

ACADEMIC WRITING FOR FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS



Mary Jo M. Keiter

HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community
College

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Students

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Licensing

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: College Success Skills

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to achieve the following after reading this chapter:

- Understand the habits, behaviors, mindsets, perspectives and overall college success skills students need to practice to achieve academic goals.
- Use skills to communicate effectively, proactively, diplomatically, professionally, and in a timely manner with instructors and peers.
- Understand the top nine intellectual standards for quality thinking, speaking, and writing and apply them to college studies.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the differences between “growth” and “fixed” mindsets and of how to apply the growth mindset for greater college success.

[1.1: Introduction](#)

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1.1: Introduction

A Student's Story

Josh started college after being injured while working in construction. He hoped to earn a teaching degree and to work in a career that fit his family life. He thought that, given his past job—rising at an early hour, arriving on time, and working hard throughout an 8- to 10-hour day—he would find it easy to take on a full-time schedule of classes at the local community college. However, as the semester began, he struggled to maintain his weekly one-hour physical therapy appointments on top of 15 hours per week in the classroom, 5 hours per week of commuting to and from college, 25–36 hours per week of reading and studying for quizzes and class discussions, and still taking care of family and personal needs. He lost hours of sleep and found it difficult to stay awake in classes.

He considered dropping a course and decided to see his academic counselor. She took great care to speak with Josh about college success skills, starting with creating and adhering to a manageable schedule that would ensure that he had time for effective studying, for his personal needs, and especially for his family—the people for whom he had committed himself to earning a degree and becoming a teacher.

It's important for students like Josh to know that they are not alone in dealing with these kinds of challenges and frustrations. Not only is he in similar company with other adult students (i.e., who are either returning to college or have decided to change paths and start their college career with the professional world in mind), but also with many college freshmen just out of high school (i.e., who are just beginning the academic transition from high school). Regardless of a student's situation, each needs to develop specific behaviors, habits, and mindsets to succeed in college-level courses and to successfully earn the degree desired.

Students must learn the art of balance. Balancing life with one's college career is challenging, but so is balancing life as an adult. If students value working in their desired careers, the college effort is worth the career rewards, along with the many subsequent benefits accrued over a lifetime. As former First Lady Michelle Obama said when she reminded students of the true and eternal value of taking academic strides:

There is nothing that any of you can't do. This is what you have to do. You have to stay in school. You have to. You have to go to college. You have to get your degree [because]...the one thing people can't take away from you is your education. And it is worth the investment. So stay focused. (Obama, pars. 33-34)

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1.2: College Success Skills

It's About Time: Attendance and "Presence"

In elementary school, children are reminded to “stay on task” and focus on classroom activities. But college students often need to remind themselves of this as well—to maintain focus and develop the set of skills needed to help them find success in college and achieve their dreams.

College students are expected to demonstrate independence, responsibility, and relationship-building skills. While elementary-school students are dropped off and picked up from school by adults, college students are now the adults and are on their own. Adults make decisions about being early or on time to classes and meetings; balancing the shifting priorities of home life, work life, and school life; and reaching their destinations even when their cars won't start.

For college freshmen, whatever their age, the first year in college is a big transition and a learning experience in itself. Many students find themselves unable to catch up after missing even a single class. Class time is learning time.

In every class session, instructors cover course content, and students are invited (and expected) to think about the information, take notes, and participate in class discussions. Instructors, regardless of the level and subject they teach, want their students to learn things of value and that extend beyond the classroom and grade into the professional and the wider world. Most instructors put concerted and contemplative time and effort into what will become their teaching time, so they expect students to be in class to gain all they can.

However, sometimes students are absent when unforeseen events and challenges occur. So from the very first day of a student's college career, the student needs to be courageous and conscientious, to contact instructors and proactively notify them in advance of every absence, to express regret, and to show a commitment to moving forward. This is particularly critical if colleges use an automatic drop or withdrawal system that cancels students' registration if they are absent for two straight weeks.

Whether via email, phone call, text, or even in person, students should notify all their instructors about any potential missed day of class. Regardless of the notification method, students shouldn't ask what they missed. For example, in the email text below, line 3 is a faux pas.

1 Good afternoon, Professor McKenna.

2 I had a family emergency today and was unable to make it to campus.

3 Did I miss anything important? If so, is there a time I could meet with you?

4 I look forward to your response.

5 Josh McDonald

6 English 100, Section 006, Tuesday & Thursday, 3:00 p.m.–4:15 p.m.

7 Cell: 777-123-4567

Students can be certain that “something important” was definitely covered that day in class and that it's not the instructor's responsibility to teach it twice; however, reaching out with a politely worded email shows interest and responsibility on the student's part.

Absences and Connecting to Help Each Other Recover Time Lost

It's the student's responsibility to connect with the class community and find out what she or he missed. Early in the semester, students should make acquaintance with at least one classmate, exchange contact information, and agree to share important information with each other if one is absent. It's important. Whenever students are absent for any amount of time in class, they have lost important instructional time and content.

Attending and being fully present involves making a commitment of time. Students and instructors also commit to each other—students to students, students to instructors, and instructors to students. Class is time for mutual respect, thoughtfulness, and kindness. Students should aim to build a sense of community and belonging. They should enter the classroom each day with a positive outlook. It's not always easy; sometimes it's nearly impossible. But when things are difficult, a community cares for its members. All colleges are communities filled with people and programs to help students get the assistance and guidance they need.

Absences, Deadlines, Tardies, Leaving Early

Within some academic programs or courses, even one absence may result in failing the course. In general, college students must be aware of the attendance policies (i.e., policies regarding absences, tardies, and “leaving early”) indicated within each course syllabus and the college or university catalog. Double-check the syllabus for each course every semester of college. Students who know they will be absent should always contact instructors ahead of time (i.e., a month, a week, a day, or an hour before class), depending on the policies..

A missed class does not necessarily change a due date for an assignment. Students should read the course syllabus and know their instructor’s policies for absences and late work. For example, if a student misses three classes without any reasonable explanations, notifications, or formal paperwork, what happens to the overall course grade? Students should know the answer after the first day of class.

Tardiness is equivalent to absence. Critically important activities often happen during the first few minutes of class, including the taking of attendance. Some instructors will count all tardies as absences and/or deduct points for each tardy.

Leaving early is the same thing as being absent. Some students mistakenly assume that “arriving” means “attending” class and that it’s okay to leave class early at any time. It’s not okay. Even when students think their instructors don’t notice students leaving, instructors and assistants pay attention. Students not present in class could likely miss out on essential course content. However, leaving a class early may be acceptable in extenuating circumstances if a student requests permission and if the instructor approves.

Speaking of “presence,” students must be physically, psychologically, and intellectually present in class each period to learn everything they possibly can.

