notice this pattern, reading all of the second sentences in each paragraph will help you follow the text.

After working through the above suggestions, see if you can figure out the main purpose of the text simply by pre-reading. In other words, look for the global or central idea or argument.

Now, you're ready to dive in and actually read the text completely. Your pre-reading has given you an overall picture of what to expect and helped you build a schema of what the author wants you to know at the end of the reading. If the pre-reading has

worked well, giving you clues to the text's content, your actual in-depth reading will be easier and more effective. And, you'll begin reading with your curiosity already aroused, which is a great way to start!

Check Your Understanding: Practicing Your Pre-reading Skills

Now that we've covered some pre-reading practices, let's put those skills to the test.

Find the *Scientific American* article, "[U.S. Cracking Down on Brain-Training Games](#)."

1. Before reading the article, work through the above pre-reading skills.
2. Based on what you found in your pre-reading, what do you think the text is about? What position will the article take on the idea of brain-training games? How much do you know about the topic already? What did you already know (before you even looked at the article)?
3. Now, switch to in-depth reading and read the article carefully, taking notes of any questions you have or words you don't understand.
4. If needed, do a bit of quick research on any questions or unknown words you identified.
5. How did the pre-reading affect your ideas of what to expect from the text? How did your understanding of the piece compare between what you learned from pre-reading versus a complete reading? What does this tell you about the relationship between pre-reading and in-depth reading?

See the Appendix, Results for the "Check Your Understanding" Activities, for answers.

1.3: Pre-reading Strategies is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **1.2.3: Use Pre-reading Strategies** by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/>.

1.4: Annotation Strategies

Annotating Texts

What is annotation?

Annotation can be:

- A systematic summary of the text that you create within the document
- A key tool for close reading that helps you uncover patterns, notice important words, and identify main points
- An active learning strategy that improves comprehension and retention of information

Why annotate?

- Isolate and organize important material
- Identify key concepts
- Monitor your learning as you read
- Make exam prep effective and streamlined
- Can be more efficient than creating a separate set of reading notes

How do you annotate?

Summarize key points in your own words.

- Use headers and words in bold to guide you
- Look for main ideas, arguments, and points of evidence
- Notice how the text organizes itself. Chronological order? Idea trees? Etc.

Circle key concepts and phrases

- What words would it be helpful to look-up at the end?
- What terms show up in lecture? When are different words used for similar concepts? Why?

Write brief comments and questions in the margins

- Be as specific or broad as you would like—use these questions to activate your thinking about the content
- See our [handout on reading comprehension tips for some examples](#)

Use abbreviations and symbols

- Try ? when you have a question or something you need to explore further
- Try ! When something is interesting, a connection, or otherwise worthy of note
- Try * For anything that you might use as an example or evidence when you use this information.
- Ask yourself what other system of symbols would make sense to you.

Highlight/underline

- Highlight or underline, but mindfully. Check out our resource on [strategic highlighting](#) for tips on when and how to highlight.

Use comment and highlight features built into pdfs, online/digital textbooks, or other apps and browser add-ons

- Are you using a pdf? Explore its highlight, edit, and comment functions to support your annotations
- Some browsers have add-ons or extensions that allow you to annotate web pages or web-based documents
- Does your digital or online textbook come with an annotation feature?
- Can your digital text be imported into a note-taking tool like OneNote, EverNote, or Google Keep? If so, you might be able to annotate texts in those apps

What are the most important takeaways?

- Annotation is about increasing your engagement with a text
- Increased engagement, where you think about and process the material then expand on your learning, is how you achieve mastery in a subject
- As you annotate a text, ask yourself: how would I explain this to a friend?

- Put things in your own words and draw connections to what you know and wonder

The table below demonstrates this process using a geography textbook excerpt (Press 2004):

 [A chart featuring a passage from a text in the left column and then columns that illustrate annotations that include too much writing, not enough writing, and a good balance of writing.](#)

 [An image of a geology textbook page showing written notes and highlighting to indicate annotation possibilities.](#)

A common concern about annotating texts: It takes time!

Yes, it can, but that time isn't lost—it's invested.

Spending the time to annotate on the front end does two important things:

- It saves you time later when you're studying. Your annotated notes will help speed up exam prep, because you can review critical concepts quickly and efficiently.
- It increases the likelihood that you will retain the information after the course is completed. This is especially important when you are supplying the building blocks of your mind and future career.

One last tip: Try separating the reading and annotating processes! Quickly read through a section of the text first, then go back and annotate.

Works consulted:

Nist, S., & Holschuh, J. (2000). *Active learning: strategies for college success*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. 202-218.

Simpson, M., & Nist, S. (1990). Textbook annotation: An effective and efficient study strategy for college students. *Journal of Reading*, 34: 122-129.

Press, F. (2004). *Understanding earth (4th ed)*. New York: W.H. Freeman. 208-210.

Contributions and Attributions

This page is licensed under a [CC](#) license and was authored by The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A detailed versioning history of the edits to source content is available upon request.

1.4: Annotation Strategies is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

Note-Taking Methods

One final valuable tool to have in your arsenal as a student is a good note-taking system. Just the act of converting a spoken lecture to notes helps you organize and retain information, and of course, good notes also help you review important concepts later. Although taking good notes is an essential study skill, many students enter college without having received much guidance about note taking.

These sections discuss different strategies you can use to take notes efficiently. No matter which system you choose, keep the note-taking guidelines in mind.

General Note Taking Guidelines

1. Before class, quickly review your notes from the previous class and the assigned reading. Fixing key terms and concepts in your mind will help you stay focused and pick out the important points during the lecture.
2. Come prepared with paper, pens, highlighters, textbooks, and any important handouts.
3. Come to class with a positive attitude and a readiness to learn. During class, make a point of concentrating. Ask questions if you need to. Be an active participant.
4. During class, capture important ideas as concisely as you can. Use words or phrases instead of full sentences and abbreviate when possible.
5. Visually organize your notes into main topics, subtopics, and supporting points, and show the relationships between ideas. Leave space if necessary so you can add more details under important topics or subtopics.
6. Record the following:
 1. Ideas that the instructor repeats frequently or points out as key ideas
 2. Ideas the instructor lists on a whiteboard or transparency
 3. Details, facts, explanations, and lists that develop main points
 4. Definitions of key terms
7. Review your notes regularly throughout the semester, not just before exams.

Organizing Ideas in Your Notes

A good note-taking system needs to help you differentiate among major points, related subtopics, and supporting details. It visually represents the connections between ideas. Finally, to be effective, your note-taking system must allow you to record and organize information fairly quickly. Although some students like to create detailed, formal outlines or concept maps when they read, these may not be good strategies for class notes, because spoken lectures may not allow time for elaborate notes.

Instead, focus on recording content simply and quickly to create organized, legible notes. Try one of the following techniques.

Modified Outline Format

A modified outline format uses indented spacing to show the hierarchy of ideas without including roman numerals, lettering, and so forth. Just use a dash or bullet to signify each new point unless your instructor specifically presents a numbered list of items.

The first example shows Crystal's notes from a developmental psychology class about an important theorist in this field. Notice how the line for the main topic is all the way to the left. Subtopics are indented, and supporting details are indented one level further. Crystal also used abbreviations for terms like *development* and *example*.

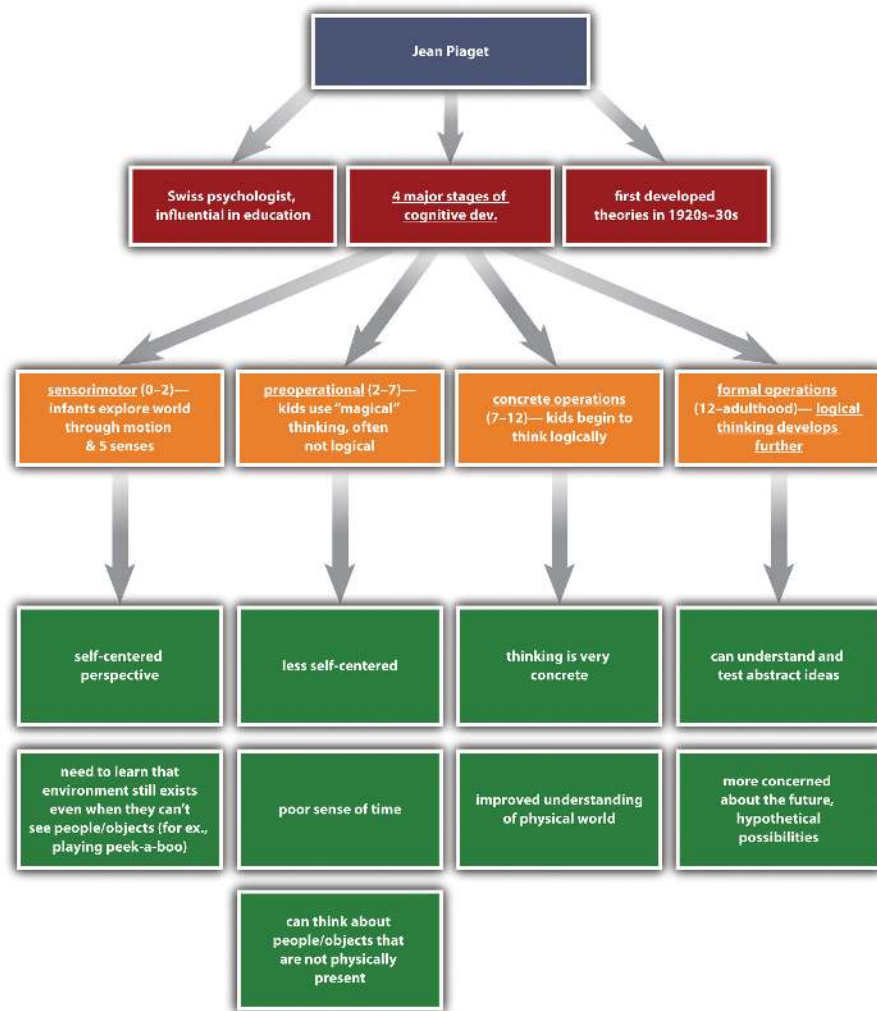
Child Development—20th Century Theorists

- Jean Piaget
- Swiss psychologist, influential in education
- first developed theories in 1920s-30s
- 4 major stages of cognitive dev.
 - sensorimotor (0-2)—infants explore world through motion & 5 senses
 - self-centered perspective
 - need to learn that environment still exists even when they can't see people/objects (for ex., playing peek-a-boo)
 - preoperational (2-7)—kids use "magical" thinking, often not logical
 - less self-centered
 - poor sense of time
 - can think about people/objects that are not physically present
 - concrete operations (7-12)—kids begin to think logically
 - thinking is very concrete
 - improved understanding of physical world
 - formal operations (12-adulthood)—logical thinking develops further
 - can understand & test abstract ideas
 - more concerned about the future, hypothetical possibilities

Idea Mapping

If you discovered in Chapter 1 that you learn best with visual presentations, you may prefer to use a more graphic format for notes, such as an idea map. The next example shows how Crystal's lecture notes could be set up differently. Although the format is different, the content and organization are the same.

Child Development—20th Century Theorists



Charting

If the content of a lecture falls into a predictable, well-organized pattern, you might choose to use a chart or table to record your notes. This system works best when you already know, either before class or at the beginning of class, which categories you should include. The next figure shows how this system might be used.

THEORIST	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	YEARS ACTIVE	STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT
Jean Piaget	Switzerland	1920s through 1970s	1. sensorimotor (0-2) 2. preoperational (2-7) 3. concrete operational (7-12) 4. formal operational (12-adulthood)

Erik Erikson	Denmark (studied in Austria, emigrated to US in 1930s)	1930s through 1980s	1. trust vs. mistrust (infants) 2. autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddler) 3. initiative vs. guilt (preschool-K) 4. industry vs. inferiority (elementary school) 5. identity vs. role confusion (teen years) ***See also stages of adult development
--------------	--	---------------------	--

The Cornell Note-Taking System

In addition to the general techniques already described, you might find it useful to practice a specific strategy known as the Cornell note-taking system. This popular format makes it easy not only to organize information clearly but also to note key terms and summarize content.

To use the Cornell system, begin by setting up the page with these components:

- The course name and lecture date at the top of the page
- A narrow column (about two inches) at the left side of the page
- A wide column (about five to six inches) on the right side of the page
- A space of a few lines marked off at the bottom of the page

During the lecture, record notes in the wide column. You can do so using the traditional modified outline format or a more visual format if you prefer.

Then, as soon as possible after the lecture, review your notes and identify key terms. Jot these down in the narrow left-hand column. You can use this column as a study aid by covering the notes on the right-hand side, reviewing the key terms, and trying to recall as much as you can about them so that you can mentally restate the main points of the lecture. Uncover the notes on the right to check your understanding. Finally, use the space at the bottom of the page to summarize each page of notes in your own words in a few sentences.

Using the Cornell system, Crystal's notes would look like the following:

Child Development	September 13, 2011
Piaget cognitive development sensorimotor preoperational concrete operations formal operations concrete thinking abstract thinking	Child Development—20th Century Theorists –Jean Piaget –Swiss psychologist, influential in education –first developed theories in 1920s–30s –4 major stages of cognitive dev. –sensorimotor (0–2)—infants explore world through motion & 5 senses –self-centered perspective –need to learn that environment still exists even when they can't see people/objects (for ex., playing peek-a-boo) –preoperational (2–7)—kids use “magical” thinking, often not logical –less self-centered –poor sense of time –can think about people/objects that are not physically present –concrete operations (7–12)—kids begin to think logically – thinking is very concrete –improved understanding of physical world –formal operations (12–adulthood)—logical thinking develops further –can understand & test abstract ideas –more concerned about the future, hypothetical possibilities
Piaget believed children go through four stages of cognitive development—sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. Gradually they progress from having a very limited understanding of the world (infants and young children), to being more logical (older kids), to being able to think abstractly (preteens and teens).	

✓ WRITING AT WORK

Often, at school or in the workplace, a speaker will provide you with pre-generated notes summarizing electronic presentation slides. You may be tempted not to take notes at all because much of the content is already summarized for you. However, it is a good idea to jot down at least a few notes. Doing so keeps you focused during the presentation, allows you to record details you might otherwise forget, and gives you the opportunity to jot down questions or reflections to personalize the content.

Over the next few weeks, establish a note-taking system that works for you.

1. If you are not already doing so, try using one of the aforementioned techniques. (Remember that the Cornell system can be combined with other note-taking formats.)
2. It can take some trial and error to find a note-taking system that works for you. If you find that you are struggling to keep up with lectures, consider whether you need to switch to a different format or be more careful about distinguishing key concepts from unimportant details.
3. If you find that you are having trouble taking notes effectively, set up an appointment with your school's academic resource center.

Underline or Highlight Interesting and Important Places in the Text

Underline or highlight words, sentences, and passages that stand out, for whatever reason. Underline the key arguments that you believe the author of the text is making, and mark any evidence, examples, and stories that seem interesting or important. You might want to differentiate the evidence from the main ideas by using a different color marker or indicating the difference in another way. But don't be afraid to "get it wrong." There is no right or wrong here. The sentences in the text that you underline may be the same or different from those noticed by your classmates, and this difference of interpretation is the essence of critical reading. Consider using different colored highlighters or pens for the various categories of the writing, such as new vocabulary, main ideas, and important examples. Otherwise, you risk turning your text into one big underline or highlight of the same color. It is also a good idea to re-state main ideas in your own words. This acts as a comprehension check and gives you a start on any writing you may do later.

Annotation

If you merely read a text, start to finish, and don't write anything, you won't have a good understanding of what you read. Sure, you might know the main point the author was trying to make, and that may be good enough if you're reading for fun, but it's not good enough for college.

Annotating is good for a number of reasons. It helps you in:

- staying engaged and connected while you read
- making sure you understand what you read
- finding the main points and how the text is organized
- identifying and sorting information for an assignment
- remembering what you read and thought about, at that time.

No matter what you are annotating, you should be **writing on the same page**, next to what's printed, on sticky notes, or on a double-entry journal. Annotating consists of many different practices: writing notes in the margins of the page, jotting symbols in the margins next to passages, underlining sentences, circling words, paraphrasing etc.

Key: We annotate differently depending on the purpose.

There are four general reasons for annotation.

1. When you annotate for ENGAGEMENT, your priority is to keep focused on, and emotionally and intellectually connected to, what you are reading.

What you might do or think: What you might write:	
Respond to the text emotionally	<i>Inspiring :-)</i> <i>Discouraging :-(</i>
Relate to the text	<i>Ref. Psych Prof. point about anxiety</i> <i>Me in 9th grade</i>
Visualize information or concept	Doodle or draw a picture to remind yourself quickly.

Ask questions	<i>How does this compare to middle-class students?</i>
Observations about text	<i>Disagree (with the opinion he just described)</i>
Predict what is coming next	<i>I think the character will....</i>
Connect with other knowledge	<i>Different cause/effect than Wise describes</i>

2. When you realize you are confused, you need some strategies for **COMPREHENSION**.

What you might do or think: What you might write:	
You don't understand a word or term, so you go back and reread the sentence and figure it out – or you look it up.	Circle the word, and, after you figure out its meaning, write the meaning next to the word.
You don't understand a word, but realize you can keep reading and still understand.	Circle the word and look it up later.
You don't understand what the author is saying as it applies to that particular situation.	Write your question next to the text and bring it up in class or with a tutor.

3. When you are annotating to find the author's **MAIN POINTS**, you will need to identify the supporting points and details used to build the argument in order to discuss and write about it. This is also a helpful check for your understanding, especially if you try to rewrite the main points in your own words.

What you might do or think: What you might write:	
You find the sentence that seems to be the main idea of a paragraph.	Underline and paraphrase it briefly.
You don't see the main point actually written there, but you know what it is.	Paraphrase it.
The author says she has three reasons for her point, so you decide to make sure you can find all three.	Write "3 reasons" in the margin, and underline and number the reasons – 1, 2, 3 – when you find them.
The author gives examples for her point.	Underline them and write "ex" and draw an arrow to the point that the example is supporting.

4. When you annotate to find details and **INFORMATION** to use in your **ESSAY**, you will want to start to organize that information right on the page itself.

What you might do or think: What you might write:	
You find a statistic showing that more first generation students than ever are going to college.	Underline the statistic and write <i>1st gen population > ever</i>
You find a quote or detail that supports the idea that wages of people of color were rising in the '60s due to affirmative action	Underline it and write <i>aff. action 60s ups wages</i>

Read over your annotations to help you remember what you read and **THOUGHT!**

Taking Notes

Take notes on the margins of the text. If you do not want to write on your book or journal, attach post-it notes with your comments to the text. If your source is electronic, use the highlighting and commenting functions available in many e-readers. Try to avoid reading text on your phone because the screen is small, and cell phones don't generally have annotation capabilities. Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively finding meaning. Writing about what you read is the best way to make sense of it, especially, if the text is difficult. Writing about what you read will help you not only to remember the argument that the author is trying to advance, but it will also help you create your own interpretations of the text you are reading.

Here are some things you can do in your comments:

- Ask questions.
- Identify unknown vocabulary.
- Agree or disagree with the author.
- Question the evidence presented in the text.
- Offer counter-evidence.
- Offer additional evidence, examples, stories, etc. that support the author's argument.
- Mention other texts that advance the same or similar arguments.
- Mention personal experiences that enhance your reading of the text.

Keep a Double-Entry Journal

Many writers like double-entry journals because they allow us to make that leap from summary of a source to interpretation and persuasion. To start a double-entry journal, divide a page into two columns. As you read, in the left column write down interesting and important words, sentences, quotations, and passages from the text. (Be sure to include the page number to make it easier for yourself later if you use it in your writing.) In the right column, write your reaction and responses to the passages. Be as formal or informal as you want. Record words, passages, and ideas from the text that you find useful, interesting, or in any way striking or unusual. Quote or summarize in full, accurately, and fairly. In the right-hand side column, ask the kinds of questions and provide the kinds of responses that will later enable you to create an original reading of the text, and use that reading to create your own paper.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [English Composition 2](#). Provided by: Lumen Learning. [CC BY-SA](#)
- Adapted from [Successful College Composition](#). Authored by: Kathryn Crowther, Lauren Curtright, Nancy Gilbert, Barbara Hall, Tracienne Ravita, and Kirk Swenson. Provided by: Galileo, Georgia's Virtual Library. [CC-NC-SA-4.0](#)
- Adapted from [EDUC 1300: Effective Learning Strategies](#). Provided by: Lumen Learning. [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)
- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. [CC-NC-SA 3.0](#)

This page most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

This page titled [1.5: Note-Taking Strategies](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [3.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Questioning Circles

The questioning circles are a graphical representation (a form of a Venn diagram) of three domains: You, the Text, and the World (or another text). When you create questions based on a domain, or a combination of domains, it can help you examine and think about an idea more deeply. This, in turn, can help you understand and think about your reading and help you develop your writing.

There are three levels of questions in this model:

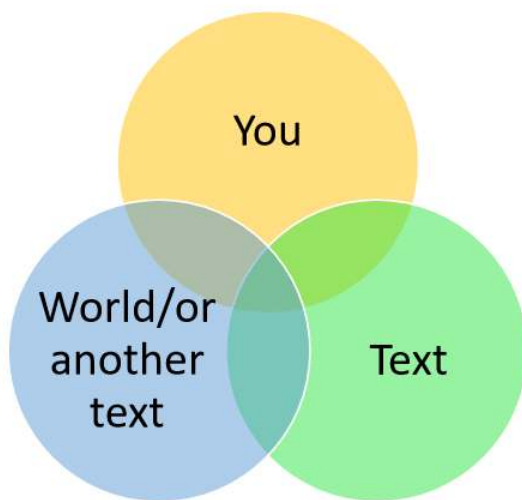
Level 1 (Clear) Questions: These are about one domain only and can only be answered with a fact.

Level 2 (Shaded) Questions: These are questions about a combination of two domains and require interpretation and an opinion by the person who answers the question.

Level 3 (Dense) Questions: These questions combine all three domains. They require interpretation, and usually there is no one right answer. Level 3 questions make great essay questions!

The following figure is a graphic representation of the domains you would ask about when creating questions: you, the text, and another world or another text. Please note that a text can be anything you "read," from a class reading assignment, to a movie, etc.

Figure 3.3.1: Questioning Circle Domains



Examples of Questioning Circle Questions

Level 1 questions can be answered with facts only.

- Level 1 question about you: Have you ever experienced xx?
- Level 1 question about the text: What was the setting in the text in Chapter x?
- Level 1 question about the world: How often does x occur in the world?

Level 2 questions combine two of the domains. They can only be answered with an opinion (an educated opinion).

- Level 2 question about you and the text: Do you think you would respond in the same way as (character) did if you were in that situation?
- Level 2 question about you and the world: What have your experiences in the world in relation to xxx been like?
- Level 2 question about the text and the world: Are (character's) experiences in the book representative of how most people in the world experience this situation?
- Level 2 question about the text and another text: How do the characters in [novel] and [novel] react differently to similar situations?

Level 3 questions ask questions about a combination of all three domains. These questions cannot be answered definitively and generally require readers to compare ideas about issues that can't easily be answered.

Level 3 question about you, text, and the world: How do you think a person's past experiences inform how they interact with people in situations such as those in which [characters] found themselves?

Contributors

CC LICENSED CONTENT, ORIGINAL:

- Revision, Adaptation, and Original Content. **Provided by:** Libretexts. **License:** CC BY-SA 4.0: Attribution.

This page was most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

This page titled [1.6: Questioning Strategies](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto \(ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative\)](#).

- [3.4: Questioning Strategies](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Adults learn most of their new vocabulary from reading. Therefore, to increase your vocabulary, which is a major goal for many college students, the best thing you can do is read texts that aren't too easy. Your instructor should assign readings that will stretch your reading level.

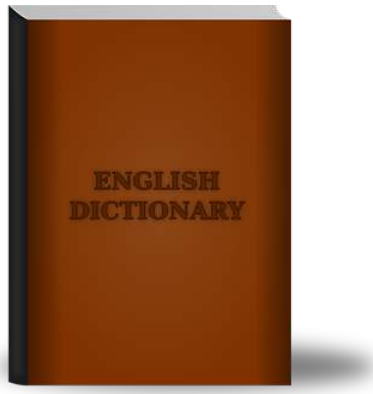


Figure: Image from Pixabay

Strategies for Dealing with Unfamiliar Words

Many subject-matter textbooks include key vocabulary and definitions at the beginning of chapters. However, in the humanities, this is not the case many times, so you need to figure out new vocabulary without that help. When you encounter new vocabulary, try to avoid going straight to the dictionary. And unless the word is really impeding your understanding of the text, just circle it and come back to it later after reading. However, if the same word repeats a couple of times, it might be a key word, so it could be prudent to go through the "Vocabulary from Context" activity before you move on with your reading. First, try to figure out the word from context. Second, try to figure out the meaning through words with similar roots. The suffix of the word will tell you the part of speech.

To summarize:

1. Context Clues
2. Understanding words through their structure (roots, prefixes, suffixes)
3. Dictionary and other reference tools

Context Clues

Context clues are bits of information within a text that will assist you in deciphering the meaning of unknown words. Since most of your knowledge of vocabulary comes from reading, it is important that you recognize context clues. By becoming more aware of particular words and phrases surrounding a difficult word, you can make logical guesses about its meaning. The following are the different types of context clues:

1. Brief definition or restatement
2. Synonyms and antonyms
3. Examples

1) Brief Definition or Restatement

Sometimes a text directly states the definition or a restatement of the unknown word. The brief definition or restatement is signaled by a word or a punctuation mark. Consider the following example:

If you visit Alaska, you will likely see many glaciers, or slow moving masses of ice.

In this sentence, the word *glaciers* is defined by the phrase that follows the signal word *or*, which is *slow moving masses of ice*.

In other instances, the text may restate the meaning of the word in a different way, by using punctuation as a signal. Look at the following example:

Marina was indignant—fuming mad—when she discovered her brother had left for the party without her.

Although *fuming mad* is not a formal definition of the word *indignant*, it does serve to define it. These two examples use signals—the word *or* and the punctuation dashes—to indicate the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Other signals to look for are the words *is*, *as*, *means*, *known as*, and *refers to*.

2) Synonyms and Antonyms

Sometimes a text gives a synonym of the unknown word to signal the meaning of the unfamiliar word:

When you interpret an image, you actively question and examine what the image connotes and suggests.

In this sentence the word *suggests* is a synonym of the word *connotes*. The word *and* sometimes signals synonyms.

Likewise, the word *but* may signal a contrast, which can help you define a word by its antonym.

I abhor clothes shopping, but I adore grocery shopping.

The word *abhor* is contrasted with its opposite: *adore*. From this context, the reader can guess that *abhor* means to dislike greatly. The word *but* sometimes signals antonyms.

3) Examples

Sometimes a text will give you an example of the word that sheds light on its meaning:

I knew Mark's ailurophobia was in full force because he began trembling and stuttering when he saw my cat, Ludwig, slink out from under the bed.

Although *ailurophobia* is an unknown word, the sentence gives an example of its effects. Based on this example, a reader could confidently infer that the word means a fear of cats.



Tip

Look for signal words like *such as*, *for instance*, and *for example*. These words signal that a word's meaning may be revealed through an example.



Exercise 1.7.1

You can use this form to help you decipher the meaning of words through context clues:

Vocabulary From Context Activity

Word #1: _____

Sentence that word appears in:

What you think the word means from context: _____

What clues in the sentence tell you it might mean this?

Dictionary definition of word (do not use a definition that has a form of the word in it):

Were you right? _____

Re-read the sentence. Does it make more sense now? _____

If not, bring this sentence up for class or group discussion.



Exercise 1.7.2

Identify the context clue that helps define the underlined words in each of the following sentences. Write the context clue on your own sheet of paper.