Don’t Let Electronic Devices Steal Time and Attendance

The student scrolling through websites unrelated to class content or completing homework for another course isn’t completely present nor attending to task. Such students sometimes fail their courses because it’s hard to truly learn without listening.; active learning occurs through notetaking and participating in class discussion—and it is helpful to turn off devices that distract and steal attention. If information about cellphones and other devices isn’t in the syllabus, ask or take cues from the instructor and from other students during the first couple of days of class.

Some instructors weave the use of electronic devices into their lessons through response and polling programs, which allow students to use their devices to participate in discussions. In addition, many instructors allow and encourage the use of laptops and tablets in class, when appropriate. However, not all instructors and situations allow devices, and some instructors deduct points for cell phone use during class, so students should know the instructor’s preference.

Time Communicating and Attending to Email and Learning Management Systems

Before the semester begins, students would do well to familiarize themselves with their campus email system and respective learning management system (LMS). Instructors and students use their campus LMS in a variety of ways. It’s important for students to ask questions about how instructors will use the LMS and how they wish to be contacted.

The Syllabus: Words to Live By

Syllabi created for college-level courses are likely to be much longer than students have previously encountered. A course syllabus is a multiple-page document that instructors provide to students during the first few days of class. If one stays enrolled in a course, both student and instructor are expected to follow the syllabus, which usually provides the following critically important information:

- Course number, title, schedule, and final exam date and time
- Instructor’s name, contact information, and office hours
- Learning Outcomes/Objectives (LOs) or goals (sometimes called Student Learning Outcomes [SLOs] or Program Learning Outcomes [PLOs], which vary amongst college and universities): Students should highlight these and keep them in mind as a checklist of goals they should meet, concepts they should learn, and skills they should demonstrate over the semester and certainly by the end of the course.
- Required materials (e.g., books, email access, computer access)
- General course tasks
- Course assignments (e.g., homework) and assessments (e.g., quizzes, exams), including formatting of written work

- Daily and/or weekly class schedule
- General course policies (e.g., attendance and participation, academic integrity, grading and late work, and suggested study times per week)
- Campus-wide support services (e.g., a writing center, learning assistance center, counseling center, health clinic, Title IX support center, and LGBTQ+ support center)
- College and university policies, rules, and guidelines

Students should read each syllabus on the first day they receive it so they are clear about all that will be expected of them for the rest of the semester.

Managing Time

It often seems the older people get, the busier their lives become. These days, increasingly more students can't complete a degree without also having to work at least one job. Add family needs into the mix, and it becomes a situation in which time can seem difficult to manage, and responsibilities in life can feel overwhelming. "Overwhelming," in fact, is a word college students often use. College is interesting, fun, exciting, and full of new ideas, and exists as a path to fulfill students' dreams, but it requires time, attention, and energy.

To feel empowered and in control of one's life, students need to proactively manage their time and life—instead of just letting life happen to them. It helps to be clear about expectations, to plan ahead, to stay organized, to anticipate any complications, and to create a schedule that works. It helps to use a planner to organize one's time. Many students benefit from creating a weekly hourly plan. Organizational strategies help maintain control over time.

Staying Organized

Some people seem more organized than others. Regardless, everyone can use strategies that work to make sure that important documents are not misplaced and that the correct essay is emailed to the correct instructor. Students should organize all their syllabi and class materials, keep up with their planners or calendars, maintain checklists of assignments and due dates, schedule study and meeting times between classes and work (i.e., actively and weekly), eat healthfully, plan for self-care (i.e., body, spirit, and mind, including sufficient sleep). Studies increasingly show the importance of sleep to a strong body, mind, and spirit, all of which affect students' ability to succeed.

Using today's technology makes staying organized easy; that's what it's there for. Calendars and software applications on cellphones can be synchronized with other devices. Online calendars can email reminders and ping cell phones so nothing is forgotten or missed.

Making Appointments with Instructors and Keeping Them

Meeting with instructors helps students obtain or process content that is significant for getting the most out of a course, but they also demonstrate a student's interest in the content and commitment to doing well in the class. Students should prepare questions beforehand and be prepared to take notes on anything the instructor offers that seems especially poignant or helpful.

If an appointment is missed, an apology is surely due. But it's important to remember that everyone misses a meeting now and then, and all one can do is apologize and try not to miss a second one.

Be Your Best Reader

Every college course will include student readings. Sometimes they're optional, but most of the time they are meant to either provide the foundation for course content or act as supplemental material. First, students discern how the course reading is meant to be accessed and used. Then, they create their own best practice including looking up, writing down, and memorizing definitions for unclear terms and finding the best places and times to read.

Close Reading

Practicing close reading can help lead toward college success. This means truly engaging with the words on the page and the content being discussed, and, most of the time, that means taking notes.

In the Inc. article "[Here's How Isaac Newton Remembered Everything He Read](#)," author Ilan Mochari explains that not only did Newton dog-ear the corners of pages in the books, he also filled the margins with words of his own . . . even if he had borrowed the book from the library (Mochari). Newton is known for his studies regarding gravity—the epiphanal moment with the falling apple.

But the years of research that brought him to publish *Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687 involved extensive jotting down of ideas as he crafted his genius.

These are some tips for notetaking:

- Use a variety of colored pens and highlighters and, in front of the book, a legend detailing which color represents which kind of notes.
- Take notes on a separate sheet of paper. Students should use methods that work best for them, whether using Cornell notes, informal bulleted notes, or formal outlines with Roman and Arabic numbers and letters.
- Use sticky notes. Again, using a variety of colors is great, and thoughts or questions can be written on the notes versus the pages themselves leaving the book clean thus worth more money in the buyback.

Growth Mindset

In 2007, Dr. Carol Dweck and her team of researchers studied students' attitudes about success and failure. They noticed that some students were able to deal with failure better and rebound relatively quickly while others were crushed by even the smallest of setbacks. Essentially, they determined that students who believe they can become smarter understand that making the effort can get them there. Students who believe that their intelligence is already fixed fear trying in case they prove that they aren't as smart as they think. They aren't interested in working harder. As such, Dweck coined the terms "growth mindset" and "fixed mindset" to describe how people feel about their ability to learn.

Scientists and researchers continue to study human behavior and brain activity, seeking an understanding about how and why humans succeed or fail at their endeavors, be they academic, professional, social, or even romantic. Researchers consider the way habits are formed and can be broken, the reasons for and the effects of growth versus fixed mindsets, and the role of self-discipline in achievement.

In a 2015 interview, a year after her 2014 [TED talk](#), Dweck revisits this concept. She states, "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. . . . The key is to get students to tune in to that growth mindset (Dweck, "Carol Dweck").

The takeaway from Dweck's research and conclusions is important for all college students to consider. Where do they see themselves on the scale? They can think about ways to nurture themselves through challenging times, and reach out to instructors and anyone else who can show them how the "brains," talent, and potential for growth already exists in every individual.

Discussing with Diplomacy

During class, as a way to create meaningful discussions and extract and build knowledge, instructors often ask students to respond to questions and ideas. They may ask questions directly, with students raising their hands to politely take turns speaking. Other times, students will meet in pairs or small groups and even follow up with a whole-group discussion.

That being said, individuals have a variety of comfort zones when speaking in front of others. The fear of speaking in public is the most common fear. The following tips can help students with any level of anxiety (or comfort) during classroom discussions.

- Don't be shy. Most people feel timid. So most people empathize and are thankful someone got the discussion going.
- Don't dominate the conversation. Even if you know all the answers in class, others might too. Give everyone an equal chance to share. One good rule for an eager student to follow is to let at least two people share their ideas before jumping back in.
- Not comfortable sharing an idea? Frame it in the form of a question. Others will perceive it as sharing knowledge. This technique will actually invite further discussion and extend the conversation.

College classrooms should be safe places for learning—hostility-free and honoring open and respectful discourse.

Letters of Recommendation or Reference (LOR): Ask!

Through the course of a student's college career, many situations will arise for which the student might need a letter of recommendation (or "letter of reference"), sometimes referred to as an "LOR." Whether it be for a scholarship, an internship, study abroad, a job, or a graduate program, letters of recommendation, reference, or support are key for students and should be written by someone whom the student appreciates and trusts.

Once a student determines which instructor might be an ideal letter writer, the student should craft a formal email that includes the following elements:

- A pleasant greeting (e.g., “Good afternoon, Professor McKenna.”)
- A sentence of well-wishes. (e.g., “I hope your week is moving along nicely.”)
- An explanation of the email’s purpose (e.g., “I’m writing to you today because I am applying for graduate school, and I would like to see if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me.”)
- An understanding of the instructor’s busy schedule (e.g., “At this point in the semester, I am sure that you have many important responsibilities that require your time.”)
- A sincere wish for their assistance (e.g., “However, if you could possibly find the time to support me with such a letter, I would be sincerely grateful.”)
- A closing line (e.g., “I look forward to your response. Regardless, please know how much I have valued you as a teacher and mentor.”)
- On separate lines: a pleasant closing, student’s full name, course number and title, semester dates and times the student attended the professor’s class (e.g., “With gratitude, Jaden Bennett, English 100, Composition I, Fall 2020, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:30 a.m.–8:45 a.m.”)

If the instructor agrees, it’s good practice to immediately send a follow up email with all important information including letter due dates and the recipient’s name and address, along with any other essential information.

The letter-writer should be contacted at least one week before the letter must be received.

It’s a good idea to deliver a handwritten card of thanks regardless of whether the overall results were as wished.

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1.3: Intellectual Standards for Quality

The word “standard” is used to describe the level of quality that a given item possesses. So an “intellectual standard” is one that measures the overall value of a scholarly effort. Such standards apply to essays, reports, assignments, group discussions, and even notetaking. For overall success, students need to know their professors’ standards and need to develop their own standards, with the concept of “intellectual standards” at the forefront.

There are nine primary intellectual standards to keep in mind: clarity, precision, accuracy, depth, breadth, logic, significance, relevance, and fairness. Keeping a list of these standards (or even using an actual checklist) and applying them to academic thinking, writing, and other scholarly interaction is an excellent way to ensure one’s continued intellectual growth and college and career success.

These standards can help scholars, both students and instructors, form connected and quality ideas (e.g., “critical thinking” or “analysis”) and craft written work (e.g., essays, reports, articles, reflections, and other writing sometimes known as “papers” or “homework”).

Clarity: Do You Get It?

Many of the editorial comments and corrections (e.g., those from peers, mentors, tutors, and professors) shared with students regarding their written work is related to clarity. When an essay is clear, it’s understandable and communicates information to readers with ease. None of the statements are confusing or ambiguous. There aren’t areas within the essay where the meaning is lost due to exaggerated narrative or forced and unnatural word choice. When an essay is clear, readers can follow the path that the writer is communicating. They can read smoothly without stopping to ponder what a word or even an entire sentence means.

Sentence Clarity

Misplaced Modifiers

One way sentences become unclear is when they include misplaced (or dangling) modifiers or vague pronoun references. Here are some examples:

Original: *The sun, as he was surfing, sparkled on the water.*

- In this sentence, the modifying phrase “as he was surfing” is placed where it modifies the sun not the surfer. (i.e., It sounds like the sun is surfing.)
- The sentence also loses clarity because the pronoun “he” is vague.

Revised: *As Kalani surfed, the sun sparkled on the water.*

Missing Punctuation

Punctuation marks can be tricky. However, within the English language, their correct usage is essential to be sure one’s intended meaning is clear. Here’s an example:

Original: *Lets eat Grandma*

- Devoid of punctuation, it seems like Grandma is going to be dinner.
- To clarify, an apostrophe and a comma are needed.

Revised: *Let’s eat, Grandma!*

Punctuation is for the reader, so it’s important that each punctuation mark’s usage is clear and that the writer knows how to use it correctly

Rhetoric: Is Meaning Clear for Everyone?

When words have more than one meaning, using them in a sentence or within an essay can pose problems related to clarity. The word “rhetoric” is one such word. Generally thought of as “the art of speaking or writing effectively,” the word enters many English writing classroom discussions.

Sometimes “rhetoric” is referred to in a negative light, as in the way some people sometimes express themselves using bombastic and hyperbolic words and expressions. The Merriam-Webster dictionary also tells us that rhetoric can be defined as “the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion” or “skill in the effective use of speech.” It can even be simply

considered as “verbal communication” and “discourse” (“Rhetoric,” [Merriam-Webster](#)). So knowing the many definitions for this word is essential for college success because individuals, including instructors, will discuss rhetoric in a variety of ways.

The history of rhetoric is directly connected to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose rhetorical concepts are central for understanding the art of persuasion (also called argumentation) in both speaking and writing. Most high school students may know about logos, ethos, and pathos; however, other rhetorical concepts exist, as described below.

Clarifying Aristotelian Rhetorical Concepts

- **TELOS** is the Greek word indicating the “purpose” of a speech or text. It refers to a writer’s intended purpose as well as to the audience’s purpose as readers who wish to be informed by the writer’s words.
- **KAIROS** translates from Greek to the “right, critical, or opportune” moment, and the term can be used when talking about the persuasion of an audience through writing or speaking. Analyzing the rhetorical techniques of a speech or text through kairos involves determining how the language within a text supports an argument using the setting, time, and place.
- **LOGOS** roughly translates to “word,” and it is consistently used when determining the logic of reasoning within an argument. Some students simplify this concept to mean facts, figures, and statistics, which writers use to appeal to readers’ sense of reason.
- **ETHOS** is Greek for “character,” which speaks to a writer’s authority and expertise. As such, incorporating ethos within an argument establishes the writer as credible. Some students simplify this concept as an “ethical appeal” or the traits of trustworthiness or credibility.
- **PATHOS** is the Greek word indicating not only “suffering” but also “experience,” and it is related to feelings, beliefs, and values, sometimes simplified as an “emotional appeal.” When authors use pathos as a writing technique, they are appealing to readers’ emotions, beliefs, and values.
- **BATHOS** in Greek roughly means “depth,” but it has evolved to address an anticlimactic situation when there is a sudden appearance of the commonplace or boring during what was otherwise serious or exciting. In modern times, the technique of bathos is often used for humorous effects in comedy, using ridiculous metaphors, figures of speech, language, and ideas.