1. Lucinda is very adroit on the balance beam, but Constance is rather clumsy.
2. I saw the entomologist, a scientist who studies insects, cradle the giant dung beetle in her palm.
3. Lance's comments about politics were irrelevant and meaningless to the botanist's lecture on plant reproduction.
4. Before I left for my trip to the Czech Republic, I listened to my mother's sage advice and made a copy of my passport.
5. His rancor, or hatred, for socializing resulted in a life of loneliness and boredom.
6. Martin was mortified, way beyond embarrassment, when his friends teamed up to shove him into the pool.
7. The petulant four-year-old had a baby sister who was, on the contrary, not grouchy at all.
8. The philosophy teacher presented the students with several conundrums, or riddles, to solve.
9. Most Americans are omnivores, people that eat both plants and animals.
10. Elena is effervescent, as excited as a cheerleader, for example, when she meets someone for the first time.

? Exercise 1.7.3

On your own sheet of paper, write the name of the context clue that helps to define the underlined words.

Maggie was a precocious child to say the least. She produced brilliant watercolor paintings by the age of three. At first, her parents were flabbergasted—utterly blown away—by their daughter's ability, but soon they got used to their little painter. Her preschool teacher said that Maggie's dexterity, or ease with which she used her hands, was something she had never before seen in such a young child. Little Maggie never gloated or took pride in her paintings; she just smiled contentedly when she finished one and requested her parents give it to someone as a gift. Whenever people met Maggie for the first time they often watched her paint with their mouths agape, but her parents always kept their mouths closed and simply smiled over their "little Monet."

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

✓ Writing at Work

Jargon is a type of shorthand communication often used in the workplace. It is the technical language of a special field. Imagine it is your first time working as a server in a restaurant and your manager tells you he is going to "eighty-six" the roasted chicken. If you do not realize that "eighty-six" means to remove an item from the menu, you could be confused.

When you first start a job, no matter where it may be, you will encounter jargon that will likely be foreign to you. Perhaps after working the job for a short time, you too will feel comfortable enough to use it. When you are first hired, however, jargon can be baffling and make you feel like an outsider. If you cannot decipher the jargon based on the context, it is always a good policy to ask.

✓ Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing your first job. In the paragraph, use five words previously unknown to you. These words could be jargon words, or you may consult a dictionary or thesaurus to find a new word. Make sure to provide a specific context clue for understanding each word. Exchange papers with a classmate and try to decipher the meaning of the words in each other's paragraphs based on the context clues.

For some practice using context clues to understand new vocabulary, [try these activities](#) from Lethbridge College.

Understanding Words Through the Word Structure

The English language contains an enormous and ever-growing number of words. Enhancing your vocabulary by learning new words can seem overwhelming, but if you know the common prefixes and suffixes of English, you will understand many more words.

Mastering common prefixes and suffixes is like learning a code. Once you crack the code, it becomes not only easier to spell, but it also becomes easier to recognize and perhaps even define unfamiliar words.

Prefixes

A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word to create a new meaning. Study the common prefixes in Table 3.6.1 "Common Prefixes".

Tip:

The main rule to remember when adding a prefix to a word is to **avoid** adding or leaving out any letters. See Table 3.6.1 “Common Prefixes” for examples of this rule.

Table 3.6.1 - Common Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Example
dis	not, opposite of	dis + satisfied = dissatisfied
mis	wrongly	mis + spell = misspell
un	not	un + acceptable = unacceptable
re	again	re + election = reelection
inter	between	inter + related = interrelated
pre	before	pre + pay = prepay
non	not	non + sense = nonsense
super	above	super + script = superscript
sub	under	sub + merge = submerge
anti	against, opposing	anti + bacterial = antibacterial

? Exercise 1.7.4

Identify the five words with prefixes in the following paragraph, and write their meanings on a separate sheet of paper.

At first, I thought one of my fuzzy, orange socks disappeared in the dryer, but I could not find it in there. Because it was my favorite pair, nothing was going to prevent me from finding that sock. I looked all around my bedroom, under the bed, on top of the bed, and in my closet, but I still could not find it. I did not know that I would discover the answer just as I gave up my search. As I sat down on the couch in the family room, my Dad was reclining on his chair. I laughed when I saw that one of his feet was orange and the other blue! I forgot that he was color-blind. Next time he does laundry I will have to supervise him while he folds the socks so that he does not accidentally take one of mine!

? Exercise 1.7.5

Add the correct prefix to the word to complete each sentence. Write the word on your own sheet of paper.

1. I wanted to ease my stomach _____ comfort, so I drank some ginger root tea.
2. Lenny looked funny in his _____ matched shirt and pants.
3. Penelope felt _____ glamorous at the party because she was the only one not wearing a dress.
4. My mother said those _____ aging creams do not work, so I should not waste my money on them.
5. The child's _____ standard performance on the test alarmed his parents.
6. When my sister first saw the meteor, she thought it was a _____ natural phenomenon.
7. Even though she got an excellent job offer, Cherie did not want to _____ locate to a different country.
8. With a small class size, the students get to _____ act with the teacher more frequently.
9. I slipped on the ice because I did not heed the _____ cautions about watching my step.
10. A _____ combatant is another word for civilian.

Suffixes

A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word to create a new meaning. They also indicate the part of speech. Please see Table 3.6.2 for examples.

Table 3.6.2 -- Suffixes

Suffix	Meaning	Example

Noun Suffixes		
er	someone who performs an action	helper
ion	action or process of	celebration
ity	the state or condition of	equality
ment	the action or result of	movement
ness	a state or quality	fairness
or	a person who is something	investigator
sion	state or being	confusion
ship	position held	internship
th	state or quality	strength
Adjective suffixes		
able, ible	capable of being/doing	preventable
al	pertaining to	theatrical
ant	inclined to or tending to	defiant
ary	of or relating to	budgetary
ful	full of	grateful
ic	relating to	heroic
ious, ous	having qualities of	gracious
ive	quality or nature of	creative
less	without something	hopeless
y	made up of or characterized by	tasty
Verb Suffixes		
ed	past tense version of a verb	climbed
en	become	lengthen
er	action or process, making a comparison	faster
ing	verb form/present participle of an action	swimming
ize, ise	to cause or to become	advertize
Adverb Suffixes		
ly	the manner in which something is done	slowly
ward	in a certain direction	forward
wise	in relation to	clockwise

Suffixes and Spelling

There are a number of spelling rules that apply when adding a suffix to a word.



Rule 1

When adding the suffixes *-ness* and *-ly* to a word, the spelling of the word does not change.

Examples:

- dark + ness = darkness
- scholar + ly = scholarly

Exceptions to Rule 1

When the word ends in *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding *-ness* and *-ly*.

Examples:

- ready + ly = readily
- happy + ness = happiness

Rule 2

When the suffix begins with a vowel, drop the silent *e* in the root word.

Examples:

- care + ing = caring
- use + able = usable

Exceptions to Rule 2

When the word ends in *ce* or *ge*, keep the silent *e* if the suffix begins with *a* or *o*.

Examples:

- replace + able = replaceable
- courage + ous = courageous

Rule 3

When the suffix begins with a consonant, keep the silent *e* in the original word.

Examples:

- care + ful = careful
- care + less = careless

Exceptions to Rule 3

Examples:

- true + ly = truly
- argue + ment = argument

Rule 4

When the word ends in a consonant plus *y*, change the *y* to *i* before any suffix not beginning with *i*.

Examples:

- sunny + er = sunnier
- hurry + ing = hurrying

Rule 5

When the suffix begins with a vowel, double the final consonant only if (1) the word has only one syllable or is accented on the last syllable and (2) the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.

Examples:

- tan + ing = tanning (one syllable word)
- regret + ing = regretting (The accent is on the last syllable; the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.)
- cancel + ed = canceled (The accent is not on the last syllable.)
- prefer + ed = preferred

? Exercise 1.7.6

On your own sheet of paper, write correctly the forms of the words with their suffixes.

1. refer + ed
2. refer + ence
3. mope + ing
4. approve + al
5. green + ness
6. benefit + ed
7. resubmit + ing
8. use + age
9. greedy + ly
10. excite + ment

✓ Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing one of your life goals. Include five words with prefixes and five words with suffixes. Exchange papers with a classmate and circle the prefixes and suffixes in your classmate's paper. Correct each prefix or suffix that is spelled incorrectly.

Additional Practice

For practice of this skill, try the [Structural Analysis Exercises](#) from Lethbridge College.

Using Reference Tools

The Dictionary

With so many different dictionary options out there, this video offers good advice in finding one that fits your personal needs.



The Thesaurus

The thesaurus is a very useful tool (book or website) to expand your vocabulary through finding synonyms. Beware! It is easy to choose a word with the wrong connotation or denotation, which could make your writing seem strange or unclear because the nuances of meaning may not be correct. However, when use in conjunction with a dictionary, expanding your vocabulary with a thesaurus can be useful.



Figure: CC BY-ND: Attribution-NoDerivatives

This [website](#), also provides a way of expanding your vocabulary by demonstrating word webs, or words that are related to the word you are investigating.

Quiz

To check your understanding of vocabulary, take this [quiz](#).

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). Provided by: The Saylor Foundation. [CC-NC-SA 3.0](#)
- Adapted from [Vocabulary](#) in the Introduction to College Composition. Provided by: Lumen Learning. CC-BY

This page titled [1.7: Vocabulary Strategies](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- [3.6: Vocabulary](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Writing Process

- [2.1: The Reading-Writing Process](#)
- [2.2: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content](#)
- [2.3: Prewriting Strategies](#)
- [2.4: Outlining](#)
- [2.5: Drafting](#)
- [2.6: Revising and Editing](#)

This page titled [2: Writing Process](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

Steps in the Reading-Writing Process

At the end of Chapter 1, we touched briefly on the writing process. Here, we will go into the process in more detail, adding the relevant reading sections as well. Chances are, you have already used this process as a writer. You may also have used it for other types of creative projects, such as developing a sketch into a finished painting or composing a song. The steps listed below apply broadly to any project that involves creative thinking. You come up with ideas (often vague at first), you work to give them some structure, you make a first attempt, you figure out what needs improving, and then you refine it until you are satisfied.

Although the following parts of the process may seem linear, you do have to start somewhere, but expect to go back and forth between the different parts of the process.

- **Reading and Responding:** Here, the student reads, annotating background notes and articles relevant to the topic.
- **Prewriting:** In this step, the writer generates ideas to write about, often by revisiting their annotations, and begins to develop these ideas.
- **Outlining a structure of ideas:** In this step, the writer determines the overall organizational structure of the writing and creates an outline to organize ideas. Usually this step involves some additional fleshing out of the ideas generated in the first step. It's possible that this is done concurrently or after drafting.
- **Writing a rough draft:** In this step, the writer uses the work completed in prewriting to develop a first draft. The draft covers the ideas the writer brainstormed and follows the organizational plan that was laid out in the first step.
- **Revising:** In this step, the writer revisits the draft to review, reorganize, and reshape its content. This stage involves moderate and sometimes major changes: adding or deleting a paragraph, phrasing the main point differently, expanding an important idea, reorganizing content, and so forth.
- **Editing:** In this step, the writer reviews the draft to make editorial changes to the text. Editing involves making changes to improve style, cohesion, and adherence to standard writing conventions—for instance, replacing a vague word with a more precise one or fixing errors in grammar and spelling.
- **Proofreading:** Proofreading is a final check for spelling, punctuation, formatting, and grammar that should be treated separately from the editing process, which is one step before. Once proofreading is complete, the work is a finished piece and ready to share with others.

The table below more fully characterizes these five main processes. As you can see, writing is much more than the actual physical act of sitting at the keyboard and creating a draft.

Table 4.2.1 -- The Writing Process

1. Considering Writing	2. Prewriting	3. Developing Thesis / Topic Sentences / Support	4. Writing the Draft	5. Revising*

may include these components: - identifying purpose - identifying audience - identifying type of writing - identifying context of the writing creating a working thesis for the idea you want to express	may include these components: - journaling - free writing - brainstorming - mapping - listing - outlining creating a working thesis	may include these components: creating a working thesis - developing ideas with details, examples – additional brainstorming - organizing supporting information into logical groups – developing topic sentences - researching, reading, and verifying sources - Note-taking	may include these components: creating and/or revising a thesis - revising topic sentence - developing paragraphs fully with analysis - organizing and linking paragraphs - writing an introduction - writing a conclusion	may include these components: revising thesis for clarity, appropriateness revising for unity between thesis and support revising support: to add/subtract revising for structure: topic sentences, paragraphs, etc. revising in light of writing considerations: purpose, audience, type, context revising for cohesion - revising for grammatical correctness - revising for language style - revising for appropriate documentation - revising for appropriate layout/format
--	---	---	---	---

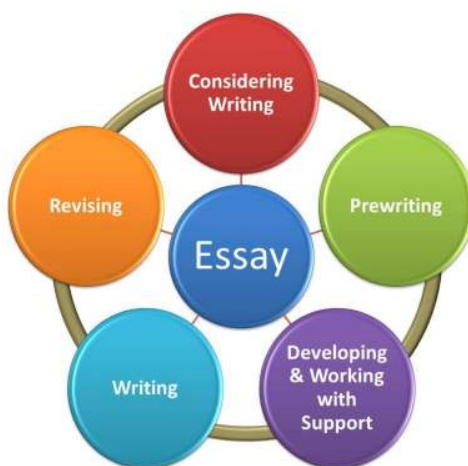


Image from College Writing by Susan Oaks.

One of the first things you may have noticed is the prevalence of that word “**thesis**.” Sometimes you start off your writing process with a main idea, argument, or insight (thesis) that you want to write about, and sometimes the main idea or thesis evolves as you move through the various stages. Know that in any course on college writing, you’ll focus consistently on the concept of “thesis” throughout the writing process.

Although the table above implies a sequence to these processes, given that we generally read tables from left to right and from top to bottom, the sequence actually varies from writer to writer, and from writing project to writing project. Often, writing processes

are depicted as in the image: a circle that can be accessed at any given point. However you choose to visualize “how writing happens,” just remember that it doesn’t happen all at once, and it certainly can happen in different ways.

✓ Tip:

Timed Writing

The writing process also applies to timed writing tasks, such as essay exams. Before you begin writing, read the question thoroughly and think about the main points to include in your response. Use scrap paper to sketch out a very brief outline. Keep an eye on the clock as you write your response so you will have time to review it and make any needed changes before turning in your exam.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** [CC-NC-SA 3.0](#)
- Adapted from [Methods of Discovery: A Guide to Research Writing](#). **Authored by:** Pavel Zemliansky. **Provided by:** Libretexts. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Adapted from [College Writing](#). **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC-BY-NC

This page last revised on June 3, 2020.

This page titled [2.1: The Reading-Writing Process](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [4.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. One technique that effective writers use is to begin a fresh paragraph for each new idea they introduce. Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. One paragraph focuses on only one main idea and presents coherent sentences to support that one point. Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand on its own. To create longer assignments and to discuss more than one point, writers group together paragraphs. Just like a piece of writing as a whole (see [rhetorical analysis](#)), three elements shape the content of each paragraph:

1. **Purpose.** The reason the writer composes the paragraph.
2. **Tone.** The attitude the writer conveys about the paragraph's subject.
3. **Audience.** The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

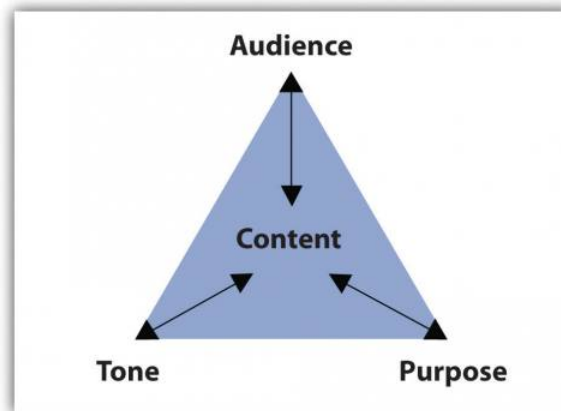


Figure: Amazon.

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what the paragraph covers and how it will support one main point. This section covers how purpose, audience, and tone affect reading and writing paragraphs.

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write a particular document. Basically, the purpose of a piece of writing answers the question "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform them of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community's needs. In academic settings, the reasons for writing fulfill four main purposes: to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate.

Identifying the Audience

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role as does the audience of a play. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions. For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send e-mails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message. In other words, being aware of "invisible" readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke. Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit through writing a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the

author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers imply their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose. Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just 7 percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelt and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

Here, the writer's tone is one of urgency and conveys a call to action. The urgent tone, combined with specific details, makes it more likely that a reader will take action than would a piece of writing that simply gave the facts and did not provide a sense of urgency.

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content. Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

Exercise 1

Match the content in the box to the appropriate audience and purpose. On your own sheet of paper, write the correct letter next to the number.

- Whereas economist Holmes contends that the financial crisis is far from over, the presidential advisor Jones points out that it is vital to catch the first wave of opportunity to increase market share. We can use elements of both experts' visions. Let me explain how.
- In 2000, foreign money flowed into the United States, contributing to easy credit conditions. People bought larger houses than they could afford, eventually defaulting on their loans as interest rates rose.
- The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, known by most of us as the humongous government bailout, caused mixed reactions. Although supported by many political leaders, the statute provoked outrage among grassroots groups. In their opinion, the government was actually rewarding banks for their appalling behavior.

1. Audience: An instructor

- Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis
- Content:

2. Audience: Classmates

- Purpose: To summarize the effects of the \$700 billion government bailout
- Content:

3. Audience: An employer

- Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery
- Content:

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 2

Using the assignment, purpose, audience, and tone from Exercise 1, generate a list of content ideas. Remember that content consists of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations.

My assignment:

My purpose:
My audience:
My tone:
My content ideas:

Managing Your Time

In the first chapter you learned [general time-management skills](#). By combining those skills with what you have learned about the writing process, you can make any writing assignment easier to manage.

When your instructor gives you a writing assignment, write the due date on your calendar. Then work backward from the due date to set aside blocks of time when you will work on the assignment. Always plan at least two sessions of writing time per assignment, so that you are not trying to move from step 1 to step 5 in one evening. Trying to work that fast is stressful, and it does not yield great results. You will plan better, think better, and write better if you space out the steps.

Ideally, you should set aside at least three separate blocks of time to work on a writing assignment: one for prewriting and outlining, one for drafting, and one for revising and editing. Depending on your writing pace and the amount of research you need to do, it may take more. Sometimes those steps may be compressed into just a few days. If you have a couple of weeks to work on a paper, space out the five steps over multiple sessions. Long-term projects, such as research papers, require more time for each step.

Tip:

In certain situations you may not be able to allow time between the different steps of the writing process. For instance, you may be asked to write in class or complete a brief response paper overnight. If the time available is very limited, apply a modified version of the writing process (as you would do for an essay exam). It is still important to give the assignment thought and effort. However, these types of assignments are less formal, and instructors may not expect them to be as polished as formal papers. When in doubt, ask the instructor about expectations, resources that will be available during the writing exam, and if they have any tips to prepare you to effectively demonstrate your writing skills.

Each Monday in Neil's Foundations of Education class, the instructor distributed copies of a current news article on education and assigned students to write a one-and-one-half- to two-page response that was due the following Monday. Together, these weekly assignments counted for 20 percent of the course grade. Although each response took just a few hours to complete, Neil found that he learned more from the reading and got better grades on his writing if he spread the work out as shown in Table 4.5.1.

Table 4.5.1 -- Time-Planning Example

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Article response assigned		Read article, pre-write, and outline response paper		Draft response		Revise and edit response

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [Successful Writing Section 6.1: Audience, Tone, and Content](#). **Authored by:** Anonymous. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)
- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** [CC-NC-SA 3.0](#).

This page most recently updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled [2.2: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- [4.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, students, and employees find that beginning to write can be intimidating. When faced with a blank page, however, experienced writers remind themselves that writing, like other everyday activities, is a process. Every process, from writing to cooking, bike riding, and learning to use a new cell phone, will get significantly easier with practice.

Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create a good written composition. In other words, writing is a process that requires following steps and using strategies to accomplish your goals.

These are the five steps in the writing process:

1. Prewriting
2. Outlining the structure of ideas
3. Writing a rough draft
4. Revising
5. Editing

Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed well and arranged in the proper order. This chapter will give you the chance to work on all these important aspects of writing. Although many more prewriting strategies exist, this chapter covers six: using experience and observations, free writing, asking questions, brainstorming, mapping, and searching the Internet. Using the strategies in this chapter can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

Prewriting

Prewriting means just what it says—it's the writing that occurs before you actually write a draft. Richard Nordquist writes that:

"In composition, the term *prewriting* refers to any activity that helps a writer think about a topic, determine a purpose, analyze an audience, and prepare to write. Prewriting is closely related to the *art of invention* in classical rhetoric."

'The objective of prewriting,' according to Roger Caswell and Brenda Mahler, 'is to prepare students for writing by allowing them to discover what they know and what else they need to know. Prewriting invites exploration and promotes the motivation to write' (*Strategies for Teaching Writing*, 2004)." [1]

In order to explore and identify what might be fruitful ideas for writing, I tend to jot concepts, phrases, and notes to myself. Sometimes I draw linkages to connect related ideas. Other writers tend to just write in order to explore and identify patterns of thought. Still other writers list out all of the concepts and information they can think of around a certain topic, and then narrow and refine their lists. Visual thinkers may draw a mind map or other pictures. Others start writing a really "drafty draft" of an essay, and then circle back into prewriting strategies to develop ideas. Any prewriting strategy is fine, depending on "how your mind thinks" and how you like to discover and explore ideas.

Prewriting is the stage of the writing process during which you transfer your abstract thoughts into more concrete ideas in ink on paper (or in type on a computer screen). Although prewriting techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, the following four strategies are best used when initially deciding on a topic:

1. Using experience and observations
2. Reading
3. Free writing
4. Asking questions

At this stage in the writing process, it is okay if you choose a general topic. Later you will learn more prewriting strategies that will narrow the focus of the topic.

Choosing a Topic

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, writers also understand that choosing a good general topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A good topic not only covers what an assignment will be about but also fits the assignment's purpose and its audience.

On this page, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she prepares a piece of writing. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself why you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and for whom

you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Using Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may also want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Tip

Have you seen an attention-grabbing story on your local news channel? Many current issues appear on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. These can all provide inspiration for your writing.

Reading

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics. Different kinds of documents can help you choose a topic and also develop that topic. For example, a magazine advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. This cover may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic. Or maybe a novel's courtroom drama sparks your curiosity of a particular lawsuit or legal controversy.

After you choose a topic, critical reading is essential to the development of a topic. While reading almost any document, you evaluate the author's point of view by thinking about his main idea and his support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about not only the author's opinion but also your own. If this step already seems daunting, remember that even the best writers need to use prewriting strategies to generate ideas.

Tip

The steps in the writing process may seem time consuming at first, but following these steps will save you time in the future. The more you plan in the beginning by reading and using prewriting strategies, the less time you may spend writing and editing later because your ideas will develop more swiftly.

Prewriting strategies depend on your critical reading skills. Reading prewriting exercises (and outlines and drafts later in the writing process) will further develop your topic and ideas. As you continue to follow the writing process, you will see how Mariah uses critical reading skills to assess her own prewriting exercises.

Free writing

Free writing is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes). During the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, just copy the same word or phrase over and over until you come up with a new thought.

Writing often comes easier when you have a personal connection with the topic you have chosen. Remember, to generate ideas in your free writing, you may also think about readings that you have enjoyed or that have challenged your thinking. Doing this may lead your thoughts in interesting directions.

Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover even more ideas about the topic. Free writing may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more.

Look at Mariah's example. The instructor allowed the members of the class to choose their own topics, and Mariah thought about her experiences as a communications major. She used this free writing exercise to help her generate more concrete ideas from her own experience.

Tip

Some prewriting strategies can be used together. For example, you could use experience and observations to come up with a topic related to your course studies. Then you could use freewriting to describe your topic in more detail and figure out what you have to say about it.

Last semester my favorite class was about mass media. We got to study radio and television. People say we watch too much television, and even though I try not to, I end up watching a few reality shows just to relax. Everyone has to relax! It's too hard to relax when something like the news (my husband watches all the time) is on because it's too scary now. Too much bad news, not enough good news. News. Newspapers I don't read as much anymore. I can get the headlines on my homepage when I check my e-mail. E-mail could be considered mass media too these days. I used to go to the video store a few times a week before I started school, but now the only way I know what movies are current is to listen for the Oscar nominations. We have cable but we can't afford the movie channels, so I sometimes look at older movies late at night. UGH! A few of them get played again and again until you're sick of them. My husband thinks I'm crazy, but sometimes there are old black-and-whites on from the 1930s and '40s. I could never live my life in black-and-white. I like the home decorating shows and love how people use color on their walls. Makes rooms look so bright. When we buy a home, if we ever can, I'll use lots of color. Some of those shows even show you how to do major renovations by yourself. Knock down walls and everything. Not for me or my husband. I'm handier than he is. I wonder if they could make a reality show about us!

Exercise 1

Free write about one event you have recently experienced. With this event in mind, write without stopping for five minutes. After you finish, read over what you wrote. Does anything stand out to you as a good general topic to write about?

Asking Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get more information. Who will be my partner for the project? When is the next meeting? Why is my car making that odd noise? Even the title of this chapter begins with the question "How do I begin?"

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you choose your topic, answering these questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

When Mariah reread her free writing notes, she found she had rambled and her thoughts were disjointed. She realized that the topic that interested her most was the one she started with, the media. She then decided to explore that topic by asking herself questions about it. Her purpose was to refine media into a topic she felt comfortable writing about. To see how asking questions can help you choose a topic, take a look at the following chart that Mariah completed to record her questions and answers. She asked herself the

questions that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are often called the 5WH questions, after their initial letters.

Questions	Answers
Who?	I use media. Students, teachers, parents, employers and employees-almost everyone uses media.
What?	The media can be a lot of things. Television, radio, e-mail (I think), newspapers, magazines, books.
Where?	The media is almost everywhere now. It's in homes, at work, in cars, even on cell phones!
When?	Media has been around for a long time, but seems a lot more important now.
Why?	Hmm. This is a good question. I don't know why there is mass media. Maybe we have it because we have the technology now. Or people live far away from their families and they have to stay in touch.
How?	Well, media is possible because of the technology inventions, but I don't know how they all work!

Tip

Prewriting is very purpose driven; it does not follow a set of hard-and-fast rules. The purpose of prewriting is to find and explore ideas so that you will be prepared to write. A prewriting technique like asking questions can help you both find a topic and explore it. The key to effective prewriting is to use the techniques that work best for your thinking process. Free writing may not seem to fit your thinking process, but keep an open mind. It may work better than you think. Perhaps brainstorming a list of topics might better fit your personal style. Mariah found free writing and asking questions to be fruitful strategies to use. In your own prewriting, use the 5WH questions in any way that benefits your planning.

Exercise 2

Choose a general topic idea from the prewriting you completed in Exercise 1. Then read each question and use your own paper to answer the 5WH questions. As with Mariah when she explored her writing topic for more detail, it is okay if you do not know all the answers. If you do not know an answer, use your own opinion to speculate, or guess. You may also use factual information from books or articles you previously read on your topic. Later in the chapter, you will read about additional ways (like searching the Internet) to answer your questions and explore your guesses.

5WH Questions

1. Who?

2. What?

3. Where?

4. When?

5. Why?

6. How?

Now that you have completed some of the prewriting exercises, you may feel less anxious about starting a paper from scratch. With some ideas down on paper (or saved on a computer), writers are often more comfortable continuing the writing process. After identifying a good general topic, you, too, are ready to continue the process.