Precision: Is It “En Pointe”?

Precision with language is critical for true understanding. For written work to be precise, it must be sufficiently detailed and what some today call “en pointe”—a term that is drawn from the realm of ballet and is French for dancing precisely on one’s toes. Precision in the English language can be tricky, as English is a polyglot language (made up of multiple languages) which is fluid and constantly evolving and, like a fluid, changes shape depending on the container or context. For example, etymologists (who study words and their origins) track the term “on point”—which has become common on social media and the English vernacular—to the French “en pointe.” Today, the phrase “on point” is commonly used, with few people aware of its more precise spelling and use in ballet.

Precision within writing demands that words are not only spelled correctly but that their meanings are also clear and that the words are not overused.

Punctuation needs to be used in a manner that follows standard rules, and ideas must be expressed in ways that are direct while still allowing for the writer to perform with skill and artistry.

Writing with precision at the college level entails researching, reading, and evaluating, and studying to understand information in greater detail and depth. For example, the previous explanation of rhetorical concepts is a college-level understanding that goes beyond the high-school triad of pathos, ethos, and logos, but there are more detailed and deeper readings and discussions about rhetoric in upper-level college and graduate-level courses.

Accuracy: Is It Correct? Is It True?

Accuracy is the difference between “en pointe” and “on point,” between “resume” and “résumé,” and between “aina” and “āina.” It’s the subtleties that make all the difference. For example, English language speakers can resume (or pick up) where they left off. In French, the word “résumé” is a short, employment-related document detailing one’s education, work history, and job and people skills.

But today, the French meaning has become part of the English vernacular, and the accent marks are often omitted while the word retains its dual meaning. Using older technology, writers sometimes were unable to include the French accent marks. Today, software often automatically will add them for precise, accurate spelling.

In Hawai‘i, the popular expression “mālama āina” encourages people to take care of the earth. Because the Hawaiian alphabet includes the glottal stop (or ‘okina [‘], a consonant) and long vowels indicated by the macron (or kahakō, the line above long vowels), omitting or changing the letters of the alphabet changes the meanings of words just as they do in English (e.g., “red,” “read,” and “bed” have different meanings based on letters used or omitted).

Accuracy in spelling in any language is essential. For example, in Hawaiian, the word “‘āina” (with the ‘okina and kahakō for the long ā) means “land,” but “‘aina” (with just the initial ‘okina) means “meal” (among other things), and “aina” (without either of the marks necessary to accurately form two of the Hawaiian alphabets) means “sexual intercourse.” The glottal stop and the macron are important marks forming complete letters within the Hawaiian alphabet, just as any English word relies on every necessary marking (as in the line that forms a “t” and, if omitted is an “l” or the number “one”). Clearly, accuracy is important across the world’s languages.

As scholars and writers across the world become more globally aware, they grow more accurate in the use of others’ languages. Students who are developing their expertise and college success skills also grow more aware of the importance of accuracy, not only when it comes to spelling, punctuation, and word usage, but also grammar, syntax, and conducting research within and outside of their respective disciplines.

Depth: Is It Sufficiently Complex?

When writing or speech is deep, it covers the complexity of a topic. It doesn’t skim the surface. It dives deeply into the profound knowledge and substantial understanding of a topic. For example, a list explaining rhetoric as made up of three concepts (logos, ethos, and pathos) is not as deep and complex as a list showing six concepts (the three plus bathos, telos, and kairos) or even longer lists with deeper descriptions and definitions. In another example, students progress from one-page book reports in elementary school to deeper, comparative, and analytical essays in college.

When analyzing the depth of any essay, including their own essays and those of their peers, students can ask these types of questions:

- How deeply does this essay go into its topic?
- Is it detailed enough?
- Did it go far enough into the research and reviews of other texts to demonstrate a deep knowledge about the subject?
- How thoroughly have specific subtopics within a major been researched?

Breadth: Are All Views Considered?

Breadth is how broad or wide a topic has been discussed in writing or in speech. For example, to attain breadth in a persuasive essay, a writer must consider not only one point of view, but all the multiple major perspectives about an issue. Breadth also entails considering multiple contexts of an issue and multiple analytical approaches to solving a problem.

Breadth means reading more than a handful of articles supporting one side of an issue; it means reading more articles supporting various perspectives so the writer can truly understand all viewpoints about the issue and can discuss the issue with breadth that builds a deeper understanding and fairness. When analyzing the breadth of any essay, students and instructors ask questions such as the following:

- Is the content of an essay sufficiently comprehensive enough to cover a wide range of perspectives and angles on a given topic?
- Is anything missing that should be included in the scope of the topic and which would help the essay achieve enough breadth?
- Has the opposing view (i.e., the “naysayer’s” perspective) been explored so as to strengthen the writer’s own argument? (This consideration is particularly key in the development of a fully supported and wisely composed persuasive or argumentative essay.)
- What has not yet been considered to make this idea or essay complete?

Logic: Does It All Make Sense?

For students to create valid arguments through essays or other written works that are meant to be persuasive, they must use accurate reasoning and avoid logical fallacies. Fallacies are arguments that use faulty reasoning, thus making them illogical. If text makes a reader stop and think, “Wait. What?” it may mean the writer needs to work on logic.

Logic exists as the essence of philosophy, mathematics, computer programming, computer science, and most other science and technology disciplines. It requires step-by-step thinking and progression in order to design a machine that works or to research and write a report worthy of submission for potential publication.

When analyzing the logic of any text, students and instructors ask questions such as the following:

- Does a sentence, paragraph, or argument make sense?
- Does one point follow another point with reason and connected ideas and transitions, rather than jumping from point A to point Z without sufficient explanation of how they are related?
- Are all assertions fortified by sufficient evidence?
- Does all data collected, whether determined as relevant or not, follow a logical approach?

Significance: Does It Matter?

The intellectual standard of significance indicates the importance and weight of a topic or point and is connected to logic and depth. For example, the deeper, broader definition of “rhetoric” from the Aristotelian perspective is more significant than the everyday, newspaper use of the word.

Significance is related to the level of importance of one thing in relation to the grander scheme of things and to the additional standards of priority and value. For example, students might write about an 18-year-old person’s right to drink alcohol, but that essay would be less significant than essays about increased drunk-driving-related fatalities in the community. Some 18 year olds might argue that, if they can be drafted into the military and be required to go to war, they should have the right to drink. However, the other side of the argument asserts the right of people of all ages to travel safely on the roads, and holding back on allowing hundreds more individuals from potentially driving drunk has more weight.