Exercise 3

Write your general topic on your own sheet of paper, under where you recorded your purpose and audience. Choose it from among the topics you listed or explored during the prewriting you have done so far. Make sure it is one you feel comfortable with and feel capable of writing about.

My general topic: _____

Tip

You may find that you need to adjust your topic as you move through the writing stages (and as you complete the exercises in this chapter). If the topic you have chosen is not working, you can repeat the prewriting activities until you find a better one.

More Prewriting Techniques

The prewriting techniques of free writing and asking questions helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- Brainstorming
- Idea mapping
- Searching the Internet

Narrowing the focus means breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating lots of subtopics will help you eventually select the ones that fit the assignment and appeal to you and your audience.

After rereading her syllabus, Mariah realized her general topic, mass media, is too broad for her class's short paper requirement. Three pages are not enough to cover all the concerns in mass media today. Mariah also realized that although her readers are other communications majors who are interested in the topic, they may want to read a paper about a particular issue in mass media.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer document) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic.

The following image is Mariah's brainstorming list:



Figure: From this list, Mariah could narrow her focus to a particular technology under the broad category of mass media.

Writing at Work



Figure:

Imagine you have to write an e-mail to your current boss explaining your prior work experience, but you do not know where to start. Before you begin the e-mail, you can use the brainstorming technique to generate a list of employers, duties, and responsibilities that fall under the general topic “work experience.”

Idea Mapping

Idea mapping allows you to visualize your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as clustering because ideas are broken down and clustered, or grouped together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

To create an idea map, start with your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then write specific ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them together. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

In addition to brainstorming, Mariah tried idea mapping. Review the following idea map that Mariah created:



Image from @api.

Notice Mariah's largest circle contains her general topic, mass media. Then, the general topic branches into two subtopics written in two smaller circles: television and radio. The subtopic television branches into even more specific topics: cable and DVDs. From there, Mariah drew more circles and wrote more specific ideas: high definition and digital recording from cable and Blu-ray from DVDs. The radio topic led Mariah to draw connections between music, downloads versus CDs, and, finally, piracy.

From this idea map, Mariah saw she could consider narrowing the focus of her mass media topic to the more specific topic of music piracy.

Searching the Internet

Using search engines on the Internet is a good way to see what kinds of websites are available on your topic. Writers use search engines not only to understand more about the topic's specific issues but also to get better acquainted with their audience.

Tip

Look back at the chart you completed in Exercise 2. Did you guess at any of the answers? Searching the Internet may help you find answers to your questions and confirm your guesses. Be choosy about the websites you use. Make sure they are reliable sources for the kind of information you seek.

When you search the Internet, type some key words from your broad topic or words from your narrowed focus into your browser's search engine (many good general and specialized search engines are available for you to try). Then look over the results for relevant and interesting articles.

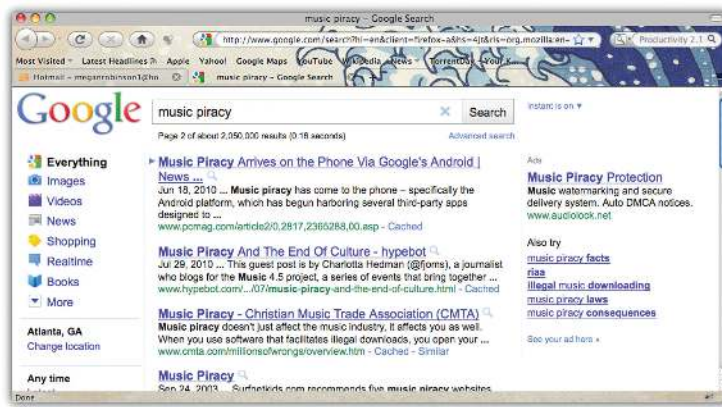
Results from an Internet search show writers the following information:

- Who is talking about the topic
- How the topic is being discussed
- What specific points are currently being discussed about the topic

Tip

If the search engine results are not what you are looking for, revise your key words and search again. Some search engines also offer suggestions for related searches that may give you better results.

Mariah typed the words *music piracy* from her idea map into the search engine, Google. The search engine provided her with the following results:



Retrieved from
<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=4Jt&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&q=music+piracy&start=10&sa=N!>>

Image from @api.

Not all the results online search engines return will be useful or reliable. Give careful consideration to the reliability of an online source before selecting a topic based on it. Remember that factual information can be verified in other sources, both online and in print. If you have doubts about any information you find, either do not use it or identify it as potentially unreliable.

The results from Mariah's search included websites from university publications, personal blogs, online news sources, and lots of legal cases sponsored by the recording industry. Reading legal jargon made Mariah uncomfortable with the results, so she decided to look further. Reviewing her map, she realized that she was more interested in consumer aspects of mass media, so she refocused her search to media technology and the sometimes confusing array of expensive products that fill electronics stores. Now, Mariah considers a paper topic on the products that have fed the mass media boom in everyday lives.

Exercise 4

In Exercise 2, you chose a possible topic and explored it by answering questions about it using the 5WH questions. However, this topic may still be too broad. Here, in Exercise 3, choose and complete one of the prewriting strategies to narrow the focus. Use either brainstorming, idea mapping, or searching the Internet.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Share what you found and what interests you about the possible topic(s).

Prewriting strategies are a vital first step in the writing process. First, they help you first choose a broad topic and then they help you narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific idea. An effective topic ensures that you are ready for the next step.

Topic Checklist

The following checklist can help you decide if your narrowed topic is good for your assignment.

- Am I interested in this topic?
- Would my audience be interested?
- Do I have prior knowledge or experience with this topic? If so, would I be comfortable exploring this topic and sharing my experiences?
- Do I want to learn more about this topic?
- Is this topic specific?
- Does it fit the length of the assignment?

With your narrowed focus in mind, answer the bulleted questions in the checklist for developing a good topic. If you can answer "yes" to all the questions, write your topic on the line. If you answer "no" to any of the questions, think about another topic or adjust the one you have and try the prewriting strategies again.

My narrowed topic: _____

Watch [this video](#) that covers the basics of prewriting:



Video 2.3.1

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [Writing for Success](#). **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** [CC-NC-SA 3.0](#)
- Adapted from "Developing Ideas for Writing" from [College Writing](#). **Provided by:** Lumen. **License:** CC-BY-NC

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED CONTENT:

- Prewriting Strategies. **Authored by:** Leslie Cox. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

This page most recently updated June 3, 2020.

This page titled [2.3: Prewriting Strategies](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [4.6: Prewriting Strategies](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

2.4: Outlining

Learning Objectives

- Identify the steps in constructing an outline.
- Construct a topic outline and a sentence outline.

Your prewriting activities and readings have helped you gather information for your assignment. The more you sort through the pieces of information you found, the more you will begin to see the connections between them. Patterns and gaps may begin to stand out. But only when you start to organize your ideas will you be able to translate your raw insights into a form that will communicate meaning to your audience.

Tip

Longer papers require more reading and planning than shorter papers do. Most writers discover that the more they know about a topic, the more they can write about it with intelligence and interest.

Organizing Ideas

When you write, you need to organize your ideas in an order that makes sense. The writing you complete in all your courses exposes how analytically and critically your mind works. In some courses, the only direct contact you may have with your instructor is through the assignments you write for the course. You can make a good impression by spending time ordering your ideas.

Order refers to your choice of what to present first, second, third, and so on in your writing. The order you pick closely relates to your purpose for writing that particular assignment. For example, when telling a story, it may be important to first describe the background for the action. Or you may need to first describe a 3-D movie projector or a television studio to help readers visualize the setting and scene. You may want to group your support effectively to convince readers that your point of view on an issue is well reasoned and worthy of belief.

In longer pieces of writing, you may organize different parts in different ways so that your purpose stands out clearly and all parts of the paper work together to consistently develop your main point.

Methods of Organizing Writing

The three common methods of organizing writing are chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance. You will learn more about these in [Chapter 9](#); however, you need to keep these methods of organization in mind as you plan how to arrange the information you have gathered in an outline. An outline is a written plan that serves as a skeleton for the paragraphs you write. Later, when you draft paragraphs in the next stage of the writing process, you will add support to create “flesh” and “muscle” for your assignment.

When you write, your goal is not only to complete an assignment but also to write for a specific purpose—perhaps to inform, to explain, to persuade, or for a combination of these purposes. Your purpose for writing should always be in the back of your mind, because it will help you decide which pieces of information belong together and how you will order them. In other words, choose the order that will most effectively fit your purpose and support your main point.

Table 8.1 “Order versus Purpose” shows the connection between order and purpose.

Table 8.1 - Order versus Purpose

Order	Purpose
Chronological Order	To explain the history of an event or a topic
	To tell a story or relate an experience
	To explain how to do or make something
	To explain the steps in a process
Spatial Order	To help readers visualize something as you want them to see it

Order	Purpose
	To create a main impression using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
Order of Importance	To persuade or convince
	To rank items by their importance, benefit, or significance

Writing a Thesis Statement

One legitimate question readers always ask about a piece of writing is “What is the big idea?” (You may even ask this question when you are the reader, critically reading an assignment or another document.) Every nonfiction writing task—from the short essay to the ten-page term paper to the lengthy senior thesis—needs a big idea, or a controlling idea, as the spine for the work. The controlling idea is the main idea that you want to present and develop.

Tip

For a longer piece of writing, the main idea should be broader than the main idea for a shorter piece of writing. Be sure to frame a main idea that is appropriate for the length of the assignment. Ask yourself, “How many pages will it take for me to explain and explore this main idea in detail?” Be reasonable with your estimate. Then expand or trim it to fit the required length.

The big idea, or controlling idea, you want to present in an essay is expressed in a thesis statement. A thesis statement is often one sentence long, and it states your point of view. The thesis statement is not the topic of the piece of writing but rather what you have to say about that topic and what is important to tell readers.

Table 8.2 “Topics and Thesis Statements” compares topics and thesis statements.

Table 8.2 - Topics and Thesis Statements

Topic	Thesis Statement
Music piracy	The recording industry fears that so-called music piracy will diminish profits and destroy markets, but it cannot be more wrong.
The number of consumer choices available in media gear	Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are extensive, and the specifications are often confusing.
E-books and online newspapers increasing their share of the market	E-books and online newspapers will bring an end to print media as we know it.
Online education and the new media	Someday, students and teachers will send avatars to their online classrooms.

The first thesis statement you write will be a preliminary thesis statement, or a working thesis statement. You will need it when you begin to outline your assignment as a way to organize it. As you continue to develop the arrangement, you can limit your working thesis statement if it is too broad or expand it if it proves too narrow for what you want to say.

? Exercise 2.4.1

Using the topic you selected in [Section 8.1](#), develop a working thesis statement that states your controlling idea for the piece of writing you are doing. On a sheet of paper, write your working thesis statement.

Tip

You will make several attempts before you devise a working thesis statement that you think is effective. Each draft of the thesis statement will bring you closer to the wording that expresses your meaning exactly.

Writing an Outline

For an essay question on a test or a brief oral presentation in class, all you may need to prepare is a short, informal outline in which you jot down key ideas in the order you will present them. This kind of outline reminds you to stay focused in a stressful situation and to include all the good ideas that help you explain or prove your point.

For a longer assignment, like an essay or a research paper, many college instructors require students to submit a formal outline before writing a major paper as a way to be sure you are on the right track and are working in an organized manner. A formal outline is a detailed guide that shows how all your supporting ideas relate to each other. It helps you distinguish between ideas that are of equal importance and ones that are of lesser importance. You build your paper based on the framework created by the outline.

Tip

Instructors may also require you to submit an outline with your final draft to check the direction of the assignment and the logic of your final draft. If you are required to submit an outline with the final draft of a paper, remember to revise the outline to reflect any changes you made while writing the paper.

There are two types of formal outlines: the topic outline and the sentence outline. You format both types of formal outlines in the same way.

- Place your introduction and thesis statement at the beginning, under roman numeral I.
- Use roman numerals (II, III, IV, V, etc.) to identify main points that develop the thesis statement.
- Use capital letters (A, B, C, D, etc.) to divide your main points into parts.
- Use arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.) if you need to subdivide any As, Bs, or Cs into smaller parts.
- End with the final roman numeral expressing your idea for your conclusion.

Here is what the skeleton of a traditional formal outline looks like. The indentation helps clarify how the ideas are related.

1. Introduction
Thesis statement
2. 1. Supporting detail → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*
 1. 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
2. Supporting detail
 1. 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
3. Supporting detail
 1. 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
3. Main point 2 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 2*
 1. 1. Supporting detail
 2. Supporting detail
 3. Supporting detail
4. Main point 3 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 3*
 1. 1. Supporting detail
 2. Supporting detail
 3. Supporting detail
5. Conclusion

tips

- In an outline, any supporting detail can be developed with subpoints. For simplicity, the model shows them only under the first main point.
- Formal outlines are often quite rigid in their organization. As many instructors will specify, you cannot subdivide one point if it is only one part. For example, for every roman numeral I, there must be a For every A, there must be a B. For every Arabic numeral 1, there must be a 2. See for yourself on the sample outlines that follow.

Constructing Topic Outlines

A topic outline is the same as a sentence outline except you use words or phrases instead of complete sentences. Words and phrases keep the outline short and easier to comprehend. All the headings, however, must be written in parallel structure. (For more information on parallel structure, see [Chapter 7](#).)

Here is the topic outline that Mariah constructed for the essay she is developing. Her purpose is to inform, and her audience is a general audience of her fellow college students. Notice how Mariah begins with her thesis statement. She then arranges her main points and supporting details in outline form using short phrases in parallel grammatical structure.

- I. Introduction
 - Thesis statement: Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.
- II. E-book readers and the way that people read
 - A. Books easy to access and carry around
 - 1. Electronic downloads
 - 2. Storage in memory for hundreds of books
 - B. An expanding market
 - 1. E-book readers from booksellers
 - 2. E-book readers from electronics and computer companies
 - C. Limitations of current e-book readers
 - 1. Incompatible features from one brand to the next
 - 2. Borrowing and sharing e-books
- III. Film cameras replaced by digital cameras
 - A. Three types of digital cameras
 - 1. Compact digital cameras
 - 2. Single lens reflex cameras, or SLRs
 - 3. Cameras that combine the best features of both
 - B. The confusing "megapixel wars"
 - C. The zoom lens battle
- IV. The confusing choice among televisions
 - A. 1080p vs. 768p
 - B. Plasma screens vs. LCDs
 - C. Home media centers
- V. Conclusion
 - How to be a wise consumer

Checklist

Writing an Effective Topic Outline

This checklist can help you write an effective topic outline for your assignment. It will also help you discover where you may need to do additional reading or prewriting.

- Do I have a controlling idea that guides the development of the entire piece of writing?

- Do I have three or more main points that I want to make in this piece of writing? Does each main point connect to my controlling idea?
- Is my outline in the best order—chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance—for me to present my main points? Will this order help me get my main point across?
- Do I have supporting details that will help me inform, explain, or prove my main points?
- Do I need to add more support? If so, where?
- Do I need to make any adjustments in my working thesis statement before I consider it the final version?

✓ Writing at Work

Word processing programs generally have an automatic numbering feature that can be used to prepare outlines. This feature automatically sets indents and lets you use the tab key to arrange information just as you would in an outline. Although in business this style might be acceptable, in college your instructor might have different requirements. Teach yourself how to customize the levels of outline numbering in your word-processing program to fit your instructor's preferences.

? Exercise 2.4.2

Using the working thesis statement you wrote in Note 8.32 “Exercise 1” and the reading you did in Section 8.1 “Apply Prewriting Models”, construct a topic outline for your essay. Be sure to observe correct outline form, including correct indentions and the use of Roman and arabic numerals and capital letters.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your outline. Point out areas of interest from their outline and what you would like to learn more about.

Constructing Sentence Outlines

A sentence outline is the same as a topic outline except you use complete sentences instead of words or phrases. Complete sentences create clarity and can advance you one step closer to a draft in the writing process.

Here is the sentence outline that Mariah constructed for the essay she is developing.

- I. Introduction
 - Thesis statement: Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.
- II. E-book readers are changing the way people read.
 - A. E-book readers make books easy to access and to carry.
 - 1. Books can be downloaded electronically.
 - 2. Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.
 - B. The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.
 - 1. Booksellers sell their own e-book readers.
 - 2. Electronics and computer companies also sell e-book readers.
 - C. Current e-book readers have significant limitations.
 - 1. The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.
 - 2. Few programs have been made to fit the other way Americans read: by borrowing books from libraries.
- III. Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras.
 - A. The first major choice is the type of digital camera.
 - 1. Compact digital cameras are light but have fewer megapixels.
 - 2. Single lens reflex cameras, or SLRs, may be large and heavy but can be used for many functions.
 - a. Some cameras combine the best features of compacts and SLRs.
 - B. Choosing the camera type involves the confusing "megapixel wars."
 - C. The zoom lens battle also determines the camera you will buy.
- IV. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.
 - A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?
 - B. In the screen-size wars, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?
 - C. Does every home really need a media center?
- V. Conclusion
 - The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

Tip

The information compiled under each roman numeral will become a paragraph in your final paper. In the previous example, the outline follows the standard five-paragraph essay arrangement, but longer essays will require more paragraphs and thus more roman numerals. If you think that a paragraph might become too long or stringy, add an additional paragraph to your outline, renumbering the main points appropriately.

Writing at Work

PowerPoint presentations, used both in schools and in the workplace, are organized in a way very similar to formal outlines. PowerPoint presentations often contain information in the form of talking points that the presenter develops with more details and examples than are contained on the PowerPoint slide.

Exercise 2.4.3

Expand the topic outline you prepared in Exercise 2 to make it a sentence outline. In this outline, be sure to include multiple supporting points for your main topic even if your topic outline does not contain them. Be sure to observe correct outline form, including correct indentions and the use of Roman and Arabic numerals and capital letters.

Key Takeaways

- Writers must put their ideas in order so the assignment makes sense. The most common orders are chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance.
- After gathering and evaluating the information you found for your essay, the next step is to write a working, or preliminary, thesis statement.
- The working thesis statement expresses the main idea that you want to develop in the entire piece of writing. It can be modified as you continue the writing process.
- Effective writers prepare a formal outline to organize their main ideas and supporting details in the order they will be presented.
- A topic outline uses words and phrases to express the ideas.
- A sentence outline uses complete sentences to express the ideas.
- The writer's thesis statement begins the outline, and the outline ends with suggestions for the concluding paragraph.

2.4: Outlining is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **8.2: Outlining** by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

2.5: Drafting

Learning Objectives

- Identify drafting strategies that improve writing.
- Use drafting strategies to prepare the first draft of an essay.

Drafting is the stage of the writing process in which you develop a complete first version of a piece of writing.

Even professional writers admit that an empty page scares them because they feel they need to come up with something fresh and original every time they open a blank document on their computers. Because you have completed the first two steps in the writing process, you have already recovered from empty page syndrome. You have hours of prewriting and planning already done. You know what will go on that blank page: what you wrote in your outline.

Getting Started: Strategies For Drafting

Your objective for this portion of [Chapter 8](#) is to draft the body paragraphs of a standard five-paragraph essay. A five-paragraph essay contains an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. If you are more comfortable starting on paper than on the computer, you can start on paper and then type it before you revise. You can also use a voice recorder to get yourself started, dictating a paragraph or two to get you thinking. In this lesson, Mariah does all her work on the computer, but you may use pen and paper or the computer to write a rough draft.

Making the Writing Process Work for You

What makes the writing process so beneficial to writers is that it encourages alternatives to standard practices while motivating you to develop your best ideas. For instance, the following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in the writing process:

- **Begin writing with the part you know the most about.** You can start with the third paragraph in your outline if ideas come easily to mind. You can start with the second paragraph or the first paragraph, too. Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support. Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.
- **Write one paragraph at a time and then stop.** As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.
- **Take short breaks to refresh your mind.** This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multipage report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. But do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.
- **Be reasonable with your goals.** If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.
- **Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write.** These aspects of writing are just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

Of all of these considerations, keeping your purpose and your audience at the front of your mind is the most important key to writing success. If your purpose is to persuade, for example, you will present your facts and details in the most logical and convincing way you can.

Your purpose will guide your mind as you compose your sentences. Your audience will guide word choice. Are you writing for experts, for a general audience, for other college students, or for people who know very little about your topic? Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their background and experience, need to be told in order to understand your ideas. How can you best express your ideas so they are totally clear and your communication is effective?

 Tip

You may want to identify your purpose and audience on an index card that you clip to your paper (or keep next to your computer). On that card, you may want to write notes to yourself—perhaps about what that audience might not know or what it needs to know—so that you will be sure to address those issues when you write. It may be a good idea to also state exactly what you want to explain to that audience, or to inform them of, or to persuade them about.

✓ writing at work

Many of the documents you produce at work target a particular audience for a particular purpose. You may find that it is highly advantageous to know as much as you can about your target audience and to prepare your message to reach that audience, even if the audience is a coworker or your boss. Menu language is a common example. Descriptions like “organic romaine” and “free-range chicken” are intended to appeal to a certain type of customer though perhaps not to the same customer who craves a thick steak. Similarly, mail-order companies research the demographics of the people who buy their merchandise. Successful vendors customize product descriptions in catalogs to appeal to their buyers’ tastes. For example, the product descriptions in a skateboarder catalog will differ from the descriptions in a clothing catalog for mature adults.

? Exercise 2.5.1

Using the topic for the essay that you outlined in [Section 8.2](#), describe your purpose and your audience as specifically as you can. Use your own sheet of paper to record your responses. Then keep these responses near you during future stages of the writing process.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Setting Goals for Your First Draft

A draft is a complete version of a piece of writing, but it is not the final version. The step in the writing process after drafting, as you may remember, is revising. During revising, you will have the opportunity to make changes to your first draft before you put the finishing touches on it during the editing and proofreading stage. A first draft gives you a working version that you can later improve.

✓ writing at work

Workplace writing in certain environments is done by teams of writers who collaborate on the planning, writing, and revising of documents, such as long reports, technical manuals, and the results of scientific research. Collaborators do not need to be in the same room, the same building, or even the same city. Many collaborations are conducted over the Internet.

In a perfect collaboration, each contributor has the right to add, edit, and delete text. Strong communication skills, in addition to strong writing skills, are important in this kind of writing situation because disagreements over style, content, process, emphasis, and other issues may arise.

The collaborative software, or document management systems, that groups use to work on common projects is sometimes called groupware or workgroup support systems.

The reviewing tool on some word-processing programs also gives you access to a collaborative tool that many smaller workgroups use when they exchange documents. You can also use it to leave comments to yourself.

 Tip

If you invest some time now to investigate how the reviewing tool in your word processor works, you will be able to use it with confidence during the revision stage of the writing process. Then, when you start to revise, set your reviewing tool to track any changes you make, so you will be able to tinker with text and commit only those final changes you want to keep.

Discovering the Basic Elements of a First Draft

If you have been using the information in this chapter step by step to help you develop an assignment, you already have both a formal topic outline and a formal sentence outline to direct your writing. Knowing what a first draft looks like will help you make the creative leap from the outline to the first draft. A first draft should include the following elements:

- An introduction that piques the audience's interest, tells what the essay is about, and motivates readers to keep reading.
- A *thesis statement* that presents the main point, or controlling idea, of the entire piece of writing.
- A topic sentence in each paragraph that states the main idea of the paragraph and implies how that main idea connects to the thesis statement.
- Supporting sentences in each paragraph that develop or explain the topic sentence. These can be specific facts, examples, anecdotes, or other details that elaborate on the topic sentence.
- A conclusion that reinforces the thesis statement and leaves the audience with a feeling of completion.

These elements follow the standard five-paragraph essay format, which you probably first encountered in high school. This basic format is valid for most essays you will write in college, even much longer ones. For now, however, Mariah focuses on writing the three body paragraphs from her outline. [Chapter 9](#) covers writing introductions and conclusions, and you will read Mariah's introduction and conclusion in [Chapter 9](#).

The Role of Topic Sentences

Topic sentences make the structure of a text and the writer's basic arguments easy to locate and comprehend. In college writing, using a topic sentence in each paragraph of the essay is the standard rule. However, the topic sentence does not always have to be the first sentence in your paragraph even if it the first item in your formal outline.

 Tip

When you begin to draft your paragraphs, you should follow your outline fairly closely. After all, you spent valuable time developing those ideas. However, as you begin to express your ideas in complete sentences, it might strike you that the topic sentence might work better at the end of the paragraph or in the middle. Try it. Writing a draft, by its nature, is a good time for experimentation.

The topic sentence can be the first, middle, or final sentence in a paragraph. The assignment's audience and purpose will often determine where a topic sentence belongs. When the purpose of the assignment is to persuade, for example, the topic sentence should be the first sentence in a paragraph. In a persuasive essay, the writer's point of view should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph.

Choosing where to position the topic sentence depends not only on your audience and purpose but also on the essay's arrangement, or order. When you organize information according to order of importance, the topic sentence may be the final sentence in a paragraph. All the supporting sentences build up to the topic sentence. Chronological order may also position the topic sentence as the final sentence because the controlling idea of the paragraph may make the most sense at the end of a sequence.

When you organize information according to spatial order, a topic sentence may appear as the middle sentence in a paragraph. An essay arranged by spatial order often contains paragraphs that begin with descriptions. A reader may first need a visual in his or her mind before understanding the development of the paragraph. When the topic sentence is in the middle, it unites the details that come before it with the ones that come after it.

 Tip

As you read critically throughout the writing process, keep topic sentences in mind. You may discover topic sentences that are not always located at the beginning of a paragraph. For example, fiction writers customarily use topic ideas, either expressed or implied, to move readers through their texts. In nonfiction writing, such as popular magazines, topic sentences are often used when the author thinks it is appropriate (based on the audience and the purpose, of course). A single topic sentence might even control the development of a number of paragraphs. For more information on topic sentences, please see [Chapter 6](#).

Developing topic sentences and thinking about their placement in a paragraph will prepare you to write the rest of the paragraph.

Paragraphs

The paragraph is the main structural component of an essay as well as other forms of writing. Each paragraph of an essay adds another related main idea to support the writer's thesis, or controlling idea. Each related main idea is supported and developed with facts, examples, and other details that explain it. By exploring and refining one main idea at a time, writers build a strong case for their thesis.

Paragraph Length

How long should a paragraph be?

One answer to this important question may be “long enough”—long enough for you to address your points and explain your main idea. To grab attention or to present succinct supporting ideas, a paragraph can be fairly short and consist of two to three sentences. A paragraph in a complex essay about some abstract point in philosophy or archaeology can be three-quarters of a page or more in length. As long as the writer maintains close focus on the topic and does not ramble, a long paragraph is acceptable in college-level writing. In general, try to keep the paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than one full page of double-spaced text.

 Tip

Journalistic style often calls for brief two- or three-sentence paragraphs because of how people read the news, both online and in print. Blogs and other online information sources often adopt this paragraphing style, too. Readers often skim the first paragraphs of a great many articles before settling on the handful of stories they want to read in detail.

You may find that a particular paragraph you write may be longer than one that will hold your audience's interest. In such cases, you should divide the paragraph into two or more shorter paragraphs, adding a topic statement or some kind of transitional word or phrase at the start of the new paragraph. Transition words or phrases show the connection between the two ideas.

In all cases, however, be guided by what your instructor wants and expects to find in your draft. Many instructors will expect you to develop a mature college-level style as you progress through the semester's assignments.

? Exercise 2.5.2

To build your sense of appropriate paragraph length, use the Internet to find examples of the following items. Copy them into a file, identify your sources, and present them to your instructor with your annotations, or notes.

- A news article written in short paragraphs. Take notes on, or annotate, your selection with your observations about the effect of combining paragraphs that develop the same topic idea. Explain how effective those paragraphs would be.
- A long paragraph from a scholarly work that you identify through an academic search engine. Annotate it with your observations about the author's paragraphing style.