When analyzing the significance of any document, students and instructors ask questions such as the following:

- Is the information important enough to include?
- Does the information answer the question asked in an assignment?
- What key points are most important for writers to include and for readers to consider?
- Is this topic important in relation to other topics in the same subject area?
- What’s the most important thing to focus on?
- Is this topic worth the writer’s time researching and the reader’s time reading?
- Would there be enough readers interested in this topic?
- So what? Why is a topic or point more important than another topic or point?

Relevance: Is It Essential to the Main Idea?

If paragraphs in an essay are relevant, they are related to the main topic and help support the main idea with additional, related, relevant details and evidence. If paragraphs are irrelevant, a reader might think, “Wait. What? How is this on topic?”

If, for example, an essay begins by stating that government officials should take five major actions to solve the issue of homelessness in Hawai‘i, but then the majority of the body paragraphs wander into opinions focused on the history of governmental decision-making in the islands for decades, a reader might feel lost and wonder how much of the content of the essay is related to solving homelessness in Hawai‘i.

When analyzing the relevance of any essay, students and instructors ask questions such as the following:

- Does this point help readers understand the main issue?
- Does this essay focus on the assignment question or prompt?
- Does it answer the main question?
- If this paragraph is slightly off-topic, what can be done to refocus it so that it does its job in supporting the main idea in the thesis statement?
- If a point is confusing readers who don’t understand how it’s related to the main idea, does it belong in this essay?

Fairness: Is It Objective and Judicious?

The word “fair” is often used synonymously with “just” or “judicious” and is related to “justice.” Especially in essays that are meant to persuade through logical argumentation, topics and points of view (POVs or “perspectives”) need to be treated fairly and diplomatically. A fair, even-handed treatment doesn’t necessarily mean agreeing to opposing (or “naysayer’s”) POVs, but strong, college-level writing must acknowledge the opposing POVs, then must either accommodate or refute them. For example, an essay may state, “The opponents have valid points regarding X and Y. They are right about this and that. However, they are inaccurate about this specific point about X, and their argument doesn’t negate A and B, which remains the most accurate ideas and still strongly support this argument.”

When analyzing the fairness of any essay, students and instructors ask questions such as the following:

- Does the writer of this essay exhibit the ability to fairly assess the viewpoints of others, even opposing viewpoints?
- Are there any fallacies, such as ad hominem that unfairly label opponents rather than speak directly and precisely about the opposing argument or POV itself? (Note: The term “ad hominem” is short for “argumentum ad hominem” and is a fallacious argumentative strategy whereby genuine discussion of the topic at hand is avoided by instead attacking the character, motive, or other attribute of the person making the argument, or persons associated with the argument, rather than attacking the substance of the argument itself.)
- Does the writer or speaker have a conflict of interest? Does that conflict of interest appear as bias in the text? Given today’s political scene and questionable statements by government officials, this question may bear more significance.

Apply the Intellectual Standards to Studying and Writing

Students and instructors in colleges and the universities often consider the quality of their own and others’ work by applying the concepts of intellectual standards, whether or not they are aware of them or have had them articulated for them. Scholarship is evaluated for quality in terms of clarity, precision, accuracy, depth, breadth, logic, significance, relevance, and fairness. Successful college-level studying involves reading, annotating, writing, discussing, and analyzing information and involves practicing skills to apply new knowledge, all of which result in learning and building expertise. Writing to communicate, writing to learn, and writing to demonstrate learning and skills are key skills in college and should demonstrate the mindful application of intellectual standards.

? Activities

1. View and take notes on the video “[The Intellectual Standards: An Introduction](#),” posted by Gary Meegan on April 2, 2014. Review the notes. Then describe and define the nine intellectual standards, using your own (and different and unique) words and phrasing. Then use the nine intellectual standards to evaluate a partner’s personalized descriptions.
2. View the video “[Shot on iPhone XS—Don’t mess with Mother—Apple](#),” posted by the Apple company. Take notes on observations about the visual and audio rhetoric and observations on what the images, movements, music, and words communicate, how they meet intellectual standards, and how they meet the company’s purpose(s) for creating the video.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: The Writing Process

Learning Objectives

- Use prewriting to prepare to write a well-developed college essay.
- Strategically draft, revise, and edit an effective college essay appropriate to the audience and purpose of the assignment.

[2.1: Introduction](#)

[2.2: Prewriting](#)

[2.3: Drafting](#)

[2.4: Revision](#)

[2.5: Editing](#)

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2.1: Introduction

A Student's Story

When Kiana started taking college classes, she brought with her a belief that she was not a very strong writer. This lack of confidence was, unfortunately, developed throughout her K-12 education. In elementary school, she struggled with spelling. In middle school, she found that her vocabulary were embarrassingly limited. In high school, she struggled with what she thought must be writer's block, sitting down to finally write a draft right before it was due, and finding that she could only produce a paragraph before feeling like she had nothing else to say.

As she entered college and enrolled in her first-year writing course, she was anxious about attending a required conference with her instructor, who was meeting with each student to discuss the rough drafts of their first essays. She handed her draft to her instructor knowing that it was far from the required length. Before reading it, he asked her about the process that she had used to write it. Kiana confessed that she had worked on it just the night before.

"Did you do any prewriting?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I just sat down and wrote this."

When Kiana was asked to read her essay aloud, several issues became evident. The overall purpose of her essay was unclear, and the narrative rambled making many points but not developing any of them. The narrative lacked detail in some parts and had too much information in other parts. Throughout the composition, Kiana heard words and phrases that were completely repetitive, and she also used some words awkwardly because she had searched for synonyms that didn't actually work within the context of the sentence.

When she finished reading, her instructor suggested that she avoid directly working on that draft until she had done some prewriting activities that would help her organize her ideas, develop her thesis, and refine and develop her content.

"Don't worry yet about spelling and word choice. First, you need to explore and identify your ideas. Here are some fun, helpful exercises that will help you to do that efficiently. Then, when you come back to drafting, you'll find it goes more quickly. Worry about the mechanics such as your grammar and punctuation after you've written a draft that says what you want to say."

Kiana went home feeling better about getting back on her computer to work on her essay. Once Kiana learned the value of prewriting, drafting, and revision techniques as parts of the writing process, she started to enjoy the writing process a bit more. She was able to avoid the feeling of writer's block, and she found herself feeling more confident as a writer and better able to produce essays that she was proud to submit to her instructors.

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2.2: Prewriting

Prewriting is an essential activity for most writers. Through robust prewriting, writers generate ideas, explore directions, and find their way into their writing. When students attempt to write an essay without developing their ideas, strategizing their desired structure, and focusing on precision with words and phrases, they can end up with a “premature draft”—one that is more writer-based than reader-based and, thus, might not be received by readers in the way the writer intended.