Starting Your First Draft

Now we are finally ready to look over Mariah's shoulder as she begins to write her essay about digital technology and the confusing choices that consumers face. As she does, you should have in front of you your outline, with its thesis statement and topic sentences, and the notes you wrote earlier in this lesson on your purpose and audience. Reviewing these will put both you and Mariah in the proper mind-set to start.

The following is Mariah's thesis statement.

Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.

Here are the notes that Mariah wrote to herself to characterize her purpose and audience.

Purpose: *My purpose is to inform readers about the wide variety of consumer digital technology available in stores and to explain why the specifications for these products, expressed in numbers that average consumers don't understand, often cause bad or misinformed buying decisions.*

Audience: *My audience is my instructor and members of this class. Most of them are not heavy into technology except for the usual laptops, cell phones, and MP3 players, which are not topics I'm writing about. I'll have to be as exact and precise as I can be when I explain possibly unfamiliar product specifications. At the same time, they're more with it electronically than my grandparents' VCR-flummoxed generation, so I won't have to explain every last detail.*

Mariah chose to begin by writing a quick introduction based on her thesis statement. She knew that she would want to improve her introduction significantly when she revised. Right now, she just wanted to give herself a starting point. You will read her introduction again in [Section 8.4](#) when she revises it.

 Tip

Remember Mariah's other options. She could have started directly with any of the body paragraphs.

You will learn more about writing attention-getting introductions and effective conclusions in [Chapter 9](#).

With her thesis statement and her purpose and audience notes in front of her, Mariah then looked at her sentence outline. She chose to use that outline because it includes the topic sentences. The following is the portion of her outline for the first body paragraph. The roman numeral II identifies the topic sentence for the paragraph, capital letters indicate supporting details, and arabic numerals label subpoints.

- II. *E-book readers are changing the way people read.*
- A. *E-book readers make books easy to access and to carry.*
 - 1. *Books can be downloaded electronically.*
 - 2. *Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.*
 - B. *The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.*
 - 1. *Booksellers sell their own e-book readers.*
 - 2. *Electronics and computer companies also sell e-book readers.*
 - C. *Current e-book readers have significant limitations.*
 - 1. *The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.*
 - 2. *Few programs have been made to fit the other way Americans read: by borrowing books from libraries.*

Mariah then began to expand the ideas in her outline into a paragraph. Notice how the outline helped her guarantee that all her sentences in the body of the paragraph develop the topic sentence.

E-book readers are changing the way people read, or so e-book developers hope. The main selling point for these handheld devices, which are sort of the size of a paperback book, is that they make books easy to access and carry. Electronic versions of printed books can be downloaded online for a few bucks or directly from your cell phone. These devices can store hundreds of books in memory and, with text-to-speech features, can even read the texts. The market for e-books and e-book readers keeps expanding as a lot of companies enter it. Online and traditional booksellers have been the first to market e-book readers to the public, but computer companies, especially the ones already involved in cell phone, online music, and notepad computer technology, will also enter the market. The problem for consumers, however, is which device to choose. Incompatibility is the norm. E-books can be read only on the devices they were intended for. Furthermore, use is restricted by the same kind of DRM systems that restrict the copying of music and videos. So, book buyers are often unable to lend books to other readers, as they can with a real book. Few accommodations have been made to fit the other way Americans read: by borrowing books from libraries. What is a buyer to do?

 Tip

If you write your first draft on the computer, consider creating a new file folder for each course with a set of subfolders inside the course folders for each assignment you are given. Label the folders clearly with the course names, and label each assignment folder and word processing document with a title that you will easily recognize. The assignment name is a good choice for the document. Then use that subfolder to store all the drafts you create. When you start each new draft, do not just write over the last one. Instead, save the draft with a new tag after the title—draft 1, draft 2, and so on—so that you will have a complete history of drafts in case your instructor wishes you to submit them.

In your documents, observe any formatting requirements—for margins, headers, placement of page numbers, and other layout matters—that your instructor requires.

 Exercise 2.5.3

Study how Mariah made the transition from her sentence outline to her first draft. First, copy her outline onto your own sheet of paper. Leave a few spaces between each part of the outline. Then copy sentences from Mariah's paragraph to align each sentence with its corresponding entry in her outline.

Continuing the First Draft

Mariah continued writing her essay, moving to the second and third body paragraphs. She had supporting details but no numbered subpoints in her outline, so she had to consult her prewriting notes for specific information to include.

 Tip

If you decide to take a break between finishing your first body paragraph and starting the next one, do not start writing immediately when you return to your work. Put yourself back in context and in the mood by rereading what you have already written. This is what Mariah did. If she had stopped writing in the middle of writing the paragraph, she could have jotted down some quick notes to herself about what she would write next.

Preceding each body paragraph that Mariah wrote is the appropriate section of her sentence outline. Notice how she expanded roman numeral III from her outline into a first draft of the second body paragraph. As you read, ask yourself how closely she stayed on purpose and how well she paid attention to the needs of her audience.

- III. Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras.*
- A. The first major choice is the type of digital camera.*
 - 1. Compact digital cameras are light but lack the megapixels.*
 - 2. Single lens reflex cameras, or SLRs, may be large but can be used for many functions.*
 - 3. Some cameras combine the best features of compacts and SLRs.*
 - B. Choosing the camera type involves the confusing "megapixel wars."*
 - C. The zoom lens battle also determines the camera you will buy.*

Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras in amateur photographers' gadget bags. My father took hundreds of slides when his children were growing up, but he had more and more trouble getting them developed. So, he decided to go modern. But, what kind of camera should he buy? The small compact digital cameras could slip right in his pocket, but if he tried to print a photograph larger than an 8 x 10, the quality would be poor. When he investigated buying a single lens reflex camera, or SLR, he discovered that they were as versatile as his old film camera, also an SLR, but they were big and bulky. Then he discovered yet a third type, which combined the smaller size of the compact digital cameras with the zoom lenses available for SLRs. His first thought was to buy one of those, but then he realized he had a lot of decisions to make. How many megapixels should the camera be? Five? Ten? What is the advantage of each? Then came the size of the zoom lens. He knew that 3x was too small, but what about 25x? Could he hold a lens that long without causing camera shake? He read hundreds of photography magazines and buying guides, and he still wasn't sure he was right.

Mariah then began her third and final body paragraph using roman numeral IV from her outline.

- IV. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.*
- A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?*
 - B. In the screen-size wars, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?*
 - C. Does every home really need a media center?*

Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell you what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions. The other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show decent blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints. Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need.

? Exercise 2.5.4

Reread body paragraphs two and three of the essay that Mariah is writing. Then answer the questions on your own sheet of paper.

1. In body paragraph two, Mariah decided to develop her paragraph as a nonfiction narrative. Do you agree with her decision? Explain. How else could she have chosen to develop the paragraph? Why is that better?
2. Compare the writing styles of paragraphs two and three. What evidence do you have that Mariah was getting tired or running out of steam? What advice would you give her? Why?
3. Choose one of these two body paragraphs. Write a version of your own that you think better fits Mariah's audience and purpose.

Writing a Title

A writer's best choice for a title is one that alludes to the main point of the entire essay. Like the headline in a newspaper or the big, bold title in a magazine, an essay's title gives the audience a first peek at the content. If readers like the title, they are likely to keep reading.

Following her outline carefully, Mariah crafted each paragraph of her essay. Moving step by step in the writing process, Mariah finished the draft and even included a brief concluding paragraph (you will read her conclusion in [Chapter 9](#)). She then decided, as the final touch for her writing session, to add an engaging title.

Thesis Statement: *Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.*

Working Title: *Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?*

Writing Your Own First Draft

Now you may begin your own first draft, if you have not already done so. Follow the suggestions and the guidelines presented in this section.

Key Takeaways

- Make the writing process work for you. Use any and all of the strategies that help you move forward in the writing process.
- Always be aware of your purpose for writing and the needs of your audience. Cater to those needs in every sensible way.
- Remember to include all the key structural parts of an essay: a thesis statement that is part of your introductory paragraph, three or more body paragraphs as described in your outline, and a concluding paragraph. Then add an engaging title to draw in readers.
- Write paragraphs of an appropriate length for your writing assignment. Paragraphs in college-level writing can be a page long, as long as they cover the main topics in your outline.
- Use your topic outline or your sentence outline to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas. Each main idea, indicated by a roman numeral in your outline, becomes the topic of a new paragraph. Develop it with the supporting details and the subpoints of those details that you included in your outline.
- Generally speaking, write your introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.

2.5: Drafting is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **8.3: Drafting** by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

2.6: Revising and Editing

Learning Objectives

- Identify major areas of concern in the draft essay during revising and editing.
- Use peer reviews and editing checklists to assist revising and editing.
- Revise and edit the first draft of your essay and produce a final draft.

Revising and editing are the two tasks you undertake to significantly improve your essay. Both are very important elements of the writing process. You may think that a completed first draft means little improvement is needed. However, even experienced writers need to improve their drafts and rely on peers during revising and editing. You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. For both athletes and dancers, the more they practice, the stronger their performance will become. Web designers seek better images, a more clever design, or a more appealing background for their web pages. Writing has the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.

Understanding the Purpose of Revising and Editing

Revising and editing allow you to examine two important aspects of your writing separately, so that you can give each task your undivided attention.

- When you revise, you take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information in order to make your ideas clearer, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.
- When you edit, you take a second look at how you expressed your ideas. You add or change words. You fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. You improve your writing style. You make your essay into a polished, mature piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.

Tip

How do you get the best out of your revisions and editing? Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them over the course of this semester; then keep using the ones that bring results.

- Take a break. You are proud of what you wrote, but you might be too close to it to make changes. Set aside your writing for a few hours or even a day until you can look at it objectively.
- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?
- Use the resources that your college provides. Find out where your school's writing lab is located and ask about the assistance they provide online and in person.

Many people hear the words *critic*, *critical*, and *criticism* and pick up only negative vibes that provoke feelings that make them blush, grumble, or shout. However, as a writer and a thinker, you need to learn to be critical of yourself in a positive way and have high expectations for your work. You also need to train your eye and trust your ability to fix what needs fixing. For this, you need to teach yourself where to look.

Creating Unity and Coherence

Following your outline closely offers you a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. However, when writers are rushed, are tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may become less than they want it to be. Their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may be adding information that is not needed to develop the main idea.

When a piece of writing has unity, all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense. When the writing has coherence, the ideas flow smoothly. The wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and from paragraph to paragraph.

 Tip

Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes.

Creating Unity

Sometimes writers get caught up in the moment and cannot resist a good digression. Even though you might enjoy such detours when you chat with friends, unplanned digressions usually harm a piece of writing.

Mariah stayed close to her outline when she drafted the three body paragraphs of her essay she tentatively titled “Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?” But a recent shopping trip for an HDTV upset her enough that she digressed from the main topic of her third paragraph and included comments about the sales staff at the electronics store she visited. When she revised her essay, she deleted the off-topic sentences that affected the unity of the paragraph.

Read the following paragraph twice, the first time without Mariah’s changes, and the second time with them.

Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. ~~You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs.~~ You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won’t be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. ~~The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions.~~ The other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info.~~ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. ~~But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints.~~ Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don’t let someone make you buy more television than you need!

? Exercise 2.6.1

1. Answer the following two questions about Mariah’s paragraph:

1. Do you agree with Mariah’s decision to make the deletions she made? Did she cut too much, too little, or just enough? Explain.
2. Is the explanation of what screen resolution means a digression? Or is it audience friendly and essential to understanding the paragraph? Explain.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

2. Now start to revise the first draft of the essay you wrote in [Section 8.1](#). Reread it to find any statements that affect the unity of your writing. Decide how best to revise.

 Tip

When you reread your writing to find revisions to make, look for each type of problem in a separate sweep. Read it straight through once to locate any problems with unity. Read it straight through a second time to find problems with coherence. You may follow this same practice during many stages of the writing process.

✓ writing at work

Many companies hire copyeditors and proofreaders to help them produce the cleanest possible final drafts of large writing projects. Copyeditors are responsible for suggesting revisions and style changes; proofreaders check documents for any errors in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation that have crept in. Many times, these tasks are done on a freelance basis, with one freelancer working for a variety of clients.

Creating Coherence

Careful writers use transitions to clarify how the ideas in their sentences and paragraphs are related. These words and phrases help the writing flow smoothly. Adding transitions is not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and give a mature feel to your essays. Table 8.3 “Common Transitional Words and Phrases” groups many common transitions according to their purpose.

Table 8.3 - Common Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitions That Show Sequence or Time		
after	before	later
afterward	before long	meanwhile
as soon as	finally	next
at first	first, second, third	soon
at last	in the first place	then
Transitions That Show Position		
above	across	at the bottom
at the top	behind	below
beside	beyond	inside
near	next to	opposite
to the left, to the right, to the side	under	where
Transitions That Show a Conclusion		
indeed	hence	in conclusion
in the final analysis	therefore	thus
Transitions That Continue a Line of Thought		
consequently	furthermore	additionally
because	besides the fact	following this idea further
in addition	in the same way	moreover
looking further	considering..., it is clear that	
Transitions That Change a Line of Thought		
but	yet	however
nevertheless	on the contrary	on the other hand
Transitions That Show Importance		
above all	best	especially
in fact	more important	most important
most	worst	
Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay		
finally	last	in conclusion
most of all	least of all	last of all
All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas Inside Paragraphs		

admittedly	at this point	certainly
granted	it is true	generally speaking
in general	in this situation	no doubt
no one denies	obviously	of course
to be sure	undoubtedly	unquestionably
Transitions that Introduce Examples		
for instance	for example	
Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps		
first, second, third	generally, furthermore, finally	in the first place, also, last
in the first place, furthermore, finally	in the first place, likewise, lastly	

After Maria revised for unity, she next examined her paragraph about televisions to check for coherence. She looked for places where she needed to add a transition or perhaps reword the text to make the flow of ideas clear. In the version that follows, she has already deleted the sentences that were off topic.

Tip

Many writers make their revisions on a printed copy and then transfer them to the version on-screen. They conventionally use a small arrow called a caret (^) to show where to insert an addition or correction.

Finally,
^Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. There's good reason for this confusion: ^You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. The first big decision is the screen resolution you want. ^Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The ^other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD. Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features. ^Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, ^Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need!

? Exercise 2.6.2

Answer the following questions about Mariah's revised paragraph.

1. Do you agree with the transitions and other changes that Mariah made to her paragraph? Which would you keep and which were unnecessary? Explain.
 2. What transition words or phrases did Mariah add to her paragraph? Why did she choose each one?
 3. What effect does adding additional sentences have on the coherence of the paragraph? Explain. When you read both versions aloud, which version has a more logical flow of ideas? Explain.
2. Now return to the first draft of the essay you wrote in [Section 8.1](#) and revise it for coherence. Add transition words and phrases where they are needed, and make any other changes that are needed to improve the flow and connection between ideas.

Being Clear and Concise

Some writers are very methodical and painstaking when they write a first draft. Other writers unleash a lot of words in order to get out all that they feel they need to say. Do either of these composing styles match your style? Or is your composing style somewhere in between? No matter which description best fits you, the first draft of almost every piece of writing, no matter its author, can be made clearer and more concise.

If you have a tendency to write too much, you will need to look for unnecessary words. If you have a tendency to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language.

Identifying Wordiness

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers, because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

- **Wordy:** There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.

Revised: The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.

- **Wordy:** Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favor of the proposed important legislation.

Revised: Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favor of the proposed legislation.

- **Sentences with deadwood phrases that add little to the meaning.** Be judicious when you use phrases such as *in terms of*, *with a mind to*, *on the subject of*, *as to whether or not*, *more or less*, *as far as...is concerned*, and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point.

Wordy: As a world leader in the field of green technology, the company plans to focus its efforts in the area of geothermal energy.

A report as to whether or not to use geysers as an energy source is in the process of preparation.

Revised: As a world leader in green technology, the company plans to focus on geothermal energy.

A report about using geysers as an energy source is in preparation.

- **Sentences in the passive voice or with forms of the verb *to be*.** Sentences with passive-voice verbs often create confusion, because the subject of the sentence does not perform an action. Sentences are clearer when the subject of the sentence performs the action and is followed by a strong verb. Use strong active-voice verbs in place of forms of *to be*, which can lead to wordiness. Avoid passive voice when you can.

Wordy: It might perhaps be said that using a GPS device is something that is a benefit to drivers who have a poor sense of direction.

Revised: Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.

- **Wordy:** The e-book reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.

My over-sixty uncle bought an e-book reader, and his wife bought an e-book reader, too.

Revised: The e-book reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.

My over-sixty uncle and his wife both bought e-book readers.

? Exercise 2.6.3

Now return once more to the first draft of the essay you have been revising. Check it for unnecessary words. Try making your sentences as concise as they can be.

Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most college essays should be written in formal English suitable for an academic situation. Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate. For more information about word choice, see [Chapter 4](#).

- **Avoid slang.** Find alternatives to *bummer*, *kewl*, and *rad*.
- **Avoid language that is overly casual.** Write about “men and women” rather than “girls and guys” unless you are trying to create a specific effect. A formal tone calls for formal language.
- **Avoid contractions.** Use *do not* in place of *don’t*, *I am* in place of *I’m*, *have not* in place of *haven’t*, and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.
- **Avoid clichés.** Overused expressions such as *green with envy*, *face the music*, *better late than never*, and similar expressions are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.
- **Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have different meanings.** Some examples are *allusion/illusion*, *complement/compliment*, *council/counsel*, *concurrent/consecutive*, *founder/flounder*, and *historic/historical*. When in doubt, check a dictionary.
- **Choose words with the connotations you want.** Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word *proud* and the negative connotations of *arrogant* and *conceited*.
- **Use specific words rather than overly general words.** Find synonyms for *thing*, *people*, *nice*, *good*, *bad*, *interesting*, and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Now read the revisions Mariah made to make her third paragraph clearer and more concise. She has already incorporated the changes she made to improve unity and coherence.

confuses buyers more than purchasing.

Finally, nothing ^{is} ~~is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses~~ lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV), ~~with a large-~~ ^{and with} screen-to-watch sports and DVDs on. ^{There's} good reason for this confusion. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. The first ^{involves} ^{which} big decision ~~is~~ ^{is} the screen resolution, you want. ^{Screen-resolution} means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often expressed as 1080p, ^{as} ^{on} or full HD, or 768p, which is half that. The trouble is that ^{if you have a smaller} ^{screen, viewers will not} ^{between them} screen, 32-inch or 37-inch diagonal ^{you won't} be able to tell the difference ^{with} the naked eye. The second important decision ~~you face as you walk around the sales-~~ floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features.~~ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma ^{deeper} screens show ~~truer~~ ^{blacks} and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD ~~Only after buyers are totally certain they know what they want should they open their wallets.~~ models. ~~Don't buy more television than you need!~~

? Exercise 2.6.4

1. Answer the following questions about Mariah's revised paragraph:

1. Read the unrevised and the revised paragraphs aloud. Explain in your own words how changes in word choice have affected Mariah's writing.
2. Do you agree with the changes that Mariah made to her paragraph? Which changes would you keep and which were unnecessary? Explain. What other changes would you have made?
3. What effect does removing contractions and the pronoun *you* have on the tone of the paragraph? How would you characterize the tone now? Why?

2. Now return once more to your essay in progress. Read carefully for problems with word choice. Be sure that your draft is written in formal language and that your word choice is specific and appropriate.

Completing a Peer Review

After working so closely with a piece of writing, writers often need to step back and ask for a more objective reader. What writers most need is feedback from readers who can respond only to the words on the page. When they are ready, writers show their drafts to someone they respect and who can give an honest response about its strengths and weaknesses.

You, too, can ask a peer to read your draft when it is ready. After evaluating the feedback and assessing what is most helpful, the reader's feedback will help you when you revise your draft. This process is called peer review.

You can work with a partner in your class and identify specific ways to strengthen each other's essays. Although you may be uncomfortable sharing your writing at first, remember that each writer is working toward the same goal: a final draft that fits the audience and the purpose. Maintaining a positive attitude when providing feedback will put you and your partner at ease. The box that follows provides a useful framework for the peer review session.

Questions for Peer Review

Title of essay: _____

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Peer reviewer's name: _____

1. This essay is about _____.
2. Your main points in this essay are _____.
3. What I most liked about this essay is _____.
4. These three points struck me as your strongest:
 - a. Point: _____
Why: _____
 - b. Point: _____
Why: _____
 - c. Point: _____
Why: _____
5. These places in your essay are not clear to me:
 - a. Where: _____
Needs improvement because _____
 - b. Where: _____
Needs improvement because _____
 - c. Where: _____
Needs improvement because _____
- The one additional change you could make that would improve this essay significantly is _____.

writing at work

One of the reasons why word-processing programs build in a reviewing feature is that workgroups have become a common feature in many businesses. Writing is often collaborative, and the members of a workgroup and their supervisors often critique group members' work and offer feedback that will lead to a better final product.

Exercise 2.6.5

Exchange essays with a classmate and complete a peer review of each other's draft in progress. Remember to give positive feedback and to be courteous and polite in your responses. Focus on providing one positive comment and one question for more information to the author.

Using Feedback Objectively

The purpose of peer feedback is to receive constructive criticism of your essay. Your peer reviewer is your first real audience, and you have the opportunity to learn what confuses and delights a reader so that you can improve your work before sharing the final

draft with a wider audience (or your intended audience).

It may not be necessary to incorporate every recommendation your peer reviewer makes. However, if you start to observe a pattern in the responses you receive from peer reviewers, you might want to take that feedback into consideration in future assignments. For example, if you read consistent comments about a need for more research, then you may want to consider including more research in future assignments.

Using Feedback from Multiple Sources

You might get feedback from more than one reader as you share different stages of your revised draft. In this situation, you may receive feedback from readers who do not understand the assignment or who lack your involvement with and enthusiasm for it.

You need to evaluate the responses you receive according to two important criteria:

1. Determine if the feedback supports the purpose of the assignment.
2. Determine if the suggested revisions are appropriate to the audience.

Then, using these standards, accept or reject revision feedback.

? Exercise 2.6.6

Work with two partners. Go back to Exercise 4 in this lesson and compare your responses to Activity A, about Mariah's paragraph, with your partners'. Recall Mariah's purpose for writing and her audience. Then, working individually, list where you agree and where you disagree about revision needs.

Editing Your Draft

If you have been incorporating each set of revisions as Mariah has, you have produced multiple drafts of your writing. So far, all your changes have been content changes. Perhaps with the help of peer feedback, you have made sure that you sufficiently supported your ideas. You have checked for problems with unity and coherence. You have examined your essay for word choice, revising to cut unnecessary words and to replace weak wording with specific and appropriate wording.

The next step after revising the content is editing. When you edit, you examine the surface features of your text. You examine your spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation. You also make sure you use the proper format when creating your finished assignment.

📌 Tip

Editing often takes time. Budgeting time into the writing process allows you to complete additional edits after revising. Editing and proofreading your writing helps you create a finished work that represents your best efforts. Here are a few more tips to remember about your readers:

- Readers do not notice correct spelling, but they *do* notice misspellings.
- Readers look past your sentences to get to your ideas—unless the sentences are awkward, poorly constructed, and frustrating to read.
- Readers notice when every sentence has the same rhythm as every other sentence, with no variety.
- Readers do not cheer when you use *there*, *their*, and *they're* correctly, but they notice when you do not.
- Readers will notice the care with which you handled your assignment and your attention to detail in the delivery of an error-free document..

The first section of this book offers a useful review of grammar, mechanics, and usage. Use it to help you eliminate major errors in your writing and refine your understanding of the conventions of language. Do not hesitate to ask for help, too, from peer tutors in your academic department or in the college's writing lab. In the meantime, use the checklist to help you edit your writing.

📌 checklist

Editing Your Writing

Grammar

- Are some sentences actually sentence fragments?

- Are some sentences run-on sentences? How can I correct them?
- Do some sentences need conjunctions between independent clauses?
- Does every verb agree with its subject?
- Is every verb in the correct tense?
- Are tense forms, especially for irregular verbs, written correctly?
- Have I used subject, object, and possessive personal pronouns correctly?
- Have I used *who* and *whom* correctly?
- Is the antecedent of every pronoun clear?
- Do all personal pronouns agree with their antecedents?
- Have I used the correct comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs?
- Is it clear which word a participial phrase modifies, or is it a dangling modifier?

Sentence Structure

- Are all my sentences simple sentences, or do I vary my sentence structure?
- Have I chosen the best coordinating or subordinating conjunctions to join clauses?
- Have I created long, overpacked sentences that should be shortened for clarity?
- Do I see any mistakes in parallel structure?

Punctuation

- Does every sentence end with the correct end punctuation?
- Can I justify the use of every exclamation point?
- Have I used apostrophes correctly to write all singular and plural possessive forms?
- Have I used quotation marks correctly?

Mechanics and Usage

- Can I find any spelling errors? How can I correct them?
- Have I used capital letters where they are needed?
- Have I written abbreviations, where allowed, correctly?
- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as *to/too/two*?

tips

- Be careful about relying too much on spelling checkers and grammar checkers. A spelling checker cannot recognize that you meant to write *principle* but wrote *principal* instead. A grammar checker often queries constructions that are perfectly correct. The program does not understand your meaning; it makes its check against a general set of formulas that might not apply in each instance. If you use a grammar checker, accept the suggestions that make sense, but consider why the suggestions came up.
- Proofreading requires patience; it is very easy to read past a mistake. Set your paper aside for at least a few hours, if not a day or more, so your mind will rest. Some professional proofreaders read a text backward so they can concentrate on spelling and punctuation. Another helpful technique is to slowly read a paper aloud, paying attention to every word, letter, and punctuation mark.

If you need additional proofreading help, ask a reliable friend, a classmate, or a peer tutor to make a final pass on your paper to look for anything you missed.

Formatting

Remember to use proper format when creating your finished assignment. Sometimes an instructor, a department, or a college will require students to follow specific instructions on titles, margins, page numbers, or the location of the writer's name. These requirements may be more detailed and rigid for research projects and term papers, which often observe the American Psychological Association (APA) or Modern Language Association (MLA) style guides, especially when citations of sources are included.

To ensure the format is correct and follows any specific instructions, make a final check before you submit an assignment.

? Exercise 2.6.7

With the help of the checklist, edit and proofread your essay.

Key Takeaways

- Revising and editing are the stages of the writing process in which you improve your work before producing a final draft.
- During revising, you add, cut, move, or change information in order to improve content.
- During editing, you take a second look at the words and sentences you used to express your ideas and fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- Unity in writing means that all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong together and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense.
- Coherence in writing means that the writer's wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and between paragraphs.
- Transitional words and phrases effectively make writing more coherent.
- Writing should be clear and concise, with no unnecessary words.
- Effective formal writing uses specific, appropriate words and avoids slang, contractions, clichés, and overly general words.
- Peer reviews, done properly, can give writers objective feedback about their writing. It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer reviews and incorporate only useful feedback.
- Remember to budget time for careful editing and proofreading. Use all available resources, including editing checklists, peer editing, and your institution's writing lab, to improve your editing skills.

2.6: [Revising and Editing](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **8.4: Revising and Editing** by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Essay Essentials

[3.1: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking](#)

[3.2: Argument](#)

[3.3: Paraphrasing and Summarizing](#)

[3.4: Writing a Thesis](#)

[3.5: Elements of a Thesis](#)

[3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement](#)

[3.7: Resources](#)

3: Essay Essentials is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

The Prompt: What Does “Analyze” Mean Anyway?