In addition, a lack of prewriting can cause students to experience writer’s block. Writer’s block is the feeling of being stuck when faced with a writing task. It is often caused by fear, anxiety, or a tendency toward perfectionism, but it can be overcome through prewriting activities that allow writers to relax, catch their breath, gather ideas, and gain momentum.

The following exist as the goals of prewriting:

- Contemplating the many possible ideas worth writing about.
- Developing ideas through brainstorming, freewriting, and focused writing.
- Planning the structure of the essay overall so as to have a solid introduction, meaningful body paragraphs, and a purposeful conclusion.

Discovering and Developing Ideas

Quick Prewriting Activities

Quick strategies for developing ideas include brainstorming, freewriting, and focused writing. These activities are done quickly, with a sense of freedom, while writers silence their inner critic. In her book *Wild Mind*, teacher and writer Natalie Goldberg describes this freedom as the “creator hand” freely allowing thoughts to flow onto the page while the “editor hand” remains silent. Sometimes, these techniques are done in a timed situation (usually two to ten minutes), which allows writers to get through the shallow thoughts and dive deeper to access the depths of the mind.

Brainstorming begins with writing down or typing a few words and then filling the page with words and ideas that are related or that seem important without allowing the inner critic to tell the writer if these ideas are acceptable or not. Writers do this quickly and without too much contemplation. Students will know when they are succeeding because the lists are made without stopping.

Freewriting is the “most effective way” to improve one’s writing, according to Peter Elbow, the educator and writer who first coined the term “freewriting” in pivotal book *Writing Without Teachers*, published in 1973. Freewriting is a great technique for loosening up the writing muscle. To freewrite, writers must silence the inner critic and the “editor hand” and allow the “creator hand” a specified amount of time (usually from 10 to 20 minutes) to write nonstop about whatever comes to mind. The goal is to keep the hand moving, the mind contemplating, and the individual writing. If writers feel stuck, they just keep writing “I don’t know what to write” until new ideas form and develop in the mind and flow onto the page.

Focused freewriting entails writing freely—and without stopping, during a limited time—about a specific topic. Once writers are relaxed and exploring freely, they may be surprised about the ideas that emerge.

Researching

Unlike quick prewriting activities, researching is best done slowly and methodically and, depending on the project, can take a considerable amount of time. Researching is exciting, as students activate their curiosity and learn about the topic, developing ideas about the direction of their writing. The goal of researching is to gain background understanding on a topic and to check one’s original ideas against those of experts. However, it is important for the writer to be aware that the process of conducting research can become a trap for procrastinators. Students often feel like researching a topic is the same as doing the assignment, but it’s not.

The two aspects of researching that are often misunderstood are as follows:

1. Writers start the research process too late so the information they find never really becomes their own setting themselves up for way more quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing the words of others than is appropriate for the 70% one’s own words and 30% the words of others ratio necessary for college-level research-based writing.
2. Writers become so involved in the research process that they don’t start the actual writing process soon enough so as to meet a due date with a well written, edited, and revised finished composition.

Being thoughtful about limiting one’s research time—and using a planner of some sort to organize one’s schedule—is a way to keep oneself from starting the research process too late to

See Part V of this book for more information about researching.

Audience and Purpose

It's important that writers identify the audience and the purpose of a piece of writing. To whom is the writer communicating? Why is the writer writing? Students often say they are writing for whomever is grading their work at the end. However, most students will be sharing their writing with peers and reviewers (e.g., writing tutors, peer mentors). The audience of any piece of college writing is, at the very minimum, the class as a whole. As such, it's important for the writer to consider the expertise of the readers, which includes their peers and professors). There are even broader applications. For example, students could even send their college writing to a newspaper or a legislator, or share it online for the purpose of informing or persuading decision-makers to make changes to improve the community. Good writers know their audience and maintain a purpose to mindfully help and intentionally shape their essays for meaning and impact. Students should think beyond their classroom and about how their writing could have an impact on their campus community, their neighborhood, and the wider world.

Planning the Structure of an Essay

Planning Based on Audience and Purpose

Identifying the target audience and purpose of an essay is a critical part of planning the structure and techniques that are best to use. It's important to consider the following:

- Is the the purpose of the essay to educate, announce, entertain, or persuade?
- Who might be interested in the topic of the essay?
- Who would be impacted by the essay or the information within it?
- What does the reader know about this topic?
- What does the reader need to know in order to understand the essay's points?
- What kind of hook is necessary to engage the readers and their interest?
- What level of language is required? Words that are too subject-specific may make the writing difficult to grasp for readers unfamiliar with the topic.
- What is an appropriate tone for the topic? A humorous tone that is suitable for an autobiographical, narrative essay may not work for a more serious, persuasive essay.

Hint: Answers to these questions help the writer to make clear decisions about diction (i.e., the choice of words and phrases), form and organization, and the content of the essay.

Use Audience and Purpose to Plan Language

In many classrooms, students may encounter the concept of language in terms of correct versus incorrect. However, this text approaches language from the perspective of appropriateness. Writers should consider that there are different types of communities, each of which may have different perspectives about what is "appropriate language" and each of which may follow different rules, as John Swales discussed in "The Concept of Discourse Community." Essentially, Swales defines discourse communities as "groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals."

Writers (and readers) may be more familiar with a home community that uses a different language than the language valued by the academic community. For example, many people in Hawai'i speak Hawai'i Creole English (HCE colloquially regarded as "Pidgin"), which is different from academic English. This does not mean that one language is better than another or that one community is homogeneous in terms of language use; most people "code-switch" from one "code" (i.e., language or way of speaking) to another. It helps writers to be aware and to use an intersectional lens to understand that while a community may value certain language practices, there are several types of language practices within our community.

What language practices does the academic discourse community value? The goal of first-year-writing courses is to prepare students to write according to the conventions of academia and Standard American English (SAE). Understanding and adhering to the rules of a different discourse community does not mean that students need to replace or drop their own discourse. They may add to their language repertoire as education continues to transform their experiences with language, both spoken and written. In addition to the linguistic abilities they already possess, they should enhance their academic writing skills for personal growth in order to meet the demands of the working world and to enrich the various communities they belong to.

Use Techniques to Plan Structure

Before writing a first draft, writers find it helpful to begin organizing their ideas into chunks so that they (and readers) can efficiently follow the points as organized in an essay.