Often, the handout or other written text explaining the assignment—what professors call the [assignment prompt](#)—will explain the purpose of the assignment, the required parameters (length, number and type of sources, referencing style, etc.), and the criteria for evaluation. Sometimes, though—especially when you are new to a field—you will encounter the baffling situation in which you comprehend every single sentence in the prompt but still have absolutely no idea how to approach the assignment. No one is doing anything wrong in a situation like that. It just means that further discussion of the assignment is in order. Here are some tips:

1. *Focus on the [verbs](#).* Look for verbs like “compare,” “explain,” “justify,” “reflect” or the all-purpose “analyze.” You’re not just producing a paper as an artifact; you’re conveying, in written communication, some intellectual work you have done. So the question is, what kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning?
2. *Put the assignment in context.* Many professors think in terms of [assignment sequences](#). For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then a first draft, then a final draft, and, perhaps, a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you’re on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date, and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing your discussion.⁵ If the assignment isn’t part of a sequence, think about where it falls in the semester, and how it relates to readings and other assignments. Are there headings on the [syllabus](#) that indicate larger units of material? For example, if you see that a paper comes at the end of a three-week unit on the role of the Internet in organizational behavior, then your professor likely wants you to synthesize that material in your own way. You should also check your notes and online course resources for any other guidelines about the workflow. Maybe you got a rubric a couple weeks ago and forgot about it. Maybe your instructor posted a link about “how to make an annotated bibliography” but then forgot to mention it in class.
3. *Try a free-write.* When handing out an assignment, teachers often ask students to do a five-minute or ten-minute free-write. A free-write is when you just write, without stopping, for a set period of time. That doesn’t sound very “free;” it actually sounds kind of coerced. The “free” part is *what* you write—it can be whatever comes to mind. [Professional writers use free-writing](#) to get started on a challenging (or distasteful) writing task or to overcome writers block or a powerful urge to procrastinate. The idea is that if you just make yourself write, you can’t help but produce some kind of useful nugget. Thus, even if the first eight sentences of your free write are all variations on “I don’t understand this” or “I’d really rather be doing something else,” eventually you’ll write something like “I guess the main point of this is ...” and then you’re off and running. As instructors, we’ve found that asking students to do a brief free-write right after I hand out an assignment generates useful clarification questions. If your instructor doesn’t make time for that in class, a quick free-write on your own will quickly reveal whether you need clarification about the assignment and, often, what questions to ask.
4. *Ask for clarification the right way.* Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, especially because students’ familiarity with the field can vary enormously. Asking for clarification is a good thing. Be aware, though, that instructors get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and instead receive an exact recipe for an ‘A’ paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification, but try to convey that you want to learn and you’re ready to work. In general, avoid starting a question with “Do we have to ...” because I can guarantee that your instructor is thinking, “You don’t have to do crap. You’re an adult. You chose college. You chose this class. You’re free to exercise your right to fail.” Similarly, avoid asking the professor about what he or she “wants.” You’re not performing some service for the professor when you write a paper. What they “want” is for you to really think about the material.

5. *So what does analyze mean?* Analyze means breaking down a topic into component parts and exploring and examining those various parts to come to some sort of new understanding.

Table 4.3.1 -- Clarifying Questions for Essay Assignments

Questions that may not get you a useful answer	Preferable alternatives
I don't get it. Can you explain this more? or What do you want us to do?	I see that we are comparing and contrasting these two cases. What should be our focus? Their causes? Their impacts? Their implications? All of those things? or I'm unfamiliar with how art historians analyze a painting. Could you say more about what questions I should have in mind to do this kind of analysis? (Note: be specific with your questions.)
How many sources do we have to cite?	Is there a typical range for the number of sources a well written paper would cite for this assignment? or Could you say more about what the sources are for? Is it more that we're analyzing these texts in this paper, or are we using these texts to analyze some other case?
What do I have to do to get an 'A' on this paper?	Could I meet with you to get feedback on my (pre-prepared) plans/outline/thesis/draft? or I'm not sure how to approach this assignment. Are there any good examples or resources you could point me to?

Three Common Types of College Writing Assignments

From our experience, you are likely to get three kinds of writing assignments based upon the instructor's degree of direction for the assignment. We'll take a brief look at each kind of academic writing task.

The Closed Writing Assignment

- Does your advertisement employ techniques of propaganda, and if so what kind?
- Was the South justified in seceding from the Union?
- Was Hitler evil or just mad?

These kinds of writing assignments present you with two counter claims and ask you to determine from your own analysis the more valid claim. They resemble yes-no questions. These topics define the claim for you, so the major task of the writing assignment then is working out the support for the claim. They resemble a math problem in which the teacher has given you the answer and now wants you to "show your work" in arriving at that answer. Be careful with these writing assignments, however, because often these topics don't have a simple yes/no, either/or answer (despite the nature of the essay question). A close analysis of the subject matter often reveals nuances and ambiguities within the question that your eventual claim should reflect. Perhaps a claim such as, "In my opinion, Hitler was mad" might work, but I urge you to avoid such a simplistic thesis. This thesis would be better: "I believe Hitler's unhinged mind borders on insanity but doesn't quite reach it."

The Semi-Open Writing Assignment

- Discuss the role of law in *Antigone*.
- Show how the Fugitive Slave Act influenced the Abolitionist Movement.

Although these topics chart out a subject matter for you to write about, they don't offer up claims you can easily use in your paper. It would be a misstep to offer up claims such as, "Law plays a role in *Antigone*." Such statements express the obvious and what the topic takes for granted. The question, for example, is not whether law plays a role in *Antigone*, but rather what sort of role law plays. What is the nature of this role? What influences does it have on the characters or actions or theme? This kind of writing assignment resembles a kind of archeological dig. The teacher cordons off an area, hands you a shovel, and says dig here and see what you find. Be sure to avoid summary and mere explanation in this kind of assignment. Despite using key words in the assignment such as "explain," "illustrate," analyze," "discuss," or "show how," these topics still ask you to make an argument. Implicit in the topic is the expectation that you will analyze the reading and arrive at some insights into patterns and relationships about the subject. Your eventual paper, then, needs to present what you found from this analysis—the treasure you found from your digging. Determining your own claim represents the biggest challenge for this type of writing assignment.

The Open Writing Assignment

- What does it mean to be an “American” in the 21st Century?
- Analyze the influence of slavery upon one cause of the Civil War.

These kinds of writing assignments require you to decide both your writing topic and your claim (or thesis). Which character in the *Inferno* will I pick to analyze? What two themes in *Pride and Prejudice* will I choose to write about? Many students struggle with these types of assignments because they have to understand their subject matter well before they can intelligently choose a topic. For instance, you need a good familiarity with the characters in *The Inferno* before you can pick one. You have to have a solid understanding defining elements of American identity as well as 21st century culture before you can begin to connect them. This kind of writing assignment resembles riding a bike without the training wheels on. It says, “You decide what to write about.” The biggest decision, then, becomes selecting your topic and limiting it to a manageable size.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Rubrics as Road Maps

If a professor provides a grading rubric with an assignment prompt, thank your lucky stars (and your professor). If the professor took the trouble to prepare and distribute it, you can be sure that he or she will use it to grade your paper. He or she may not go over it in class, but it's the clearest possible statement of what the professor is looking for in the paper. If it's wordy, it may seem like those online “terms and conditions” that we routinely accept without reading. But you really should read it over carefully before you begin and again as your work progresses. A lot of rubrics do have some useful specifics. Ours, for example, often contain phrases like “makes at least six error-free connections to concepts or ideas from the course,” or “gives thorough consideration to at least one plausible counter-argument.” Even less specific criteria (such as “incorporates course concepts” and “considers counter-arguments”) will tell you how you should be spending your writing time.

Even the best rubrics aren't completely transparent. They simply can't be. Take, for example, this [AAC&U rubric](#). It has been drafted and repeatedly revised by a multidisciplinary expert panel and tested multiple times on sample student work to ensure reliability. But it is still seems kind of vague. What is the real difference between “demonstrating a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose” and “demonstrating adequate consideration” of the same? It depends on the specific context. So how can you know whether you've done that? A big part of what you're learning, through feedback from your professors, is to judge the quality of your writing for yourself. Your future managers are counting on that. At this point, it is better to think of rubrics as roadmaps, displaying your destination, rather than a GPS system directing every move you make.

Behind any rubric is the essential goal of higher education: helping you take charge of your own learning, which means writing like an independently motivated scholar. Are you tasked with proposing a research paper topic? Don't just tell the professor what you want to do, convince him or her of the salience of your topic, as if you were a scholar seeking grant money. Is it a reflection paper? Then outline both the insights you've gained and the intriguing questions that remain, as a scholar would. Are you writing a thesis-driven analytical paper? Then apply the concepts you've learned to a new problem or situation. Write as if your scholarly peers around the country are eagerly awaiting your unique insights. Descriptors like “thoroughness” or “mastery” or “detailed attention” convey the vision of student writers making the time and rigorous mental effort to offer something new to the ongoing, multi-stranded academic conversation. What your professor wants, in short, is critical thinking.

Critical Thinking in the College Essay Assignments

What's critical about critical thinking? Why do college professors gravitate towards essay assignments that encourage critical thinking?

Critical thinking is one of those terms that has been used so often and in so many different ways that it often seems meaningless. It also makes one wonder, is there such a thing as uncritical thinking? If you aren't thinking critically, then are you even thinking?

Despite the prevalent ambiguities, critical thinking actually does mean something. [The Association of American Colleges and Universities](#) usefully defines it as “a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.”⁶

That definition aligns with the best description of critical thinking I ever heard; it came from junior high art teacher, Joe Bolger.⁷ He once asked, “What color is the ceiling?” In that withering 'tween tone, we reluctantly replied, “Whiiiiite.” He then asked, “What color is it really?” We deigned to aim our pre-adolescent eyes upwards, and eventually began to offer more accurate answers: “Ivory?” “Yellow-ish tan.” “It's grey in that corner.” After finally getting a few thoughtful responses, Mr. Bolger said something like, “Making good art is about drawing what you see, not what you think you're supposed to see.” The AAC&U definition, above, essentially amounts to the same thing: taking a good look and deciding what you *really* think rather than relying on the first idea or assumption that comes to mind.

[The critical thinking rubric](#) produced by the AAC&U describes the relevant activities of critical thinking in more detail. To think critically, one must ...

- a. “clearly state and comprehensively describe the issue or problem,”
- b. “independently interpret and evaluate sources,”
- c. “thoroughly analyze assumptions behind and context of your own or others' ideas,”
- d. “argue a complex position and one that takes counter-arguments into account,” and
- e. “arrive at logical and well informed conclusions”.⁸

While you are probably used to providing some evidence for your claims, you can see that college-level expectations go quite a bit further. When professors assign an analytical paper, they don't just want you to formulate a plausible-sounding argument. They want you to dig into the evidence, think hard about unspoken assumptions and the influence of context, and then explain what you really think and why.

Interestingly, the AAC&U defines critical thinking as a “habit of mind” rather than a discrete achievement. And there are at least two reasons to see critical thinking as a craft or art to pursue rather than a task to check off. First, the [more you think critically, the better you get at it](#). As you get more and more practice in closely examining claims, their underlying logic, and alternative perspectives on the issue, it'll begin to feel automatic. You'll no longer make or accept claims that begin with “Everyone knows that ...” or end with “That's just human nature.” Second, just as artists and crafts persons hone their skills over a lifetime, learners continually expand their critical thinking capacities, both through the feedback they receive from others and from [their own reflections](#). Artists of all kinds find satisfaction in continually seeking greater challenges. Continual reflection and improvement is part of the craft.

This comment about critical thinking was provided by student, Aly Button: “As soon as I see the phrase 'critical thinking,' the first thing I think is more work. It always sounds as if you're going to have to think harder and longer. But I think the AAC&U's definition is on point; critical thinking is a habit. Seeing that phrase shouldn't be a scary thing because by this point in many people's college career this is an automatic response. I never expect an answer to a question to be in the text; by now I realize that my professors want to know what I have to say about something or what I have learned. In a paper or essay, the three-step thesis process is a tool that will help you get this information across. While you're doing the hard work (the thinking part), this formula offers you a way to clearly state your position on a subject. It's as simple as: make a general statement, make an arguable statement, and finally, say why it is important. This is my rule of thumb, and I would not want to start a thesis-driven paper any other way!”

Critical thinking is hard work. Even those who actively choose to do it experience it as tedious, difficult, and sometimes surprisingly emotional. Nobel-prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains that our brains aren't designed to think; rather, they're designed to save us from having to think.⁹ Our brains are great at developing routines and repertoires that enable us to accomplish fairly complex tasks like driving cars, choosing groceries, and having a conversation without thinking consciously and thoroughly about every move we make. Kahneman calls this “fast thinking.” “Slow thinking,” which is deliberate and painstaking, is something our brains seek to avoid. That built-in tendency can lead us astray. Kahneman and his colleagues often used problems like this one in experiments to gauge how people used fast and slow thinking in different contexts:

A bat and ball cost \$1.10.

The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.

How much does the ball cost?

Most people automatically say the ball costs \$0.10. However, if the bat costs \$1 more, than the bat would cost \$1.10 leading to the incorrect total of \$1.20. The ball costs \$0.05. Kahneman notes, “Many thousands of university students have answered the bat-and-ball puzzle, and the results are shocking. More than 50% of students at Harvard, MIT, and Princeton gave the intuitive—incorrect—answer.” These and other results confirm that “many people are overconfident, prone to place too much faith in their intuitions.” Thinking critically—thoroughly questioning your immediate intuitive responses—is difficult work, but every organization and business in the world needs people who can do that effectively. Some students assume that an unpleasant critical thinking experience means that they’re either doing something wrong or that it’s an inherently uninteresting (and oppressive) activity. While we all relish those times when we’re pleasantly absorbed in a complex activity (what [psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) calls “flow”¹²), the more tedious experiences can also bring satisfaction, sort of like a good work-out.

Critical thinking can also be emotionally challenging, researchers have found. Facing a new realm of uncertainty and contradiction without relying on familiar assumptions is inherently anxiety-provoking because when you’re doing it, you are, by definition, incompetent. Recent research has highlighted that both children and adults need to be able to regulate their own emotions in order to cope with the challenges of building competence in a new area.¹³ The kind of critical thinking your professors are looking for—that is, pursuing a comprehensive, multi-faceted exploration in order to arrive at an arguable, nuanced argument—is inevitably a struggle and it may be an emotional one. Your best bet is to find [ways to make those processes as efficient, pleasant, and effective as you can](#).

Kaethe Leonard, another student, says: “The thing no one tells you when you get to college is that critical thinking papers are professors’ favorites. College is all about learning how to think individual thoughts so you’ll have to do quite a few of them. Have no fear though; they do get easier with time. The first step? Think about what you want to focus on in the paper (aka your thesis) and go with it.

The demands students face are not at all unique to their academic pursuits. Professional working roles demand critical thinking, as [81% of major employers reported in an AAC&U-commissioned survey](#)¹⁴, and it’s pretty easy to imagine how critical thinking helps one make much better decisions in all aspects of life. Embrace it. And just as athletes, artists, and writers sustain their energy and inspiration for hard work by interacting with others who share these passions, look to others in the scholarly community—your professors and fellow students—to keep yourself engaged in these ongoing intellectual challenges. While writing time is often solitary, it’s meant to plug you into a vibrant academic community. What your professors want, overall, is for you to join them in asking and pursuing important questions about the natural, social, and creative worlds.

Other Resources

1. [This website](#) from the Capital Community College Foundation has some good advice about overcoming writer’s block. And student contributor Aly Button recommends [this funny clip from SpongeBob Squarepants](#).
2. [The Foundation for Critical Thinking](#) maintains a website with many useful articles and tools.
3. The [Online Writing Laboratory \(OWL\) at Purdue University](#) is a wonderful set of resources for every aspect of college writing. Especially germane to this chapter is [this summary](#) of the most common types of writing assignments.
4. [This website](#), BrainBashers.com, offers logic puzzles and other brain-teasers for your entertainment.

Exercise 1

1. Free-write on an assignment prompt. If you have one, do that one. If not, here’s one to practice with: A. “Please write a five-page paper analyzing the controversy surrounding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the food supply.” B. What clarification questions would you like to ask your professor? What additional background knowledge do you need to deeply understand the topic? What are some starter ideas that could lead to a good thesis and intriguing argument?
2. Find a couple of sample student papers from online paper mills such as [this one](#) (Google “free college papers”) and journals featuring excellent undergraduate writing (such as [this one from Cornell University](#)), and use the [AAC&U rubric on critical thinking](#) to evaluate them. Which descriptor in each row most closely fits the paper?

Video



Video 3.1.1

University of North Carolina Writing Center video "Understanding Assignments" *All Rights Reserved*. Standard YouTube license.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from [What Does the Professor Want? Understanding the Assignment](#). **Authored by:** Amy Guptill. **Provided by:** IndependentTextBC.CA. **License:** CC-NC-SA 4.0.

This page last updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled [3.1: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto \(ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative\)](#) .

- [4.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Argument

Making a claim

What is an argument? In academic writing, an argument is usually a main idea, often called a “claim” or “thesis statement,” backed up with evidence that supports the idea. In the majority of college papers, you will need to make some sort of claim and use evidence to support it, and your ability to do this well will separate your papers from those of students who see assignments as mere accumulations of fact and detail. In other words, gone are the happy days of being given a “topic” about which you can write anything. It is time to stake out a position and prove why it is a good position for a thinking person to hold. See this [handout on thesis statements](#).

Claims can be as simple as “Protons are positively charged and electrons are negatively charged,” with evidence such as, “In this experiment, protons and electrons acted in such and such a way.” Claims can also be as complex as “The end of the South African system of apartheid was inevitable,” using reasoning and evidence such as, “Every successful revolution in the modern era has come about after the government in power has given and then removed small concessions to the uprising group.” In either case, the rest of your paper will detail the reasoning and evidence that have led you to believe that your position is best.

When beginning to write a paper, ask yourself, “What is my point?” For example, the point of this handout is to help you become a better writer, and we are arguing that an important step in the process of writing effective arguments is understanding the concept of argumentation. If your papers do not have a main point, they cannot be arguing for anything. Asking yourself what your point is can help you avoid a mere “information dump.” Consider this: your instructors probably know a lot more than you do about your subject matter. Why, then, would you want to provide them with material they already know? **Instructors are usually looking for two things:**

1. Proof that you understand the material
2. A demonstration of your ability to use or apply the material in ways that go beyond what you have read or heard.

This second part can be done in many ways: you can critique the material, apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. In order to succeed at this second step, though, you must have a particular point to argue.

Arguments in academic writing are usually complex and take time to develop. Your argument will need to be more than a simple or obvious statement such as “Frank Lloyd Wright was a great architect.” Such a statement might capture your initial impressions of Wright as you have studied him in class; however, you need to look deeper and express specifically what caused that “greatness.” Your instructor will probably expect something more complicated, such as “Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture combines elements of European modernism, Asian aesthetic form, and locally found materials to create a unique new style,” or “There are many strong similarities between Wright’s building designs and those of his mother, which suggests that he may have borrowed some of her ideas.” To develop your argument, you would then define your terms and prove your claim with evidence from Wright’s drawings and buildings and those of the other architects you mentioned.

Evidence

Do not stop with having a point. You have to back up your point with evidence. The strength of your evidence, and your use of it, can make or break your argument. See this [handout on evidence](#). You already have the natural inclination for this type of thinking, if not in an academic setting. Think about how you talked your parents into letting you borrow the family car. Did you present them with lots of instances of your past trustworthiness? Did you make them feel guilty because your friends’ parents all let them drive?

Did you whine until they just wanted you to shut up? Did you look up statistics on teen driving and use them to show how you didn't fit the dangerous-driver profile? These are all types of argumentation, and they exist in academia in similar forms.

Every field has slightly different requirements for acceptable evidence, so familiarize yourself with some arguments from within that field instead of just applying whatever evidence you like best. Pay attention to your textbooks and your instructor's lectures. What types of argument and evidence are they using? The type of evidence that sways an English instructor may not work to convince a sociology instructor. Find out what counts as proof that something is true in that field. Is it statistics, a logical development of points, something from the object being discussed (art work, text, culture, or atom), the way something works, or some combination of more than one of these things?

Be consistent with your evidence. Unlike negotiating for the use of your parents' car, a college paper is not the place for an all-out blitz of every type of argument. You can often use more than one type of evidence within a paper, but make sure that within each section you are providing the reader with evidence appropriate to each claim. So, if you start a paragraph or section with a statement like "Putting the student seating area closer to the basketball court will raise player performance," do not follow with your evidence on how much more money the university could raise by letting more students go to games for free. Information about how fan support raises player morale, which then results in better play, would be a better follow-up. Your next section could offer clear reasons why undergraduates have as much or more right to attend an undergraduate event as wealthy alumni—but this information would not go in the same section as the fan support information. You cannot convince a confused person, so keep things tidy and ordered.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Counter-argument

One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing is to anticipate and address counter-arguments or objections. By considering what someone who disagrees with your position might have to say about your argument, you show that you have thought things through, and you dispose of some of the reasons your audience might have for not accepting your argument. Recall our discussion of student seating in the Dean Dome. To make the most effective argument possible, you should consider not only what students would say about seating but also what alumni who have paid a lot to get good seats might say.

You can generate counter-arguments by asking yourself how someone who disagrees with you might respond to each of the points you've made or your position as a whole. **If you can't immediately imagine another position, here are some strategies to try:**

- Do some research. It may seem to you that no one could possibly disagree with the position you are arguing, but someone probably has. For example, some people argue that the American Civil War never ended. If you are making an argument concerning, for example, the outcomes of the Civil War, you might wish to see what some of these people have to say.
- Talk with a friend or with your teacher. Another person may be able to imagine counter-arguments that haven't occurred to you.
- Consider your conclusion or claim and the premises of your argument and imagine someone who denies each of them. For example, if you argued, "Cats make the best pets. This is because they are clean and independent," you might imagine someone saying, "Cats do not make the best pets. They are dirty and needy."

Once you have thought up some counter-arguments, consider how you will respond to them—will you concede that your opponent has a point but explain why your audience should nonetheless accept your argument? Will you reject the counter-argument and explain why it is mistaken? Either way, you will want to leave your reader with a sense that your argument is stronger than opposing arguments.

When you are summarizing opposing arguments, be charitable. Present each argument fairly and objectively, rather than trying to make it look foolish. You want to show that you have considered the many sides of the issue. If you simply attack or caricature your opponent (also referred to as presenting a “straw man”), you suggest that your argument is only capable of defeating an extremely weak adversary, which may undermine your argument rather than enhance it.

It is usually better to consider one or two serious counter-arguments in some depth, rather than to give a long but superficial list of many different counter-arguments and replies.

Be sure that your reply is consistent with your original argument. If considering a counter-argument changes your position, you will need to go back and revise your original argument accordingly.

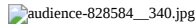
audience-828584_340.jpg

Figure: Image from Pixabay

Audience

Audience is a very important consideration in argument. Take a look at this [handout on audience](#). A lifetime of dealing with your family members has helped you figure out which arguments work best to persuade each of them. Maybe whining works with one parent, but the other will only accept cold, hard statistics. Your kid brother may listen only to the sound of money in his palm. It's usually wise to think of your audience in an academic setting as someone who is perfectly smart but who doesn't necessarily agree with you. You are not just expressing your opinion in an argument (“It's true because I said so”), and in most cases your audience will know something about the subject at hand—so you will need sturdy proof. At the same time, do not think of your audience as capable of reading your mind. You have to come out and state both your claim and your evidence clearly. Do not assume that because the instructor knows the material, he or she understands what part of it you are using, what you think about it, and why you have taken the position you've chosen.

Critical reading

Critical reading is a big part of understanding argument. Although some of the material you read will be very persuasive, do not fall under the spell of the printed word as authority. Very few of your instructors think of the texts they assign as the last word on the subject. Remember that the author of every text has an agenda, something that he or she wants you to believe. This is OK—everything is written from someone's perspective—but it's a good thing to be aware of. For more information on objectivity and bias and on reading sources carefully, read our handouts on [evaluating print sources](#) and [reading to write](#).

Take notes either in the margins of your source (if you are using a photocopy or your own book) or on a separate sheet as you read. Put away that highlighter! Simply highlighting a text is good for memorizing the main ideas in that text—it does not encourage critical reading. Part of your goal as a reader should be to put the author's ideas in your own words. Then you can stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start thinking of them as arguments.

When you read, ask yourself questions like “What is the author trying to prove?” and “What is the author assuming I will agree with?” Do you agree with the author? Does the author adequately defend her argument? What kind of proof does she use? Is there something she leaves out that you would put in? Does putting it in hurt her argument? As you get used to reading critically, you will start to see the sometimes hidden agendas of other writers, and you can use this skill to improve your own ability to craft effective arguments.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [Argument](#). **Provided by:** The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. **License:** CC-NC-ND 4.0.

This page most recently updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled [3.2: Argument](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- [4.4: Argument](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Paraphrasing

The essay assignments for most first-year composition classes call on you to use information from various texts. However, you cannot just copy the exact words out of the text you are writing about. If you do, you are plagiarizing and may put your academic career in jeopardy. If you are not citing direct quotes and citing them, you must put the words from the readings fully into your own words *and* cite them.

When paraphrasing, there are two basic kinds of changes you can make:

1. Change the words so you are using **synonyms** wherever possible. For example, imagine you are paraphrasing the sentence “After work, Judy rushed back to her house.” Instead of “her house” you can say “her home” or “her place.” Instead of “rushed” you could say “hurried.”
2. Change the **sentence structure** so that it is different. One method is to switch the order of dependent and independent clauses. For example, instead of “After work, Judy rushed back to her house” you might write, “Judy was in a hurry to get back home at the end of the day.”

However, this is really just a bit simplistic. It still may not give you a full paraphrase. A full paraphrase, which should convey another's idea fully and truly, should be in your own words (except for, perhaps, key words and data measures). One of the best ways to paraphrase another's idea is to put aside the text (don't look at it) and write down the gist (the general idea) of what the author is saying.

One important thing to remember is that **you choose which information is important**. For a simple example,

Joe drove after hours for Lyft for six months to save up enough money to buy himself a laptop.

You could decide that some of the detail is not necessary for your paper. You could leave the unimportant detail out of your paraphrase, like this:

In order to afford a laptop, Joe worked for a long time.

The author of this sentence decided that the specific job Joe held, the number of years, and the fact that it was his dream stereo wasn't important. That was his choice.

Here is a video that explains the above with additional examples.

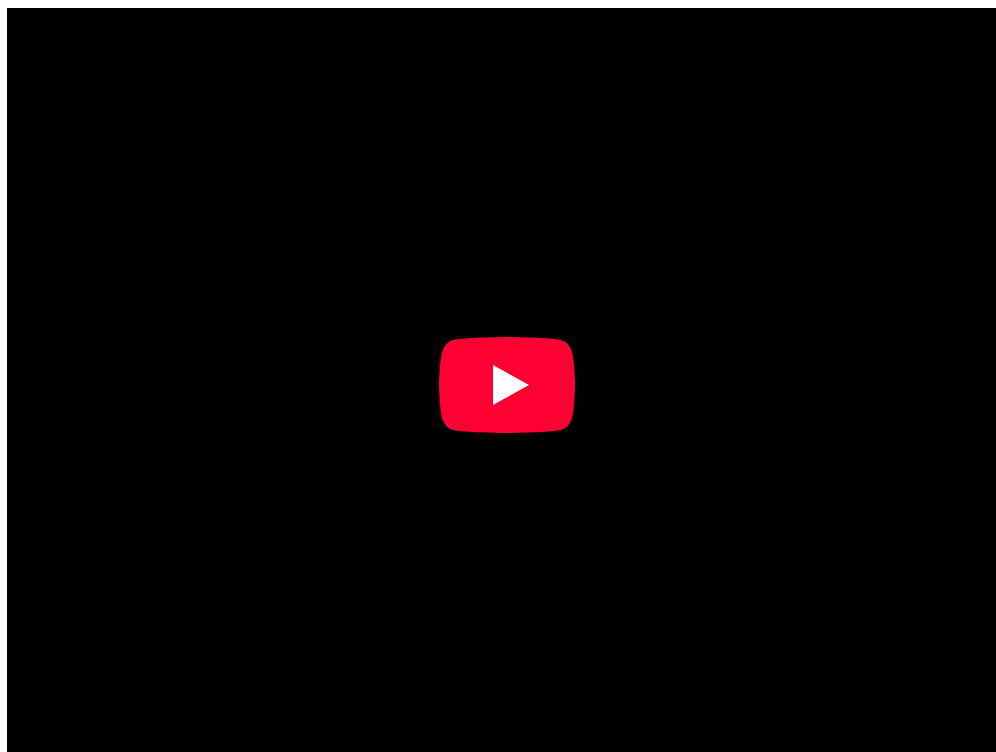


Video 3.3.1

[How to Paraphrase in Five Easy Steps](#). **Authored by:** Scribbr. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Remember: When paraphrasing another's idea, be sure to still provide an in-text citation.