First, it's important to decide whether to organize an essay (or even just a paragraph) according to one of the following:

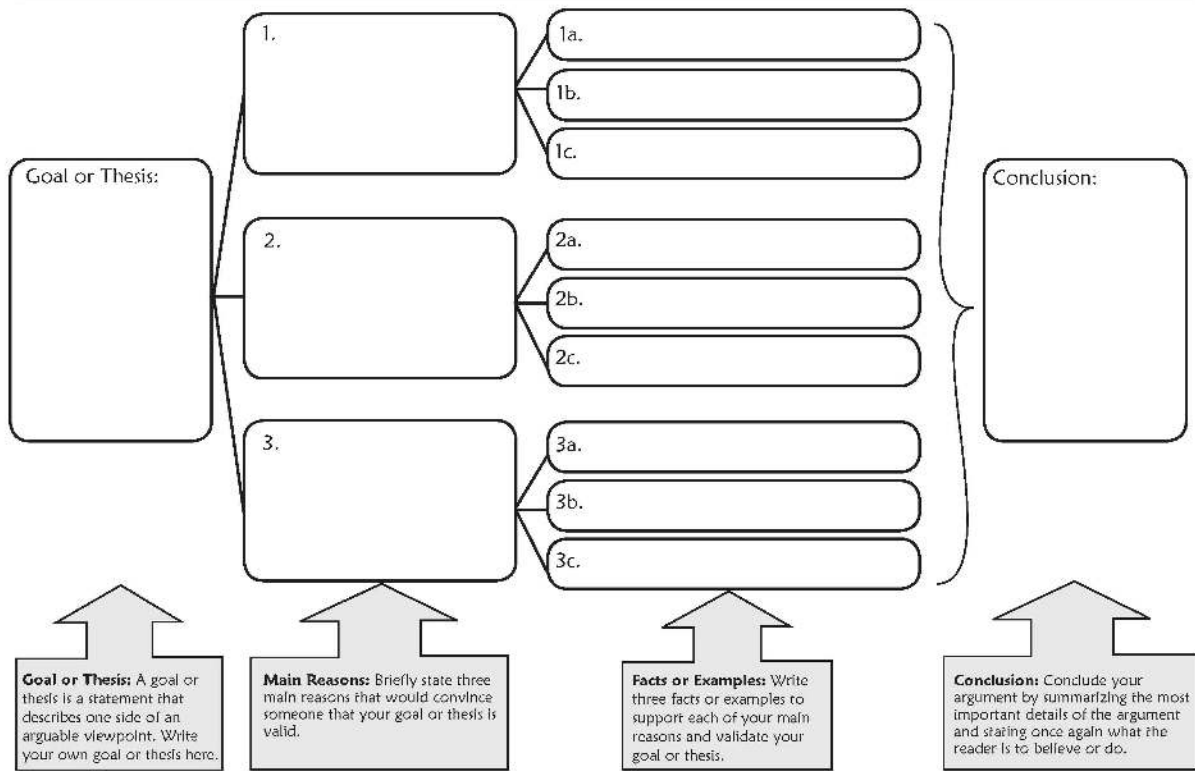
- Chronological order (organized by time)
- Spatial order (organized by physical space from one end to the other)
- Prioritized order (organized by order of importance)

There are many ways to plan an essay's overall structure, including mapping and outlining.

Mapping (which sometimes includes using a graphic organizer) involves organizing the relationships between the topic and other ideas. The following is example (from ReadWriteThink.org, 2013) of a graphic organizer that could be used to write a basic, persuasive essay:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Persuasion Map



The diagram is a Persuasion Map graphic organizer. It features a central column of three boxes labeled 1., 2., and 3. To the left of these boxes is a box labeled 'Goal or Thesis:'. To the right is a box labeled 'Conclusion:'. Each of the three central boxes is connected to three smaller boxes on its right, labeled 1a., 1b., 1c. for the first box, 2a., 2b., 2c. for the second, and 3a., 3b., 3c. for the third. At the bottom, there are four boxes with arrows pointing up to the main sections: 'Goal or Thesis: A goal or thesis is a statement that describes one side of an arguable viewpoint. Write your own goal or thesis here.', 'Main Reasons: Briefly state three main reasons that would convince someone that your goal or thesis is valid.', 'Facts or Examples: Write three facts or examples to support each of your main reasons and validate your goal or thesis.', and 'Conclusion: Conclude your argument by summarizing the most important details of the argument and stating once again what the reader is to believe or do.'

Goal or Thesis:

1.

1a.

1b.

1c.

2.

2a.

2b.

2c.

3.

3a.

3b.

3c.

Conclusion:

Goal or Thesis: A goal or thesis is a statement that describes one side of an arguable viewpoint. Write your own goal or thesis here.

Main Reasons: Briefly state three main reasons that would convince someone that your goal or thesis is valid.

Facts or Examples: Write three facts or examples to support each of your main reasons and validate your goal or thesis.

Conclusion: Conclude your argument by summarizing the most important details of the argument and stating once again what the reader is to believe or do.

readwritethink International Reading Association NCTE Copyright 2013 IRA/NCTE. All rights reserved. ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Persuasion Map. Copyright 2013 IRA/NCTE. All rights reserved. ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Outlining is also an excellent way to plan how to organize an essay. Formal outlines use levels of notes, with Roman numerals for the top level, followed by capital letters, Arabic numerals, and lowercase letters. Here's an example:

1. Introduction

1. Hook/Lead/Opener: According to the Leilani was shocked when a letter from Chicago said her "Aloha Poke" restaurant was infringing on a non-Hawaiian Midwest restaurant that had trademarked the words "aloha" (the Hawaiian word for love,

compassion, mercy, and other things besides serving as a greeting) and “poke” (a Hawaiian dish of raw fish and seasonings).

2. Background information about trademarks, the idea of language as property, the idea of cultural identity, and the question about who owns language and whether it can be owned.
3. Thesis Statement (with the main point and previewing key or supporting points that become the topic sentences of the body paragraphs): While some business people use language and trademarks to turn a profit, the nation should consider that language cannot be owned by any one group or individual and that former (or current) imperialist and colonialist nations must consider the impact of their actions on culture and people groups, and legislators should bar the trademarking of non-English words for the good of internal peace of the country.

2. Body Paragraphs

1. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Some business practices involve co-opting languages for the purpose of profit.

1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Book 1—Supporting Sentences

1. Subpoint

2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Article 1—Supporting Sentences

1. Subpoint

2. Subpoint

2. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Language cannot be owned by any one group or individual.

1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Book 1—Supporting Sentences

1. Subpoint

2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Article 1—Supporting Sentences

1. Subpoint

2. Subpoint

3. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Once (or currently) imperialist and colonialist nations must consider the impact of their actions on culture and people groups.

1. Supporting Detail

1. Subpoint

4. Legislators should bar the trademarking of non-English words for the good and internal peace of the country.

3. Conclusion (Revisit the Hook/Lead/Opener, Restate the Thesis, End with a Twist—a strong more globalized statement about why this topic was important to write about)

Note about outlines: Informal outlines can be created using lists with or without bullets. What is important is that main and subpoint ideas are linked and identified.