How to avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing a text:





Stop, Thief! Avoid Plagiarism by Paraphrasing. Authored by: Emily Nimsakont. All Rights Reserved. Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 13.3.1

Using the methods discussed above (especially the "don't look at the original method") paraphrase the following passage on your own piece of paper.

Infectious diseases are transmitted from person to person by direct or indirect contact. Certain types of viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi can all cause infectious disease. Malaria, measles, and respiratory illnesses are examples of infectious diseases. (Source: Healthline.com. No author).

Exercise 23.3.1

Using the methods discussed above (especially the "don't look at the original method") paraphrase the following passage on your own piece of paper.

As the continued spread of COVID-19 puts much of the U.S. economy at a standstill, many are wondering how the economic slowdown will affect the real estate market. While construction is considered an essential business in the majority of states and real estate agents have transitioned to online showings, housing markets nationwide are likely to struggle, and some appear to be far more vulnerable than others. (Source: Evan Comen, May 26, 2020, USA Today)

Summarizing

How to Write a Summary

Proficient students understand that *summarizing*, identifying what is most important and restating the text (or other media) in your own words, is an important tool for college success.

After all, if you really know a subject, you will be able to summarize it. If you cannot summarize a subject, even if you have memorized all the facts about it, you can be absolutely sure that you have not learned it. And, if you truly learn the subject, you will still be able to summarize it months or years from now.

Proficient students may monitor their understanding of a text by summarizing as they read. They understand that if they can write a one- or two-sentence summary of each paragraph after reading it, then that is a good sign that they have correctly understood it. If they can not summarize the main idea of the paragraph, they know that comprehension has broken down and they need to use fix-up strategies to repair understanding.

How to Write a Summary (A Review)

A summary is a brief restatement of someone else's points *in your own words*. It needs to be:

- **Brief** – much shorter than the original, so not the details but just the main points
- **Complete** – including all the *key* information
- **Accurate** – the correct information
- **Objective** – **not** your opinion, but what the writer actually communicates

Step A. Annotating the Text for Main Ideas

1. Annotate for engagement and understanding: be sure you stayed awake and actually understood what you read!
2. Find the main ideas of each of the sections and, when appropriate, each of the paragraphs in your section.
3. You may underline the main ideas, or write them in your own words in the margin.

Remember, a main idea is a complete idea or sentence, not just a couple of words.

- Don't write for your main idea: "youth unemployment"
- Do say: "Youth unemployment has increased."

Step B. Planning the Summary

Write the main ideas of each paragraph and each section **in your own words** – and make sure each is a complete sentence. Do not include any judgment about what is in the article.

Step C. Write a Draft Summary

1. Introduce the name of the article and the author in the first sentence along with the main idea of the article.
2. Type up the paraphrased main ideas in complete sentences.
3. Analyze how the ideas connect and relate to each other. (For example, does one idea cause the next? Are some ideas examples of a larger point?) Organize the sentences into a logical order.
4. Include transition words that help the reader understand these connections.
5. Edit out ideas that repeat, and change the order of sentences as necessary.
6. Write the name of the article, the authors, and the controlling idea (main idea of the whole reading) in the first or second sentence.
7. Make sure that important details are included, but not details that are too specific.
8. Do not give your own opinions or say whether the authors do a good or bad job.
9. If the article discusses a study, the summary should briefly describe the purpose of the study and include the results of the study on a high level.

Summary Writing Format

- When writing a summary, remember that it should be in the form of a paragraph.
- A summary begins with an introductory sentence that states the text's title, author and main point of the text as you see it.
- A summary is written in your own words.
- A summary contains only the ideas of the original text. Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments into a summary.

✓ Example 3.3.1

Summary Writing Format Example

In the essay *Santa Ana*, author Joan Didion's main point is (*state main point*). According to Didion "...*passage 1...*" (para.3). Didion also writes "...*passage 2...*" (para.8). Finally, she states "...*passage 3...*" (para. 12) Write a last sentence that "wraps" up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

Summary: Using it Wisely

Knowing how to summarize something you have read, seen, or heard is a valuable skill, one you have probably used in many writing assignments. It is important, though, to recognize when you must go beyond describing, explaining, and restating texts and offer a more complex analysis. This page will help you distinguish between summary and analysis and avoid inappropriate summary in your academic writing.

It is important that you keep your **assignment** and your **audience** in mind as you write. If your assignment requires an argument with a thesis statement and supporting evidence—as many academic writing assignments do—then you should limit the amount of summary in your paper. You might use summary to provide background, set the stage, or illustrate supporting evidence, but keep it very brief: a few sentences should do the trick. Most of your paper should focus on your argument.

Writing a summary of what you know about your topic before you start drafting your actual paper can sometimes be helpful. If you are unfamiliar with the material you're analyzing, you may need to summarize what you've read in order to understand your reading and get your thoughts in order. Once you figure out what you know about a subject, it's easier to decide what you want to argue.

Why is it so tempting to stick with summary and skip analysis?

Many writers rely too heavily on summary because it is what they can most easily write. If you're stalled by a difficult writing prompt, summarizing may be more appealing than staring at the computer for three hours and wondering what argument to make about the content.

To write a more analytical paper, you may need to carefully consider your writing assignment before reading, viewing, or listening to the material about which you'll be writing so that your encounter with the material will be more purposeful.

How do I know if I'm writing an argument instead of just summarizing?

If you answer yes to the questions below, it is a sign that your paper may have analysis rather than just summary (which is usually a good thing):

- Am I making an original argument about the text?
- Have I arranged my evidence around my own points, rather than just stating what the author has said?
- Am I explaining why or how an aspect of the text is significant?

Strategies for Writing a Summary

You can use T.I.P.S. to help you write a summary.

T=topic

I=main idea

P=major supporting points

S=summarize

Read through the selection you are summarizing thoroughly, jotting down the topic, main idea, major supporting points. Then, in a couple of lines, summarize the information you have jotted down in your own words. This is your summary.

How to Write a Summary by Paraphrasing Source Material

When you paraphrase material from a source, you restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words, using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them.

It is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing—that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources. A true paraphrase restates the gist of the ideas using the writer's own language and style

✓ Example 3.3.1

Example Paraphrase Writing Format

In the essay *Santa Ana*, author Joan Didion's main point is (*state main point*). According to Didion ...*PARAPHRASE 1...*. Didion also CLAIMS... *PARAPHRASE 2...*. Finally, she CLAIMS "...*PARAPHRASE 3...*" Write a last sentence that "wraps" up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

Exercise 3.3.1

Summarizing Circles: A small group/ class activity

Practice summarizing by working with teams.

1. Divide the text you are summarizing into small sections.
2. In groups of three or so, ask students to summarize each section. They must use words such as "In other words,..." "Here the author is saying that..." To summarize,

3. Students should try to write their section down in a single line using these starters. They should not use the words used in the text, but instead come up with their own words to explain the ideas in the text. They should get at the main idea in the section rather than just repeat the details.
4. As a class, determine the main idea of the whole passage. Write up a sample summary on the board based on the summaries from the sections.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from [English Composition I: Rhetorical Methods-Based](#), Provided by Lumen Learning, License: [CC BY: Attribution](#)

This page most recently revised on June 6, 2020.

This page titled [3.3: Paraphrasing and Summarizing](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto](#) ([ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative](#)) .

- [3.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing](#) by Athena Kashyap & Erika Dyquisto is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

3.4: Writing a Thesis

Once you have explored or been given your topic, gotten one that works, and come up with some content, you need to decide what point you are trying to make. That's the basis of a thesis statement or claim. It's the "So what?" of your topic. This "so what" is present in any kind of writing: formal papers, essay question responses, emails, presentations, Twitter posts, proposals to clients. Every piece of writing needs a focus.

In a paper, a thesis tends to be more formal—usually one or two sentences that state the main "so what" of the paper.

For example, let's say your topic is about Native American children being fostered in non-Native homes.

So what?

What are you going to say about this topic? This might lead you to think about audience and purpose again. Are you writing to Native American families to discuss a solution to this issue or to explain why it might be happening? Are you writing to the director of a social service organization that places foster children to persuade her to take a new approach to fostering Native American children? Are you trying to show the inequity in foster programs for Native and non-native families to a more general audience?

Once you figure out your audience and purpose, then you can start thinking of your thesis.

So, let's say your audience is class of graduate students in a social work program at a local university. Your purpose is to inform them about the possible problems with fostering Native American children with non-Native families.

Next, you can go back to your exploring and look for information, examples, evidence, and research that you collected. You might need to go back and look for more now that you really know your focus.

This page titled [3.4: Writing a Thesis](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

3.5: Elements of a Thesis

So what makes a good working thesis? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is it interesting?
2. Is it limited?
3. Is it specific?

Interesting thesis

Being interesting doesn't have to mean the writing is about mutant zombies who become cheerleaders for a professional football team (although that would be interesting!). The question to ask is "To whom is this interesting?" This means making sure your thesis is relevant to your audience. Is it meaningful? Can the audience connect to it or can you make them connect to it? For example, maybe your topic is worm composting. You decide your audience will be a local gardening club because the topic is interesting and relevant to that population. Your thesis, then, would draw more on how to make the topic interesting to that audience.

Maybe you are given an audience and purpose. You have to write a report and present it to your class and your purpose is to teach them something about the class topic (American Literature). You would want to find a topic that interests you and your audience and then create a thesis that will engage the audience as much as possible.

Sample thesis: *By using Americana music and Jazz rhythms, the poets of the Harlem Renaissance changed American poetry and made it more relevant and accessible to many people, especially people of color.*

Sometimes, your audience is your nursing instructor or a client at work. Then you need to think about what their expectations are. You also need to think about what you know or what you can learn (through research). Find the intersection between those two things, and you will have a good thesis.



Limited thesis

Having a limited thesis means making sure your topic fits your writing assignment. Is it too broad or too narrow? Does the thesis fit the assignment or writing project? A thesis for an email to a potential employer needs to be very focused and limited. Emails should be short and to the point:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to interview with St. Joseph's Hospital, and I am including the additional information we discussed yesterday.

Short, to the point. The email, then, would discuss this additional information. But the "so what" is here to start.

Keep in mind that in the forming of a thesis when writing papers, it's very easy to go too big.

This essay will discuss the Black Lives Matter movement.

Whoa! That's way too big. What about Black Lives Matters? What kind of essay will this be (informative? persuasive? cause and effect?)? Who is the audience? All of this will help you to limit your thesis and topic.

But you also need to be careful not to go too specific either. What about this thesis statement?

The Black Lives Matters movement began with the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida.

This is really just a fact. It is not a claim about what might be changed. It is not part of some ongoing debate we are having about how things ought to be. It just states a historical truth. It would be hard to write a whole paper that focuses only on this thesis statement.

Sample thesis: *Black Lives Matters was started as a political movement to bring attention to racial bias in the justice system and stems from civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s.*

This would be a thesis claiming to make a certain comment about history and historical facts. It is saying, here is how we should read these historical facts. Notice that one can debate that. Historians certainly do. For example, you can right away see the counterarguments here. Someone could counter:

Black Lives Matters has little to no relationship to the main Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s; in fact, it is more an offshoot of one of the more radical branches of those movements.

Or,

Black Lives Matters was not started as a political movement, but rather, it was a grass-roots community response to a tragedy that morphed into a political movement to bring attention to racial bias in the justice system.

Notice that both of these are plausible counterarguments, and they are also different ways to read a historical fact. So all three would be good thesis statements. The sample thesis above would be a good, supportable, arguable thesis.

Specific thesis

To be specific means giving a why in your thesis. In a working thesis, writers often give the what but not the why. Look at this example:

College students should take online classes.

That's good that you think college students should take online classes, but why?

Sample thesis: *College students should take at least one online class because it will make their schedule more flexible, teach them important technologies, hone their time management skills, and make them better online writers.*

Notice that it is also the organization of the paper. You can see the sections right there. There is the first paragraph with the introduction to the topic of online classes. Then there will probably be a section (a paragraph or two) on the flexibility of schedule. Then a section on technology. Then time management. Then a bang-up conclusion. It's all right there in the thesis statement. This is typical of thesis statements of academic argument research papers.

Sometimes a thesis might be almost the whole piece of writing, like a note to your roommate.

Does this meet the criteria of a good thesis?



- Yes, it's interesting because Tai, the audience, wants his girlfriend to continue to date him.
- Yes, it's limited. It says what it needs to say and no more.
- Yes, it's specific. It gives a what and a why.

This page titled [3.5: Elements of a Thesis](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement

Here are some tips for writing a thesis statement, especially an academic, researched, argument thesis statement (also called a “claim”).

- Are there plausible counterarguments to your thesis (your argument, your central claim)? A good thesis has plausible counterarguments. For example, what if your thesis is: “The sky is blue”? You know that it is a bad thesis. How? Because who would plausibly argue the contrary?
- Speak your thesis to someone. Pretend you are at a dinner party and someone asks: “Hey, Dwayne, what are you arguing in your economic justice paper?” Can you briefly state what your central claim is? If you can, that’s good. It shows you are probably staying on focus. You know what specific things you are trying to change. You also can say it in a few brief sentences to a friend, so you are probably sticking to one topic.
- After you have finished the writing process, compare the beginning of your paper to the end of your paper. Is the thesis (central claim / argument) the same? Or have you veered off into another argument or discussion? This expanding of one thesis into many theses is very common in people who have a lot of good ideas! Pick just one good one. Stick to it.
- In general, all writing needs a focus, a theme, a subject. However, we should note that a thesis is not always the same as a focus. We think sometimes of “thesis” meaning “focus” or “general idea.” But often in writing studies, in formal academic argument papers, when we use this word “*thesis*” we mean *formal argument or claim being made*. That is, what exactly is the main thing the paper is claiming, or wanting switched? What is the “it should be read, or thought of, or treated this way” that then gives reasons for why things should go one way and not another on a debated topic? Keep this in mind for academic, researched, argument papers.
- Another way to think of your thesis in an academic, researched, argument paper, is by answering this question: Where is the “things should be **this** way, the way I say they should be and **not that way**, the way those others say” in your paper?

This page titled [3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

3.7: Resources

“The Thesis Statement.” *Capital Community College Guide to Grammar and Writing*. (<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar...ion/thesis.htm>).

This page titled [3.7: Resources](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Writing Basics

- [4.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme](#)
- [4.2: The Three-story Thesis- From the Ground Up](#)
- [4.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument](#)
- [4.4: Exercises](#)
- [4.5: Verb Tense](#)
- [4.6: Passive and Active Voice](#)
- [4.7: Run-ons, Fragments, Comma Splices](#)

4: Writing Basics is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme

As an instructor, I've noted that a number of new (and sometimes not-so-new) students are skilled wordsmiths and generally clear thinkers but are nevertheless stuck in a high-school style of writing. They struggle to let go of certain assumptions about how an academic paper *should be*. [Chapter 1](#) points to the essay portion of the SAT as a representative artifact of the writing skills that K-12 education imparts. Some students who have mastered that form, and enjoyed a lot of success from doing so, assume that college writing is simply more of the same. The skills that go into a very basic kind of essay—often called [the five-paragraph theme](#)—are indispensable. If you're good at the five-paragraph theme, then you're good at identifying a clear and consistent thesis, arranging cohesive paragraphs, organizing evidence for key points, and situating an argument within a broader context through the intro and conclusion.

In college you need to build on those essential skills. The five-paragraph theme, as such, is bland and formulaic; it doesn't compel deep thinking. Your professors are looking for a more ambitious and arguable thesis, a nuanced and compelling argument, and real-life evidence for all key points, all in an organically¹ structured paper.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 contrast the standard five-paragraph theme and the organic college paper. The five-paragraph theme, outlined in Figure 3.1 is probably what you're used to: the introductory paragraph starts broad and gradually narrows to a thesis, which readers expect to find at the very end of that paragraph. In this idealized format, the thesis invokes the magic number of three: three reasons why a statement is true. Each of those reasons is explained and justified in the three body paragraphs, and then the final paragraph restates the thesis before gradually getting broader. This format is easy for readers to follow, and it helps writers organize their points and the evidence that goes with them. That's why you learned this format.

Figure 3.2, in contrast, represents a paper on the same topic that has the more organic form expected in college. The first key difference is the thesis. Rather than simply positing a number of reasons to think that something is true, it puts forward an arguable statement: one with which a reasonable person might disagree. An arguable thesis gives the paper purpose. It surprises readers and draws them in. You hope your reader thinks, "Huh. Why would they come to that conclusion?" and then feels compelled to read on. The body paragraphs, then, build on one another to carry out this ambitious argument. In the classic five-paragraph theme (Figure 3.1) it hardly matters which of the three reasons you explain first or second. In the more organic structure (Figure 3.2) each paragraph specifically leads to the next.

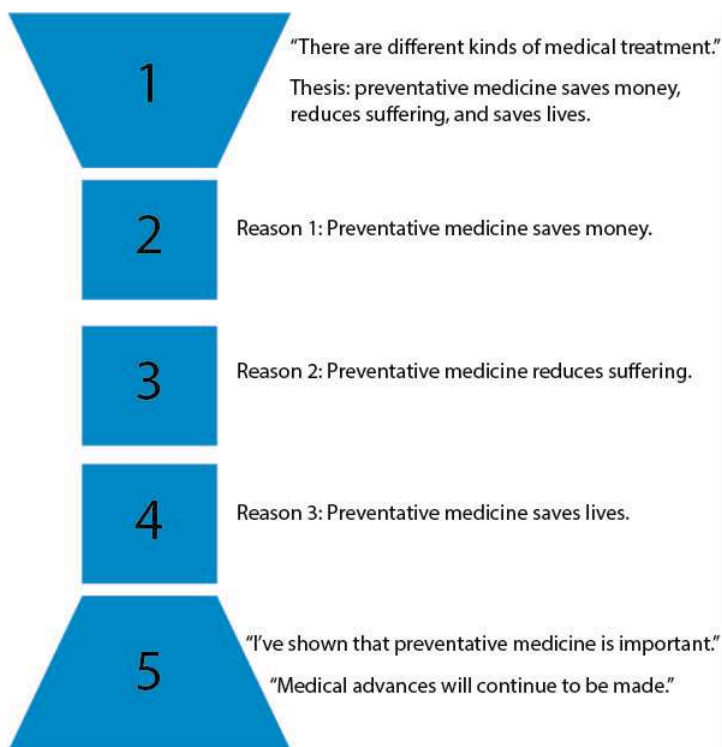


Figure 3.1 - The five-paragraph "theme"

The last key difference is seen in the conclusion. Because the organic essay is driven by an ambitious, non-obvious argument, the reader comes to the concluding section thinking “OK, I’m convinced by the argument. What do you, author, make of it? Why does it matter?” The conclusion of an organically structured paper has a real job to do. It doesn’t just reiterate the thesis; it explains why the thesis matters.

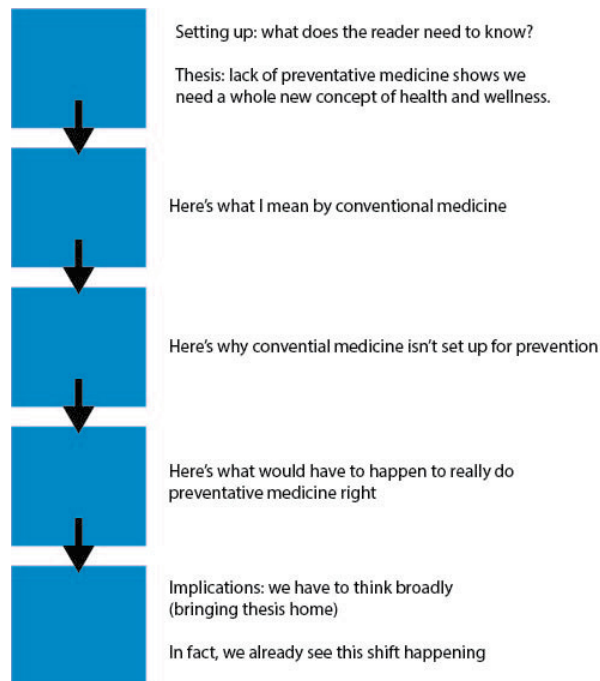


Figure 3.2 - The organic college paper

The substantial time you spent mastering the five-paragraph form in Figure 3.1 was time well spent; it’s hard to imagine anyone succeeding with the more organic form without the organizational skills and habits of mind inherent in the simpler form. But if you assume that you must adhere rigidly to the simpler form, you’re blunting your intellectual ambition. Your professors will not be impressed by obvious theses, loosely related body paragraphs, and repetitive conclusions. They want you to undertake an ambitious independent analysis, one that will yield a thesis that is somewhat surprising and challenging to explain.

This page titled [4.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Amy Guptill](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **3.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme** by [Amy Guptill](#) is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/>.

4.2: The Three-story Thesis- From the Ground Up

You have no doubt been drilled on the need for a thesis statement and its proper location at the end of the introduction. And you also know that all of the key points of the paper should clearly support the central driving thesis. Indeed, the whole model of the five-paragraph theme hinges on a clearly stated and consistent thesis. However, some students are surprised—and dismayed—when some of their early college papers are criticized for not having a good thesis. Their professor might even claim that the paper doesn't have a thesis when, in the author's view it clearly does. So, what makes a good thesis in college?

1. *A good thesis is non-obvious.* High school teachers needed to make sure that you and all your classmates mastered the basic form of the academic essay. Thus, they were mostly concerned that you had a clear and consistent thesis, even if it was something obvious like “sustainability is important.” A thesis statement like that has a wide-enough scope to incorporate several supporting points and concurring evidence, enabling the writer to demonstrate his or her mastery of the five-paragraph form. Good enough! When they can, high school teachers nudge students to develop arguments that are less obvious and more engaging. College instructors, though, fully expect you to produce something more developed.
2. *A good thesis is arguable.* In everyday life, “arguable” is often used as a synonym for “doubtful.” For a thesis, though, “arguable” means that it's worth arguing: it's something with which a reasonable person might disagree. This arguability criterion dovetails with the non-obvious one: it shows that the author has deeply explored a problem and arrived at an argument that legitimately needs 3, 5, 10, or 20 pages to explain and justify. In that way, a good thesis sets an ambitious agenda for a paper. A thesis like “sustainability is important” isn't at all difficult to argue for, and the reader would have little intrinsic motivation to read the rest of the paper. However, an arguable thesis like “sustainability policies will inevitably fail if they do not incorporate social justice,” brings up some healthy skepticism. Thus, the arguable thesis makes the reader want to keep reading.
3. *A good thesis is well specified.* Some student writers fear that they're giving away the game if they specify their thesis up front; they think that a purposefully vague thesis might be more intriguing to the reader. However, consider movie trailers: they always include the most exciting and poignant moments from the film to attract an audience. In academic papers, too, a well specified thesis indicates that the author has thought rigorously about an issue and done thorough research, which makes the reader want to keep reading. Don't just say that a particular policy is effective or fair; say what makes it so. If you want to argue that a particular claim is dubious or incomplete, say why in your thesis.
4. *A good thesis includes implications.* Suppose your assignment is to write a paper about some aspect of the history of linen production and trade, a topic that may seem exceedingly arcane. And suppose you have constructed a well supported and creative argument that linen was so widely traded in the ancient Mediterranean that it actually served as a kind of currency.² That's a strong, insightful, arguable, well specified thesis. But which of these thesis statements do you find more engaging?

Version A:

Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade.

Version B:

Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade. The economic role of linen raises important questions about how shifting environmental conditions can influence economic relationships and, by extension, political conflicts.

Putting your claims in their broader context makes them more interesting to your reader and more impressive to your professors who, after all, assign topics that they think have enduring significance. Finding that significance for yourself makes the most of both your paper and your learning.

How do you produce a good, strong thesis? And how do you know when you've gotten there? Many instructors and writers find useful a metaphor based on this passage by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.:³

There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-

story men compare, reason, generalize using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight.

One-story theses state inarguable facts. Two-story theses bring in an arguable (interpretive or analytical) point. Three-story theses nest that point within its larger, compelling implications.⁴

The biggest benefit of the three-story metaphor is that it describes a process for building a thesis. To build the first story, you first have to get familiar with the complex, relevant facts surrounding the problem or question. You have to be able to describe the situation thoroughly and accurately. Then, with that first story built, you can layer on the second story by formulating the insightful, arguable point that animates the analysis. That's often the most effortful part: brainstorming, elaborating and comparing alternative ideas, finalizing your point. With that specified, you can frame up the third story by articulating why the point you make matters beyond its particular topic or case.

Thesis: that's the word that pops at me whenever I write an essay. Seeing this word in the prompt scared me and made me think to myself, "Oh great, what are they really looking for?" or "How am I going to make a thesis for a college paper?" When rehearsing that I would be focusing on theses again in a class, I said to myself, "Here we go again!" But after learning about the three story thesis, I never had a problem with writing another thesis. In fact, I look forward to being asked on a paper to create a thesis.

Timothée Pizarro

For example, imagine you have been assigned a paper about the impact of online learning in higher education. You would first construct an account of the origins and multiple forms of online learning and assess research findings about its use and effectiveness. If you've done that well, you'll probably come up with a well considered opinion that wouldn't be obvious to readers who haven't looked at the issue in depth. Maybe you'll want to argue that online learning is a threat to the academic community. Or perhaps you'll want to make the case that online learning opens up pathways to college degrees that traditional campus-based learning does not. In the course of developing your central, argumentative point, you'll come to recognize its larger context; in this example, you may claim that online learning can serve to better integrate higher education with the rest of society, as online learners bring their educational and career experiences together. To outline this example:

- *First story:* Online learning is becoming more prevalent and takes many different forms.
- *Second story:* While most observers see it as a *transformation* of higher education, online learning is better thought of an *extension* of higher education in that it reaches learners who aren't disposed to participate in traditional campus-based education.
- *Third story:* Online learning appears to be a promising way to better integrate higher education with other institutions in society, as online learners integrate their educational experiences with the other realms of their life, promoting the freer flow of ideas between the academy and the rest of society.

Here's another example of a three-story thesis:⁵

- *First story:* Edith Wharton did not consider herself a modernist writer, and she didn't write like her modernist contemporaries.
- *Second story:* However, in her work we can see her grappling with both the questions and literary forms that fascinated modernist writers of her era. While not an avowed modernist, she did engage with modernist themes and questions.
- *Third story:* Thus, it is more revealing to think of modernism as a conversation rather than a category or practice.

Here's one more example:

- *First story:* Scientists disagree about the likely impact in the U.S. of the light brown apple moth (LBAM), an agricultural pest native to Australia.
- *Second story:* Research findings to date suggest that the decision to spray pheromones over the skies of several southern Californian counties to combat the LBAM was poorly thought out.
- *Third story:* Together, the scientific ambiguities and the controversial response strengthen the claim that industrial-style approaches to pest management are inherently unsustainable.

A thesis statement that stops at the first story isn't usually considered a thesis. A two-story thesis is usually considered competent, though some two-story theses are more intriguing and ambitious than others. A thoughtfully crafted and well informed three-story thesis puts the author on a smooth path toward an excellent paper.

The concept of a three-story thesis framework was the most helpful piece of information I gained from the writing component of DCC 100. The first time I utilized it in a college paper, my professor included “good thesis” and “excellent introduction” in her notes and graded it significantly higher than my previous papers. You can expect similar results if you dig deeper to form three-story theses. More importantly, doing so will make the actual writing of your paper more straightforward as well. Arguing something specific makes the structure of your paper much easier to design.

Peter Farrell

This page titled [4.2: The Three-story Thesis- From the Ground Up](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Amy Guptill](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **3.2: The Three-story Thesis: From the Ground Up** by [Amy Guptill](#) is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/>.

4.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument

The three-story thesis is a beautiful thing. For one, it gives a paper authentic momentum. The first paragraph doesn't just start with some broad, vague statement; every sentence is crucial for setting up the thesis. The body paragraphs build on one another, moving through each step of the logical chain. Each paragraph leads inevitably to the next, making the transitions from paragraph to paragraph feel wholly natural. The conclusion, instead of being a mirror-image paraphrase of the introduction, builds out the third story by explaining the broader implications of the argument. It offers new insight without departing from the flow of the analysis.

I should note here that a paper with this kind of momentum often reads like it was knocked out in one inspired sitting. But in reality, just like accomplished athletes and artists, masterful writers make the difficult thing look easy. As writer Anne Lamott notes, reading a well written piece feels like its author sat down and typed it out, "bounding along like huskies across the snow." However, she continues,

This is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.⁶

Experienced writers don't figure out what they want to say and then write it. They write in order to figure out what they want to say.

Experienced writers develop theses in dialog with the body of the essay. An initial characterization of the problem leads to a tentative thesis, and then drafting the body of the paper reveals thorny contradictions or critical areas of ambiguity, prompting the writer to revisit or expand the body of evidence and then refine the thesis based on that fresh look. The revised thesis may require that body paragraphs be reordered and reshaped to fit the emerging three-story thesis. Throughout the process, the thesis serves as an anchor point while the author wades through the morass of facts and ideas. The dialogue between thesis and body continues until the author is satisfied or the due date arrives, whatever comes first. It's an effortful and sometimes tedious process. Novice writers, in contrast, usually oversimplify the writing process. They formulate some first-impression thesis, produce a reasonably organized outline, and then flesh it out with text, never taking the time to reflect or truly revise their work. They assume that revision is a step backward when, in reality, it is a major step forward.

Everyone has a different way that they like to write. For instance, I like to pop my earbuds in, blast dubstep music and write on a white board. I like using the white board because it is a lot easier to revise and edit while you write. After I finish writing a paragraph that I am completely satisfied with on the white board, I sit in front of it with my laptop and just type it up.

Kaethe Leonard

Another benefit of the three-story thesis framework is that it demystifies what a "strong" argument is in academic culture. In an era of political polarization, many students may think that a strong argument is based on a simple, bold, combative statement that is promoted in the most forceful way possible. "Gun control is a travesty!" "Shakespeare is the best writer who ever lived!" When students are encouraged to consider contrasting perspectives in their papers, they fear that doing so will make their own thesis seem mushy and weak. However, in academics a "strong" argument is comprehensive and nuanced, not simple and polemical. The purpose of the argument is to explain to readers why the author—through the course of his or her in-depth study—has arrived at a somewhat surprising point. On that basis, it has to consider plausible counter-arguments and contradictory information. Academic argumentation exemplifies the popular adage about all writing: show, don't tell. In crafting and carrying out the three-story thesis, you are showing your reader the work you have done.

The model of the organically structured paper and the three-story thesis framework explained here is the very foundation of the paper itself and the process that produces it. The subsequent chapters, focusing on sources, paragraphs, and sentence-level wordsmithing, all follow from the notion that you are writing to think and writing to learn as much as you are writing to communicate. Your professors assume that you have the self-motivation and organizational skills to pursue your analysis with both

rigor and flexibility; that is, they envision you developing, testing, refining and sometimes discarding your own ideas based on a clear-eyed and open-minded assessment of the evidence before you.

This page titled [4.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Amy Guptill](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **3.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument** by [Amy Guptill](#) is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/>.

4.4: Exercises

1. Find a scholarly article or book that is interesting to you. Focusing on the abstract and introduction, outline the first, second, and third stories of its thesis.
2. Here is a list of one-story theses. Come up with two-story and three-story versions of each one.
A. Television programming includes content that some find objectionable.
B. The percent of children and youth who are overweight or obese has risen in recent decades.
C. First-year college students must learn how to independently manage their time.
D. The things we surround ourselves with symbolize who we are.
3. Find an example of a five-paragraph theme (online essay mills, your own high school work), produce an alternative three-story thesis, and outline an organically structured paper to carry that thesis out.
4. Go to the [SAT website about the essay exam](#), choose one of the highly rated sample essays. In structure, how does it compare to the five-paragraph theme? How does it compare to the organic college essay? Use the SAT essay example you found to create alternative examples for Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

other resources

1. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers an [excellent, readable run-down](#) on the five-paragraph theme, why most college writing assignments want you to go beyond it, and those times when the simpler structure is actually a better choice.
2. There are many useful websites that describe good thesis statements and provide examples. Those from the writing centers at [Hamilton College](#), [Purdue University](#), and [Clarkson University](#) are especially helpful.

References

¹ “Organic” here doesn’t mean “pesticide-free” or containing carbon; it means the paper grows and develops, sort of like a living thing.

² For more see Fabio Lopez-Lazaro “Linen.” In [Encyclopedia of World Trade from Ancient Times to the Present](#). Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.

³ [Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., The Poet at the Breakfast Table \(New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1892\)](#),

⁴ The metaphor is extraordinarily useful even though the passage is annoying. Beyond the sexist language of the time, I don’t appreciate the condescension toward “fact-collectors.” which reflects a general modernist tendency to elevate the abstract and denigrate the concrete. In reality, data-collection is a creative and demanding craft, arguably more important than theorizing.

⁵ Drawn from [Jennifer Haytock, Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism \(New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2008\)](#).

⁶ [Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life \(New York: Pantheon, 1994\)](#), 21.

This page titled [4.4: Exercises](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Amy Guptill](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [3.4: Exercises](#) by [Amy Guptill](#) is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/>.

4.5: Verb Tense

Once again, every sentence must have a main subject (noun) and a verb (governing verb).

We caught the tread of dancing feet,

We loitered down the moonlit street,

And stopped beneath the harlot's house. (Wilde "The harlot's house")



The verb is underlined above. A verb in a sentence is that which tells the action, or the state of being. Above, the actions are "caught" and "loiter" and "stop". The subject (a pronoun) is "we." Notice that you could write the above as three sentences, and they would all be good sentences:

We caught the tread of dancing feet.

And

We loitered down the moonlit street.

And finally, with an insertion of the subject again,

And we stopped beneath the harlot's house.

Verbs can be in different tenses. For example, the above example is written in the past tense. If it were present, it would be

"We catch" or "We are catching" and "We loiter" or "We are loitering" and "We stop" or "We are stopping."

If it were future tense, it would be

"We will be catching" and "We will be loitering" and "We will be stopping."

These are the three basic tenses in English: past, present, and future. They indicate the time of the action. Let's look at the sentence again, considering the subject. We caught the tread of dancing feet.

Let's look at the sentence again, considering the subject.

We caught the tread of dancing feet.

The subject of the sentence above is "we." That is the subject, the thing that is doing the action, or is in the state of being. The subject is always a noun. Again, the verb, or the thing that is what "we" are doing, is the word "caught."

One common error in writing, with verbs, is that the writer switches tenses mid-paragraph, or even mid-sentence. This is a relationship error. It makes the sentence non-logical; it doesn't "make sense." For example:

Sometimes a horrible marionette

Came out, and smoked its cigarette

Upon the steps like a live thing. (Wilde "The harlot's house")

That's a nice phrase. But what if it said:

Sometimes a horrible marionette

Came out, and smoking its cigarette

Upon the steps like a live thing.

Now you have created head-scratching questions of relationship for the reader, the audience. The "and" in the second line awaits another verb in the same form or verb tense as the one it is connecting to "came." And that second verb in the same form never comes. So the audience is confused. The audience also awaits another pronoun, or noun, to provide a subject for "smoking its cigarette upon the steps like a live thing." Perhaps it is the horrible marionette that is "smoking its cigarette upon the steps like a live thing"? But perhaps it is something else, like an officer, in which case we would expect something like

“Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoking its cigarette

Upon the steps like a live thing, the officer debated.

Or, we could do as the original, and change “smoking” to “smoked,” as it should be, so that we know that it is the second verb describing what the marionette did.

Another common error in writing, with verbs, is that the tense does not match the subject.

He sit.

In third person singular, there is an “s” at the end of the verb. The “he” already indicates that this is third person singular, but the “s” is another grammatical marker that indicates the same thing. This is redundancy, but languages do this.

So the correct way to write it is “He sits.” For various reasons, you can write “he sit” and you will probably be understood. However, you should know the rule.

When writing a longer sentence, it is easy to put the wrong verb. For example, we might write, quickly, during one of the pre-writing or drafting parts of our writing process:

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and I go over to the man selling corn. We say, "How much?"

In the second to the last sentence, the verb tense shifts. So then, in revising, we realize we need to change it to all past tense, or else keep it to the basic present, which is how the above passage ends. We try the past tense:

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and I went over to the man selling corn. We said, "How much?"

But what about the present tense?

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rise up out of the ocean. We race to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We know there is no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone is roasting corn. Almira and I go over to the man selling corn. We say, "How much?"

Either choice is fine, as long as one stays consistent.

To keep the flow, and also to keep the reader in the same sense of time (past tense), the verb should stay in past tense throughout a sentence.

Within a paragraph, you should also try to keep the same tense. Sometimes people change tenses between sections of a writing, but they have an obvious reason for doing so. This is so that the reason-element of the audience’s brain does not stall.

If you change tenses, you should do it deliberately, not accidentally.

This page titled [4.5: Verb Tense](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

4.6: Passive and Active Voice

When writing sentences, there are basically two ways to show action: passively and actively.

Passive: The ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.

Active: Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

Both sentences are complete and convey an action with the verb; however, the first sentence, the passive sentence, almost seems to be missing something. If you try to picture the action, you might see a baseball coming out of nowhere, hurtling toward a girl at second base. In the active sentence, the picture is more complete: you can see who threw the ball. Even with the additional information, both sentences are the same length.

In general, active voice is more effective.

Construct your sentences so that someone or something is doing something— not just something being done. Look for “to be” verbs like is, are, was, were. These are often a sign of passive voice.

That doesn’t mean passive voice can’t be useful. When you want to deemphasize the subject or avoid responsibility, passive voice is the way to go. For example, a car company that had a major mechanical issue with their airbags and had to recall millions of cars is probably not going to admit total fault.

An error was made in the production of the airbag in your Brand X car.

This is a useful application of passive voice. If the sentence were active, the company might actually be legally more liable.

Company X made a mistake in the production of airbags...

NO! Don’t say that. We’ll get sued!

Modifier errors caused by passive voice

Another problem with using passive voice is that it can cause grammatical errors like dangling or misplaced modifiers. A modifier is a descriptive word or phrase that often comes as a dependent clause at the start of a sentence.

With pinpoint accuracy, Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

The phrase “with pinpoint accuracy” is a modifier, describing how Reeza threw the ball. Now, try that same phrase with the passive sentence.

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.

Now what is the phrase describing? From the structure of the sentence, the ball is throwing itself with pinpoint accuracy. In fact, the person who threw with accuracy isn’t even in the sentence, so this is a dangling modifier. Even if Reeza was in the sentence and the sentence was still passive, there would still be a logic problem.

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown by Reeza to Brenna at second base.

Now, Reeza is there, but the sentence still almost makes it sound like the ball was throwing itself. This is a misplaced modifier.

Correct modifier placement: With pinpoint accuracy, Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

More resources on passive and active voice and modifier errors:

“Active and passive verbs,” Oxford Dictionaries.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/grammar/active-and-passive-verbs>

“Active vs Passive Voice,” Howcast. <https://youtu.be/cOhUmttk90>

“Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers,” Tamu Writing Center.

<https://youtu.be/RHWyN1xGFdc>

4.6: Passive and Active Voice is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.7: Run-ons, Fragments, Comma Splices

As we discussed, complete sentences, or independent clauses, contain a subject, a verb, and form complete a thought:

The big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The subject is “cow,” the verb is “walked.” The other words modify or give more information about other words.

What is a sentence fragment?

Fragments occur when the sentence is missing the subject and/or verb and/or it’s an incomplete thought:

Walked quickly and quietly away towards the rabbit.

There is no subject in this group of words. What or who walked? Notice that the word “rabbit” is a noun and can, in its own sentence, be the subject. But in this case, it is part of the prepositional phrase that tells where the walking is towards. Thus, it cannot be the subject, even though it is a noun.

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The addition of the subordinating conjunction “because” creates an incomplete thought.

Other words that create fragments when added to the beginning of sentences include other subordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions (lists of these are at the end of the section). These are words that turn levers in brains to indicate some sort of connection is coming, like a trailer with a hitch. That part of the sentence needs something with an engine (main subject and governing verb) to hook up to before it can go anywhere. It needs a simple sentence (independent clause) to hitch to.

Sentence fragments are fixed by either adding the missing words or hooking the fragment onto a sentence that comes before it or after it in the paragraph.

The big brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away, I didn’t need to run away in terror from it.

In the above examples, the main (simple) subject is underlined, and the verb is in italics. In the second sentence, “cow” is no longer the subject, because the word “because” has come in and made that whole clause from “because” to “away” into a dependent clause, a trailer, needing a hitch.

What is a run-on sentence?

Run-on sentences happen when two complete sentences (independent clauses) are put together incorrectly:

I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

“I walked down to the store” is a perfectly fine sentence. “The heat was getting to me” is another great sentence. Put them together, though, without proper punctuation, and you have a run-on.

If you separate these two complete sentences with a comma, you have a type of run-on called a comma splice:

I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

The comma is probably not strong enough to hold two sentences together. Why is this? There are logical, common sense reasons for it. One, certainly, is that since “store” is a noun, and “heat” is a noun, if there is no comma, the reader is left wondering what exactly the relationship is between “store” and “heat.” This is because nouns can modify (give information about) other nouns. Once you put in the comma, you immediately take away the possible question in the readers mind about what the relationship might be between “the store” and “the heat” because the comma indicates, sort of, “new thought starting here.” The reader knows that the noun “the heat” is the subject of something, starting a whole new section of the sentence. Again, this all proves yet another time that a sentence is a series of logical-grammatical relationships that people’s brains are programmed at birth to know and follow.

How to fix a run-on sentence

So, if I do have a run-on sentence, which is basically a sentence that doesn’t easily make sense, how do I fix it? There are options. Use a coordinating conjunction:

I walked down to the store, for the heat was getting to me.

...or use a subordinating conjunction:

I walked down to the store since the heat was getting to me.

...or use a semicolon:

I walked down to the store; the heat was getting to me.

...or use a conjunctive adverb with a semicolon:

I walked down to the store; indeed, the heat was getting to me.

...or go ahead and use a period.

I walked down to the store. The heat was getting to me.

One of the most common run-on sentences is this type:

As I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

It's a run-on because it starts with a subordinating conjunction (again, words like because, since, when, and if) and does not have a comma separating out the two sentences. It should look like this:

As I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

Some instructors will also call the clause, "As I walked down to the store" an introductory phrase that needs a comma after it. Whatever the instructor calls it, the comma needs to be there.

List of coordinating conjunctions:	List of common subordinating conjunctions:	List of common conjunctive adverbs:
For	Because	Also
And	If	However
Nor	Since	Indeed
But	When	Nonetheless
Or	While	Otherwise
Yet	As	Consequently
So	Before	Besides
	Wherever	Ineed
	Once	Moreover
	After	Similarly
	Although	Still
	Even (if, though)	Likewise
	Unless	Furthermore
	Until	Hence
	Where	Nevertheless
		Next
		Therefore
		Thus

This page titled [4.7: Run-ons, Fragments, Comma Splices](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten-Erickson & Amy Jo Swing](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Sentence Clarity

[5.1: Sentence Variety](#)

[5.2: Coordination and Subordination](#)

[5.3: Parallelism](#)

[5.4: Writing Conclusions](#)

[5.5: Paraphrasing](#)

[5.6: Quoting](#)

5: Sentence Clarity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.1: Sentence Variety

Learning Objectives

- Identify ways to vary sentence structure.
- Write and revise sentence structure at the beginning of sentences.
- Write and revise sentence structure by connecting ideas.

Have you ever ordered a dish in a restaurant and been not happy with its taste, even though it contained most of your favorite ingredients? Just as a meal might lack the finishing touches needed to spice it up, so too might a paragraph contain all the basic components but still lack the stylistic finesse required to engage a reader. Sometimes writers have a tendency to reuse the same sentence pattern throughout their writing. Like any repetitive task, reading text that contains too many sentences with the same length and structure can become monotonous and boring. Experienced writers mix it up by using an assortment of sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths.

In this chapter, you will follow a student named Naomi who has written a draft of an essay but needs to refine her writing. This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using a variety of techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.

Incorporating Sentence Variety

Experienced writers incorporate sentence variety into their writing by varying sentence style and structure. Using a mixture of different sentence structures reduces repetition and adds emphasis to important points in the text. Read the following example:

During my time in office I have achieved several goals. I have helped increase funding for local schools. I have reduced crime rates in the neighborhood. I have encouraged young people to get involved in their community. My competitor argues that she is the better choice in the upcoming election. I argue that it is ridiculous to fix something that isn't broken. If you reelect me this year, I promise to continue to serve this community.

In this extract from an election campaign, the writer uses short, simple sentences of a similar length and style. Writers often mistakenly believe that this technique makes the text more clear for the reader, but the result is a choppy, unsophisticated paragraph that does not grab the audience's attention. Now read the revised paragraph with sentence variety:

During my time in office, I have helped increase funding for local schools, reduced crime rates in the neighborhood, and encouraged young people to get involved in their community. Why fix what isn't broken? If you reelect me this year, I will continue to achieve great things for this community. Don't take a chance on an unknown contender; vote for the proven success.

Notice how introducing a short rhetorical question among the longer sentences in the paragraph is an effective means of keeping the reader's attention. In the revised version, the writer combines the choppy sentences at the beginning into one longer sentence, which adds rhythm and interest to the paragraph.

Tip

Effective writers often implement the “rule of three,” which is basically the thought that things that contain three elements are more memorable and more satisfying to readers than any other number. Try to use a series of three when providing examples, grouping adjectives, or generating a list.

? Exercise 5.1.1

Combine each set of simple sentences into a compound or a complex sentence. Write the combined sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.

2. Shakespeare's writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Gay marriage is now legal in six states. Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all permit same-sex marriage. Other states are likely to follow their example.
4. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
5. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch's two children attend the school.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentences

Read the following sentences and consider what they all have in common:

John and Amanda will be analyzing this week's financial report.

The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.

Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

If you are having trouble figuring out why these sentences are similar, try underlining the subject in each. You will notice that the subject is positioned at the beginning of each sentence—*John and Amanda*, *the car*, *students*. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers tend to overuse this technique, which can result in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety.

Naomi wrote an essay about the 2008 government bailout. Read this excerpt from Naomi's essay:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

This section examines several ways to introduce sentence variety at the beginning of sentences, using Naomi's essay as an example.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

One technique you can use so as to avoid beginning a sentence with the subject is to use an adverb. An adverb is a word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in *-ly*. Examples of adverbs include *quickly*, *softly*, *quietly*, *angrily*, and *timidly*. Read the following sentences:

She slowly turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

Slowly, she turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

In the second sentence, the adverb *slowly* is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If you read the two sentences aloud, you will notice that moving the adverb changes the rhythm of the sentence and slightly alters its meaning. The second sentence emphasizes

how the subject moves—slowly—creating a buildup of tension. This technique is effective in fictional writing.

Note that an adverb used at the beginning of a sentence is usually followed by a comma. A comma indicates that the reader should pause briefly, which creates a useful rhetorical device. Read the following sentences aloud and consider the effect of pausing after the adverb:

Cautiously, he unlocked the kennel and waited for the dog's reaction.

Solemnly, the policeman approached the mayor and placed him under arrest.

Suddenly, he slammed the door shut and sprinted across the street.

In an academic essay, moving an adverb to the beginning of a sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph and increase sentence variety.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$400 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi has used two adverbs in her essay that could be moved to the beginning of their respective sentences. Notice how the following revised version creates a more varied paragraph:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Finally, the government opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$400 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. Optimistically, the government expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

 Tip

Adverbs of time—adverbs that indicate *when* an action takes place—do not always require a comma when used at the beginning of a sentence. Adverbs of time include words such as *yesterday*, *today*, *later*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *now*.

? Exercise 5.1.2

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a preposition (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an object of the preposition (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition).

Table 7.1 - Common Prepositions

above	beneath	into	till
across	beside	like	toward
against	between	near	under
after	beyond	off	underneath
among	by	on	until
around	despite	over	up
at	except	past	with
before	for	since	without
behind	from	through	
below	inside	throughout	

Read the following sentence:

The terrified child hid **underneath the table**.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase is *underneath the table*. The preposition *underneath* relates to the object that follows the preposition—the *table*. Adjectives may be placed between the preposition and the object in a prepositional phrase.

The terrified child hid **underneath the heavy wooden table**.

Some prepositional phrases can be moved to the beginning of a sentence in order to create variety in a piece of writing. Look at the following revised sentence:

Underneath the heavy wooden table, the terrified child hid.

Notice that when the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject—the terrified child—to the location in which the child is hiding. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Take a look at the following examples. The prepositional phrase is underlined in each:

The bandaged man waited **in the doctor's office**.

In the doctor's office, the bandaged man waited.

My train leaves the station **at 6:45 a.m.**

At 6:45 a.m., my train leaves the station.

Teenagers exchange drugs and money **under the railway bridge**.

Under the railway bridge, teenagers exchange drugs and money.

Prepositional phrases are useful in any type of writing. Take another look at Naomi's essay on the government bailout.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Now read the revised version.

Throughout 2007 and 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis worsened, leaving many financial institutions in jeopardy. According to some economists, the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Despite public objections, the government finally opted to bail out the banks. Since the 2008 bill passed, it has acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

The underlined words are all prepositional phrases. Notice how they add additional information to the text and provide a sense of flow to the essay, making it less choppy and more pleasurable to read.

Unmovable Prepositional Phrases

Not all prepositional phrases can be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Read the following sentence:

I would like a chocolate sundae **without whipped cream**.

In this sentence, *without whipped cream* is the prepositional phrase. Because it describes the chocolate sundae, it cannot be moved to the beginning of the sentence. "Without whipped cream I would like a chocolate sundae" does not make as much (if any) sense. To determine whether a prepositional phrase can be moved, we must determine the meaning of the sentence.

Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

Experienced writers often include more than one prepositional phrase in a sentence; however, it is important not to overload your writing. Using too many modifiers in a paragraph may create an unintentionally comical effect as the following example shows:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall, near the schoolyard, where children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall. In the nearby schoolyard, children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

✓ Writing at Work

The overuse of prepositional phrases often occurs when our thoughts are jumbled and we are unsure how concepts or ideas relate to one another. If you are preparing a report or a proposal, take the time to organize your thoughts in an outline before writing a rough draft. Read the draft aloud, either to yourself or to a colleague, and identify areas that are rambling or unclear. If you notice that a particular part of your report contains several sentences over twenty words, you should double check that particular section to make certain that it is coherent and does not contain unnecessary prepositional phrases. Reading aloud sometimes helps detect unclear and wordy sentences. You can also ask a colleague to paraphrase your main points to ensure that the meaning is clear.

Starting a Sentence by Inverting Subject and Verb

As we noted earlier, most writers follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure. In an inverted sentence, the order is reversed so that the subject follows the verb. Read the following sentence pairs:

1. A truck was parked in the driveway.
2. Parked in the driveway was a truck.
1. A copy of the file is attached.
2. Attached is a copy of the file.

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—*a truck* in the first example and *the file* in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus. We can apply this method to an academic essay. Take another look at Naomi's paragraph.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

To emphasize the subject in certain sentences, Naomi can invert the traditional sentence structure. Read her revised paragraph:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. The banks were too big to fail, argued some economists. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. These assets will rise in value, expects the government optimistically. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Notice that in the first underlined sentence, the subject (*some economists*) is placed after the verb (*argued*). In the second underlined sentence, the subject (*the government*) is placed after the verb (*expects*).

? Exercise 5.1.3

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences as inverted sentences.

1. Teresa will never attempt to run another marathon.
2. A detailed job description is enclosed with this letter.
3. Bathroom facilities are across the hall to the left of the water cooler.
4. The well-dressed stranger stumbled through the doorway.
5. My colleagues remain unconvinced about the proposed merger.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

Reviewing and rewriting the beginning of sentences is a good way of introducing sentence variety into your writing. Another useful technique is to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause, or an appositive. This section examines how to connect ideas across several sentences in order to increase sentence variety and improve writing.

Joining Ideas Using an *-ing* Modifier

Sometimes it is possible to combine two sentences by converting one of them into a modifier using the *-ing* verb form—*singing*, *dancing*, *swimming*. A modifier is a word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in the sentence. Read the following example:

Original sentences: Steve checked the computer system. He discovered a virus.

Revised sentence: Checking the computer system, Steve discovered a virus.

To connect two sentences using an *-ing* modifier, add *-ing* to one of the verbs in the sentences (*checking*) and delete the subject (*Steve*). Use a comma to separate the modifier from the subject of the sentence. It is important to make sure that the main idea in your revised sentence is contained in the main clause, not in the modifier. In this example, the main idea is that Steve discovered a virus, not that he checked the computer system.

In the following example, an *-ing* modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time:

1. Noticing the police car, she shifted gears and slowed down.

This means that she slowed down at the same time she noticed the police car.

2. Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.

This means that the dog barked as it ran across the driveway.

You can add an *-ing* modifier to the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on which fits best.

Beginning: Conducting a survey among her friends, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.

End: Maria filed the final report, **meeting her deadline.**

Dangling Modifiers

A common mistake when combining sentences using the *-ing* verb form is to misplace the modifier so that it is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence. This creates a dangling modifier. Look at the following example:

Jogging across the parking lot, my breath grew ragged and shallow.

In this sentence, *jogging across the parking lot* seems to modify *my breath*. Since breath cannot jog, the sentence should be rewritten so that the subject is placed immediately after the modifier or added to the dangling phrase.

Jogging across the parking lot, I felt my breath grow ragged and shallow.

For more information on dangling modifiers, see [Chapter 2](#).

Joining Ideas Using an *-ed* Modifier

Some sentences can be combined using an *-ed* verb form—*stopped*, *finished*, *played*. To use this method, one of the sentences must contain a form of *be* as a helping verb in addition to the *-ed* verb form. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.

Revised sentence: Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party started.

In the original version, *was* acts as a helping verb—it has no meaning by itself, but it serves a grammatical function by placing the main verb (*delayed*) in the perfect tense.

To connect two sentences using an *-ed* modifier, drop the helping verb (*was*) and the subject (*the Jones family*) from the sentence with an *-ed* verb form. This forms a modifying phrase (*delayed by a traffic jam*) that can be added to the beginning or end of the other sentence according to which fits best. As with the *-ing* modifier, be careful to place the word that the phrase modifies immediately after the phrase in order to avoid a dangling modifier.

Using *-ing* or *-ed* modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious connections between two sentences. Take a look at how Naomi might use modifiers in her paragraph.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Opting to bail out the banks, the government acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. It optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

The revised version of the essay uses the *-ing* modifier *opting* to draw a connection between the government's decision to bail out the banks and the result of that decision—the acquisition of the mortgage-backed securities.

Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

Another technique that writers use to combine sentences is to join them using a relative clause. A relative clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. Relative clauses function as adjectives by answering questions such as *which one?* or *what kind?* Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun, such as *who*, *which*, *where*, *why*, or *when*. Read the following examples:

Original sentences: The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Seattle.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who lives in Seattle, is visiting the company next week.

To connect two sentences using a relative clause, substitute the subject of one of the sentences (*he*) for a relative pronoun (*who*). This gives you a relative clause (*who lives in Seattle*) that can be placed next to the noun it describes (*the managing director*). Make sure to keep the sentence you want to emphasize as the main clause. For example, reversing the main clause and subordinate clause in the preceding sentence emphasizes where the managing director lives, not the fact that he is visiting the company.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who is visiting the company next week, lives in Seattle.

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence. Take a look at how Naomi might incorporate relative clauses into her essay.

The subprime mortgage crisis, which had been steadily building throughout 2007 and 2008, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists, who favored the bailout, argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists, who opposed the bailout, argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Notice how the underlined relative clauses can be removed from Naomi's essay without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Tip

To check the punctuation of relative clauses, assess whether or not the clause can be taken out of the sentence without changing its meaning. If the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be placed in commas. If the relative clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it does not require commas around it.

Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

An appositive is a word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun. Incorporating appositives into your writing is a useful way of combining sentences that are too short and choppy. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: Harland Sanders began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930. He is Colonel Sanders or “the Colonel.”

Revised sentence: Harland Sanders, “the Colonel,” began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930.

In the revised sentence, “*the Colonel*” is an appositive because it renames Harland Sanders. To combine two sentences using an appositive, drop the subject and verb from the sentence that renames the noun and turn it into a phrase. Note that in the previous example, the appositive is positioned immediately after the noun it describes. An appositive may be placed anywhere in a sentence, but it must come directly before or after the noun to which it refers:

Appositive after noun: Scott, a poorly trained athlete, was not expected to win the race.

Appositive before noun: A poorly trained athlete, Scott was not expected to win the race.

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set of commas. Take a look at the way Naomi uses appositives to include additional facts in her essay.

The subprime mortgage crisis, the biggest financial disaster since the 1929 Wall Street crash, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government, the institution that would decide the fate of the banks, finally opted to bail them out. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

? Exercise 5.1.4

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using the techniques you have learned in this section.

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.
4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

✓ Writing at Work

In addition to varying sentence structure, consider varying the types of sentences you are using in a report or other workplace document. Most sentences are declarative, but a carefully placed question, exclamation, or command can pique colleagues' interest, even if the subject material is fairly dry. Imagine that you are writing a budget analysis. Beginning your report with a rhetorical question, such as "Where is our money going?" or "How can we increase sales?" encourages people to continue reading to find out the answers. Although they should be used sparingly in academic and professional writing, questions or commands are effective rhetorical devices.

📌 Key Takeaways

- Sentence variety reduces repetition in a piece of writing and adds emphasis to important points in the text.
- Sentence variety can be introduced to the beginning of sentences by starting a sentence with an adverb, starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase, or by inverting the subject and verb.
- Combine ideas, using modifiers, relative clauses, or appositives, to achieve sentence variety.

5.1: Sentence Variety is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- 7.1: Sentence Variety by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

5.2: Coordination and Subordination

Learning Objectives

- Identify coordination and subordination in writing.
- Combine sentences and ideas using coordination.
- Combine sentences and ideas using subordination.

In the previous section, we learned how to use different patterns to create sentence variety and to add emphasis to important points in our writing. Next, we will examine two ways in which we can join sentences with related ideas:

- Coordination. Joining two related ideas of equal importance.
- Subordination. Joining two related ideas of unequal importance.

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs, and in turn, produces more effective writing. In this section, you will read excerpts from Naomi's classmate named Joshua, who drafted an essay about wine production. Read this excerpt from Joshua's essay.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

This section examines several ways to combine sentences with coordination and subordination, using Joshua's essay as an example.

Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

Original sentences: I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week *because* I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction so:

Revised sentence: I spent my entire paycheck last week, **so** I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the sentence retains two independent clauses (*I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend*) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

Coordinating Conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	and (joins two ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	but (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	yet (indicates a reason)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

Tip

To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym FANBOYS: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction in a sentence, a comma should precede it.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon (see [Chapter 2](#) for information on semicolon usage). A conjunctive adverb is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. Read the following sentences:

Original sentences: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

Revised sentence: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget's desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following chart of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	also, furthermore, moreover, besides	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Comparison	similarly, likewise	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.
Contrast	instead, however, conversely	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	namely, certainly, indeed	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, thus	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	finally, next, subsequently, then	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Take a look at Joshua's essay on wine production and identify some areas in which he might use coordination.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua's revised essay. Did you coordinate the same sentences? You may find that your answers are different because there are usually several ways to join two independent clauses.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

? Exercise 5.2.1

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb. Then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

✓ Writing at Work

When writing an essay or a report, it is important that you do not use excessive coordination. Workplace documents should be clear and concise, so only join two clauses that are logically connected and can work together to make one main point. If you repeat the same coordinating conjunction several times in a sentence, you are probably including more than one idea. This may make it difficult for readers to pick out the most important information in each sentence.

Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a main clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, and subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

Original sentences: Tracy stopped to help the injured man. She would be late for work.

To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

Revised sentence: Even though Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (*she stopped to help the injured man*) that stands as a complete sentence and a dependent clause (*even though Tracy would be late for work*) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

Revised sentence: Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

Tip

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is required.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following chart of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	although, while, though, whereas, even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if, unless, until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	as if, as, though	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where, wherever	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Reason	because, since, so that, in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after, before, while, once, when	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Take a look at the excerpt from Joshua's essay and identify some areas in which he might use subordination.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua's revised essay and compare your answers. You will probably notice that there are many different ways to subordinate sentences.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. Because the stems contain harsh-tasting tannins, they are removed. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added in order to prevent the liquid from becoming oxidized. Sulfur dioxide also destroys bacteria. Although some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

? Exercise 5.2.2

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction and then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

? Exercise 5.2.3

Copy the paragraph from Joshua's essay onto your own sheet of paper. Then edit using the techniques you have learned in this section. Join the underlined sentences using coordination or subordination. Check your revised sentences for punctuation.

The yeast is added to the must. Alcoholic fermentation then begins. Here, the red wine production process differs from the method used in white wine production. Red wine is fermented for a shorter time. It is fermented at a higher temperature. Whereas white wines may ferment for over a month, red wines typically ferment for less than two weeks. During fermentation, contact between the skins and the juice releases tannins and flavor compounds into the must. This process is known as maceration. Maceration may occur before, during, or after fermentation. The fermentation process is completed. The next stage is pressing. Many methods are used for pressing, the most common of which is basket pressing.

Key Takeaways

- Coordination and subordination join two sentences with related ideas.
- Coordination joins sentences with related and equal ideas, whereas subordination joins sentences with related but unequal ideas.
- Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction and a comma or a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.
- Subordinate sentences are characterized by the use of a subordinate conjunction.
- In a subordinate sentence, a comma is used to separate the main clause from the dependent clause if the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

5.2: Coordination and Subordination is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **7.2: Coordination and Subordination** by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

5.3: Parallelism

Learning Objectives

- Identify sentences that are parallel and not parallel.
- Identify ways to create parallelism in writing.
- Write and revise sentences using parallelism.

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that increasing sentence variety adds interest to a piece of writing and makes the reading process more enjoyable for others. Using a mixture of sentence lengths and patterns throughout an essay is an important writing technique. However, it is equally important to avoid introducing variation within individual sentences. A strong sentence is composed of balanced parts that all have the same structure. In this section, we will examine how to create a balanced sentence structure by using parallelism.

Using Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

Faulty parallelism

Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins each sentence by using a noun (*coordination*, *jeans*), but ends with a phrase (*to have good eyesight*, *wearing a suit*). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

Correct parallelism

Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using a parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the amount of work the reader has to do to decode the sentence. This enables the reader to focus on the main idea in the sentence and not on how the sentence is put together.

Tip

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

Creating Parallelism Using Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two clauses using a coordinating conjunction (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like **to listen to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

Correct parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like **listening to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (*to listen, talking*). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (*and*) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series:

Faulty parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.**

Correct parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages.**

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (*reduce, cut*) and a third item that uses a different verb form (*lowering*). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

? Exercise 5.3.1

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions.

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar at weekends.
2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.
4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail queries.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Creating Parallelism Using *Than* or *As*

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: **Swimming in the ocean** is much tougher than **a pool**.

Correct parallelism: **Swimming in the ocean** is much tougher than **swimming in a pool**.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (*than*) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (*swimming*) with a noun (*a pool*). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

Faulty parallelism: **A brisk walk** is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

Correct parallelism: **Going for a brisk walk** is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

In this example, it is necessary to add the verb phrase *going for* to the sentence in order to clarify that the act of walking is being compared to the act of running.

? Exercise 5.3.2

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using *than* or *as*.

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
5. Jim's opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunctions

A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

- either...or
- not only...but also
- neither...nor
- whether...or
- rather...than
- both...and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **can we take** evasive action.

Correct parallelism: We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **take** evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

Faulty parallelism: It was both a long movie and poorly written.

Correct parallelism: The movie was both long and poorly written.

Tip

To see examples of parallelism in use, read some of the great historical speeches by rhetoricians such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Notice how they use parallel structures to emphasize important points and to create a smooth, easily understandable oration.

Here is a link to text, audio, video, and the music of Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream":
<http://www.mlkonline.net/dream.html>.

Writing at Work

Speechwriters use parallelism not only within sentences but also throughout paragraphs and beyond. Repeating particular key phrases throughout a speech is an effective way of tying a paragraph together as a cohesive whole and creating a sense of importance. This technique can be adapted to any piece of writing, but it may be especially useful for creating a proposal or other type of persuasive workplace document.

Note that the spelling and grammar checker on most word processors will not draw attention to faulty parallelism. When proofreading a document, read it aloud and listen for sentences that sound awkward or poorly phrased.

Exercise 5.3.3

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions.

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

? Exercise 5.3.4

Read through the following excerpt from Alex's essay and revise any instances of faulty parallelism. Rewrite the sentences to create a parallel structure.

Owning a pet has proven to be extremely beneficial to people's health. Pets help lower blood pressure, boost immunity, and are lessening anxiety. Studies indicate that children who grow up in a household with cats or dogs are at a lower risk of developing allergies or suffer from asthma. Owning a dog offers an additional bonus; it makes people more sociable. Dogs are natural conversation starters and this not only helps to draw people out of social isolation but also they are more likely to find a romantic partner.

Benefits of pet ownership for elderly people include less anxiety, lower insurance costs, and they also gain peace of mind. A study of Alzheimer's patients showed that patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Some doctors even keep dogs in the office to act as on-site therapists. In short, owning a pet keeps you healthy, happy, and is a great way to help you relax.

Key Takeaways

- Parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and balance in writing by using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas.
- Faulty parallelism occurs when elements of a sentence are not balanced, causing the sentence to sound clunky and awkward.
- Parallelism may be created by connecting two clauses or making a list using coordinating conjunctions; by comparing two items using *than* or *as*; or by connecting two parts of a sentence using correlative conjunctions.

5.3: Parallelism is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- 7.3: Parallelism by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/>.

5.4: Writing Conclusions

Studies have shown that the human brain is more likely to remember items at the beginnings and ends of lists, presentations, and other texts. When people recall the last thing they read or hear, that's called the "recency effect" because they're remembering the most recent information they've encountered ("Recency Effect"). This is why the last thing you write is so important. It's your final chance to make an impression on your readers.

What Is the Purpose of a Conclusion?

Conclusions have two jobs:

- Leave readers with something to think about.
- Clarify why your topic matters to them and the larger community (whether that be the class, their neighborhood or the whole wide world).

Sometimes the conclusion is called the "So what?" section of the text because it helps readers understand the significance of your subject.

What Techniques Keep Readers Thinking about the Topic at the End of a Piece of Writing?

Funny enough, some of the same methods that work for the introduction also work for the conclusion. However, the formula is a little different.

Formula

A good conclusion = a call to action and/or a connection between the topic and the reader. In other words, because you're trying to end your piece, you don't want to start making new claims or sharing new research. Instead, you'll want to help readers see how they relate to your subject matter. Sometimes this means suggesting that the reader do something specific. That's a call to action. You can also end by raising questions related to your topic or by making suggestions for how this topic may develop in the future. Leaving readers with interesting ideas to think about is key to a successful conclusion.

Methods

The following are some methods and examples for concluding an essay and giving your readers a sense of closure or an idea of what you would like them to think about or do next.

Method: Make a call to action. The goal of a call to action is to prompt readers to do something.

✓ Example 5.4.1:

Citizens who agree that music education should be a part of all public schools in the United States can make a difference by writing their representatives, going to a school board meeting, and when a ballot initiative comes around, voting to fund music education.

Method: Ask a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is meant to make people think, but not necessarily come to an answer. Often, the answer to rhetorical questions is clear right away, but the deeper significance needs to be pondered.

✓ Example 5.4.2:

Should schools in the U.S. be concerned with the kind of emotional and cognitive development that music education prompts? If we're interested in educating the whole child, not just the most academic parts of the brain, then the answer is yes, and we have to reconsider our priorities when it comes to school funding.

Method: Share an anecdote or story that will keep the issue in the forefront of the readers' minds. An interesting snapshot of someone's life or story about an intriguing character will help humanize the topic and help the readers remember your message. If you used an anecdote or story in the introduction, this is an opportunity to reconnect with that at the end of your piece.

✓ Example 5.4.3:

Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of the hit Broadway musical *Hamilton*, says that arts education saved his life. He went to an elementary school where the sixth grade put on a famous play every year—everything from *Fiddler on the Roof* to *The Wizard of Oz*—but by the time Miranda’s class was in sixth grade, the teachers had run out of plays appropriate for children, so they had the sixth graders write their own musicals in addition to performing all the musicals from the previous years. That four-hour-long musical extravaganza was Miranda’s first experience of writing and acting in his own production (Raskauskas). The opportunity that his teachers provided him turned into a lifelong passion. All students should have that same opportunity to connect with the arts in meaningful ways.

(For more of Miranda’s story, see the WFMT article, “[Arts Education Saved My Life.](#)”)

Method: Share a quote by an expert or historical figure. Choose a quote from someone who is well known in a relevant field and who has expertise on your topic. This will lend your conclusion credibility and leave readers with something powerful to consider.

✓ Example 5.4.4:

As Oliver Sacks notes in his book *Musicophilia*, “Rhythm and its entrainment of movement (and often emotion), its power to ‘move’ people, in both senses of the word, may well have had a crucial cultural and economic function in human evolution, bringing people together, producing a sense of collectivity and community” (268). Our schools aim to foster that same sense of community, which is why music must be part of a well rounded education.

Exercise: Good or Bad Conclusion?



Figure 5.4.1

One way to improve your conclusion-writing skills is to look at different choices that other writers make when concluding a topic and to consider what feels satisfying or thought-provoking to you as a reader and what doesn’t. Read the conclusions below about teenagers and decision making. Which ones pull you in? Which ones are less interesting? What’s the difference? Work with peers to decide.

1. Should teens be given complete freedom? Probably not, but a measured level of responsibility helps kids of all ages learn to trust themselves to make good decisions. This is especially important for teens since they will be adults very soon.
2. Parents who want to teach their teenagers to be responsible decision makers can start by talking to their teens regularly about the kinds of decisions their teens are being faced with and allowing teens to make decisions about anything that won’t put them in immediate danger. This may be difficult at first, but the reward will come when parents see their teens feeling more confident in the face of difficult decisions and more ready to face the adult world.
3. As stated above, research shows that the teenage brain isn’t fully matured, so adults should consider this when deciding how much freedom to give them.
4. According to the AACAP, teens are more likely to make decisions based on emotions without thinking first. This means they’re more likely to “engage in dangerous or risky behavior.” Therefore, teens need to be protected until they’re old enough to make thoughtful decisions.
5. Now that Rachael has been given the freedom to make some big decisions in her life, she’s more willing to talk to her parents when she needs advice or isn’t sure about something. Even though she sometimes makes mistakes, her parents trust that she will learn important lessons from those mistakes, and they help her feel supported when she experiences a failure. Raising a teenager isn’t easy, but this family has found a method that’s working for this particular teen.

Exercise: Write a Conclusion



Figure 5.4.2

Now that you've had an opportunity to think about some different approaches and techniques for writing conclusions, let's practice. Find an entry in your journal or a draft of a piece of writing you're working on this term and use what you've learned in this section to write a compelling conclusion to your piece.

If you don't currently have a piece to work with, you can write a conclusion using one of the scenarios below. Read through the following list and choose one. Then, practice writing a concluding statement or paragraph on the topic. One to three sentences is enough.

1. Persuade your local school board members that the elementary school should change the way it teaches sex education.
2. Persuade teens to travel to a foreign country before they graduate from college.
3. Give some tips to new parents that will help lower their stress and make their new baby feel safe and loved.
4. Inform young athletes who may want to play football of the possible risks and benefits.
5. Review a movie, book, product, or trip for someone thinking of making one of these purchases to help them decide that they should or shouldn't do it.

Share your conclusion with your classmates and discuss what about it is effective and how it could be improved.

See the discussion about "Writing Endings" in the "[Writing a First Draft](#)" section of the "Drafting" portion of this text for more on writing conclusions as part of your drafting process.

5.4: [Writing Conclusions](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **2.4.9: Writing Conclusions** by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/>.

5.5: Paraphrasing



Figure 5.5.1

Paraphrasing is another way of presenting ideas from source material in your own words, but without the condensing that happens in a summary. Instead, paraphrases stay approximately the same length as the original source material being paraphrased.

Why paraphrase?

To Demonstrate Understanding

Paraphrasing can demonstrate your understanding of a text, including its more complex details and connections between its main points, and can also help you double-check the depth of your understanding of a text.

To Provide Support

You might paraphrase a section from a source (unlike summary, it is unlikely that you will ever need to paraphrase an entire source) when an idea or point in that source is important to an assignment you are working on and you feel it needs to be included, but you can rephrase it in a way that fits your work without losing any key information.



Use paraphrase instead of direct quote unless you have compelling reasons to preserve the exact language of the original text. Often, the reason to preserve the original text in a direct quote is because that text uses specialized language that you can't easily rephrase. As much of your work as possible should be in your own voice.

For example, let's look at the last paragraph of the *Scientific American* article (found at www.scientificamerican.com) "[Are you a Magnet for Mosquitoes?](#)," about why mosquitoes are more attracted to some humans than others. The sentence, "Scientists that study human odors and genetics have previously suggested scent cues associated with genetics are likely controlled via the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes" could be a good candidate for a direct quote because I wouldn't know how to paraphrase the part about MHC genes.

The sentence that follows, though, says this:

"Those genes appear to play a role in odor production and also in mammals' mating choices—because humans and mice alike appear to prefer mates that smell less similar to themselves, which scientists have theorized may be a natural control against inbreeding."

Since there isn't particularly specialized or original language in here that must be preserved, this second sentence is a good candidate for paraphrase. One way (of many possibilities!) this might look is like this:

These same genes that might be attracting mosquitoes more to some of us than to others could also be helping us choose partners that we aren't likely to be related to.

What Makes Something a Paraphrase?

A paraphrase

- Is in your own words.
- Is not condensed.
- Avoids personal opinion.

- Is completely rephrased from the original.

Like summary, a paraphrase is someone else's ideas rewritten in your own words. Unlike summary, though, paraphrase should not be condensed—the ideas as you write them should take up about the same amount of space as they do in the original text. A paraphrase should not include your own opinions about the topic, what the author of the text is saying about it, or how that author is presenting their point

It can be easy, when writing a paraphrase, to rely on some of the original author's phrasing or direct synonyms for the author's original words. Remember that a paraphrase must be entirely your own writing, not just phrases or words substituted in the same sentence structure, length, etc. used by the original text. Write paraphrases in sentence structures that are natural to you and true to your own writing voice. The only job of a paraphrase is to accurately and completely represent the relevant idea presented in the text you are paraphrasing.

How Should I Organize a Paraphrase?

It is not likely that you will encounter an assignment that solely requires you to paraphrase a text. Instead, you will use paraphrase to support your own points and ideas in work with a wide range of goals. That said, there are still some guidelines for incorporating paraphrase into your work:

- Introduce the author and original text, just as you would for a summary.
- If there is relevant context, mention that as well.
- Then, restate the part of the original text that you want to use *into your own original language and sentence structures*.
- Include a parenthetical citation (if appropriate) at the end of the paraphrased material. (To learn how to do this correctly, see the discussion of in-text citation in “[Crediting and Citing Your Sources](#),” part of the “Using Sources Correctly” section of this text.)
- After delivering and citing the paraphrased material, reconnect that information to your own topic and point.

Check Your Understanding: Creating a Paraphrase

Here is a brief passage from Sarah Boxer's article in The Atlantic, “[An Artist for the Instagram Age](#)”: “The fact that some folks have managed to make the scene while others get left out in the cold is integral to the excitement of participatory art. The thrill is akin to exotic travel, or getting to see Hamilton. Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs.”

Which of the following is an appropriate paraphrase of this passage? Why is that one “good” and the other one less functional as a paraphrase?

1. The truth that many people have been able to attend these events as others have been shut out of them is key to what makes this kind of art appealing. The excitement is similar to visiting foreign countries or attending a showing of a sold-out musical. Since some people who wish to attend can't do so, these art forms, despite not necessarily wanting to, often end up denying access to many would-be attendees.
2. Boxer notes that this kind of art only maintains its appeal as long as there are more people clamoring to view it than can possibly actually view it. This reliance on scarcity means these artists are ultimately relying on elitist principles to find their success and remain in demand.

See the Appendix, Results for the “Check Your Understanding” Activities, for answers.

5.5: [Paraphrasing](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **2.4.11: Paraphrasing** by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/>.

5.6: Quoting

A quotation (sometimes called a direct quotation) is when you use the exact language from a source and place that language into your own paper. This is significantly different from both paraphrase and summary, as you do not rephrase any part of the original language into your own words—in fact, it is important when directly quoting a source to be careful to exactly copy the source’s original language word for word.

Why Quote?

- To retain the powerful, specialized, or unique language of the original
- To demonstrate authority
- To present an opposing view

If the original text is phrased in a way that is particularly powerful and paraphrasing it would be likely to weaken it, direct quotation is a good option. This is also true when the language of the original source is so special or unique that it can’t be reasonably rephrased.

Direct quotation can demonstrate that existing authoritative sources support a point you are making. It can also present an opposing view to your own for you to then discuss. It can be useful to present opposing views as direct quotes to avoid the risk of personal bias affecting the language of a paraphrase.

Why It’s Important to Limit Quotes

It is generally a good idea to limit quotes—don’t rely too heavily on them in a paper. Remember that most of your paper should be in your own words and in your own voice. It’s also a good rule of thumb to avoid using unnecessarily long quotes. If a quote is longer than a sentence or two, it is a good idea to examine whether the full quote is needed or if a summary, paraphrase, or just part of the quote would do the job you need done.

If you do find you need to use only part of a quote, it is very important to make sure that the part of the quote you are using doesn’t change the meaning of the quote. Be careful to retain the parts of the quote that accurately represent what the author was originally saying.

How Should I Organize a Quote?

Like paraphrase, quotation will only play a supporting role in your written work. Many of the guidelines for incorporating quotation into your written work will look familiar if you have already read the summary and paraphrase sections of this text, but quotation does have some special rules.

Introduce

Introduce the author and original text (and potentially context), just as you would for a summary or paraphrase. Often this introduction is only an introductory phrase, in which case it would be followed by a comma and the quote would begin immediately after this phrase as part of the same sentence. Example: According to Amelia Smith, a researcher affiliated with Harvard, “[insert quote here].”

Deliver

After introducing the author and text, you will deliver the quote. This is often as simple as copying and pasting the relevant material from the original text. Direct quotes need to have quotation marks (“”) around them, the first quotation mark just before the first word of the quote and the end quotation mark just after the last word of the quote.

The only exception to the requirement of quotation marks is when using a block quote. A block quote is quoted material that takes up space on four or more consecutive lines of your paper. This kind of quote has a significantly different set of formatting rules, but should also be used very sparingly because it takes up so much valuable space in your paper. If you’re interested in learning more about what block quotes do differently, have a look at the “[MLA Formatting Quotations](#)” article from the Purdue OWL (at owl.english.purdue.edu); scroll down a bit to find the section titled “Long Quotations”.

Cite

Include a parenthetical citation (if appropriate) at the end of the quote. (To learn how to do this correctly, see the discussion of in-text citation in “[Crediting and Citing Your Sources](#),” part of the “Using Sources Correctly” section of this text.)

Reconnect

After delivering and citing the quote, reconnect that information to your own topic and point.

Check Your Understanding: Work with Quotation

What the reconnection component of using a quote looks like is going to vary depending on the type of essay you're writing, your intended audience, and how you're presenting the information to that audience. Introduction, delivery, and citation tend to look pretty similar regardless of those factors, so let's practice those components here.

Using [the same article](#) as in the "[Paraphrasing](#)" section (see the section just before this one), written by Sarah Boxer and published online in *The Atlantic*, I'm going to quote just the third sentence of the passage we looked at in the paraphrasing activity: "Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs."

Which of these uses of that sentence would be a correct way to use it as a quote in my own essay? There may be more than one correct answer.

1. As Sarah Boxer observes in her article about Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrors" exhibit, "Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs."
2. Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs (Boxer).
3. Carrying these ideas into the art world, Sarah Boxer notes, "everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience... their intentions and messages are democratic."
4. One article published recently in *The Atlantic* addresses this directly, stating, "Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs" (Boxer).
5. "Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs."

See the Appendix, Results for the "Check Your Understanding" Activities, for answers.

5.6: [Quoting](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **2.4.12: Quoting** by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/>.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Multilingual Writers

6: Multilingual Writers is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

Index

P

prewriting

[2: Writing Process](#)

T

thesis statement

[3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement](#)

Detailed Licensing

Overview

Title: LACC Writing Handbook

Webpages: 49

Applicable Restrictions: Noncommercial

All licenses found:

- [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#): 98% (48 pages)
- [Undeclared](#): 2% (1 page)

By Page

- [LACC Writing Handbook - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Front Matter - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [TitlePage - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [InfoPage - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Table of Contents - Undeclared](#)
 - [Licensing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1: Reading Skills - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.1: The Reading-Writing Connection - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.2: Main Ideas and Supporting Details - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.3: Pre-reading Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.4: Annotation Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.5: Note-Taking Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.6: Questioning Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.7: Vocabulary Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2: Writing Process - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.1: The Reading-Writing Process - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.2: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.3: Prewriting Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.4: Outlining - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.5: Drafting - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.6: Revising and Editing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3: Essay Essentials - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.1: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.2: Argument - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.3: Paraphrasing and Summarizing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.4: Writing a Thesis - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.5: Elements of a Thesis - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.6: Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.7: Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4: Writing Basics - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.1: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.2: The Three-story Thesis- From the Ground Up - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.3: Three-story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.4: Exercises - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.5: Verb Tense - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.6: Passive and Active Voice - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.7: Run-ons, Fragments, Comma Splices - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5: Sentence Clarity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.1: Sentence Variety - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.2: Coordination and Subordination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.3: Parallelism - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.4: Writing Conclusions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.5: Paraphrasing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.6: Quoting - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6: Multilingual Writers - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Back Matter - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Index - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Glossary - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Detailed Licensing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)