? Activities

1. Use 10 minutes to freewrite with the goal to “empty your cup”—writing about whatever is on your mind or blocking your attention on your classes, job, or family. This can be a great way to help you become centered, calm, or focused, especially when dealing with emotional challenges in your life.
2. For each writing assignment in class, spend three 10-minute sessions either listing (brainstorming) or focused-writing about the topic before starting to organize and outline key ideas.
3. Before each draft or revision of assignments, spend 10 minutes focused-writing an introduction and a thesis statement that lists all the key points that supports the thesis statement.
4. Have a discussion in your class about the various language communities that you and your classmates experience in your town or on your island.
5. Create a graphic organizer that will help you write various types of essays.
6. Create a metacognitive, self-reflective journal: Freewrite continuously (e.g., 5 times a week, for at least 10 minutes, at least half a page) about what you learned in class or during study time. Document how you used your study hours this week, how it felt to write in class and out of class, what you learned about writing and about yourself as a writer, how you saw yourself learning and evolving as a writer, what you learned about specific topics. What goals do you have for the next week?

During the second half of the semester, as you begin to tackle deeper and lengthier assignments, the journal should grow to at least one page per day, at least 20 minutes per day, as you use journal writing to reflect on writing strategies (e.g.,

structure, organization, rhetorical modes, research, incorporating different sources without plagiarizing, giving and receiving feedback, planning and securing time in your schedule for each task involved in a writing assignment) and your ideas about topics, answering research questions, and reflecting on what you found during research and during discussions with peers, mentors, tutors, and instructors. The journal then becomes a record of your journey as a writer, as well as a source of freewriting on content that you can shape into paragraphs for your various assignments.

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2.3: Drafting

Once students have spent time and effort preparing to write by gathering ideas and organizing activities, they are ready to begin drafting. Many instructors recommend a practice that is referred to as fast drafting, in which the student writes under the pressure of a time limit, much like freewriting. This allows students to create without their inner critic undermining their momentum. It empowers the “creator hand” to work with agency, while silencing the “editor hand.”

To do fast drafting, students first need to set up the conditions that will help in their success and is appropriate to their abilities to focus. The following are easy steps writers follow:

- Create a block of time in which there are no interruptions. This should be a realistic length, given a writer’s ability to focus, from 10 minutes at a time to 75 minutes or longer.
- Decide on the goal: Write a paragraph in 10 minutes, 2 pages in 1 hour, or a complete essay in 1 hour and 15 minutes.

For some, 75 minutes is a good length, but some students find that after 30 minutes they can no longer concentrate. If that is the case, they should plan on several shorter sessions of distraction-free time.

During this time, students should turn off their phones and social media, let the dog outside, and ensure that it’s time for children to be asleep. This needs to be quiet, concentrated time.

Students need to let go of their worries about good and bad ideas. There will be time to rethink, rephrase, and rework during the revision process.

? Activities

Prepare for writing a 75-minute fast draft by doing several prewriting activities including brainstorming, focused writing, outlining, and perhaps reading and researching, depending on the assignment. Then, in an intense, 75-minute time span, write your entire essay as quickly as possible including the introduction and conclusion. Don’t stop to concern yourself with word choice, citations, or grammar. Just get into the flow of ideas and write your essay all the way to the end. Remember: You can go back and revise and edit all you want, but that is much easier to do once you have a draft.

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2.4: Revision

The Revision Process

Revision literally means to re-see or re-envision a piece of writing. This process may involve adding, rearranging, removing, and replacing (ARRR) words, sentences, and ideas. Since writing is recursive, revising may require revisiting the prewriting stage.

- **Adding**

What else does the reader need to know? If the essay doesn't meet the required word or page count, what areas can be expanded? Where would further explanation help key points to be more clear? This is a good time to go back to the prewriting notes and look for ideas which weren't included in the draft.

- **Rearranging**

Even when writers carefully plan their writing, they may need to rearrange sections for their essays to flow better.

- **Removing**

Some ideas just don't work or don't contribute enough to the overall goal of the essay. Often when writers delete excess words or paragraphs, the ideas become clearer.

- **Replacing**

Vivid details help bring writing to life. Writers need to look for strong examples and quotable passages from outside sources to support their arguments. If particular paragraphs aren't working well, writers need to try rewriting them.

Other Useful Strategies

- **Reverse Outlining**

In reverse outlining, the student reads through the written text and notes, noting down the topic of each paragraph. This way, the student can review if each paragraph has a clear focus and if each paragraph fits the overall organization of the paper. More on reverse outlining is available at *The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)*, "[Reverse Outlining: An Exercise for Taking Notes and Revising Your Work.](#)"

- **Reading Aloud**

The act of reading one's essay aloud allows the student to "hear it" in the way a reader will. This act permits the writer to slow down and pay attention to all words in the essay. They get a sense of what a reader experiences, where words are clear and effective, and where they are weak. Poorly structured sentences are hard to read out loud, indicating that this would be a good place to start revising. This technique is a great precursor for receiving feedback from others. It also helps writers take responsibility for their writing.

- **Peer and Instructor Feedback**

No one becomes a good writer in a vacuum. Sometimes writing is done for ourselves, but more often, writing is done to connect to others, to share thoughts, and to communicate something others need to know. At this stage of the process, it's important for writers to get the measure of how well their writing works for readers that they are wanting to entertain, educate, or persuade. Showing the writing to someone else is essential. This might be done in a writers' circle or just with a friend who is good with words and can be asked for feedback. It's best to show our work to several people to get more than one opinion. Receiving feedback helps writers discover the strengths in their writing as well as areas that may be improved.

After receiving feedback, whether through track changes in Google Docs, Microsoft Word, on paper, or verbally in a peer-review session, the writer can discuss the comments with the reviewer. It's important that a writer consider these comments. Every reader comes from a different point of view, and the writer may not agree with everything that gets said by various readers. Sometimes, comments will be contradictory. It is the writer's responsibility to ask further and decide how to use comments received. A community that embraces and nurtures its members through the revision process works to communicate feedback so that everyone can grow and learn.

Successful college students utilize their resources, specifically their instructors and peers, to get feedback. Tutoring is an effective means by which students can receive knowledgeable one-on-one feedback about their writing. It can also be an effective way to help manage time.

Peer mentors provide students with additional one-on-one and group support in writing classrooms or during office hours. The peer mentor has had the previous experience of completing similar writing assignments and students find it helpful when they revise with their expertise in mind.

? Activities

1. Take an essay that you have written under time pressure. Create a reverse outline of the different sections of your text. Observe whether this outline makes sense. Try moving around the different parts of your essay. Are there structures that help you to highlight certain ideas or make them more powerful?
2. Find a partner or group of classmates who are willing to meet at least once a week. During your meetings, read your essays aloud and give each other feedback on the content and language of your essays. This should be a group you are committed to working with throughout the semester with the goal of helping each other grow as writers.
3. Make an appointment with your instructor or college tutor to work through prewriting, revising or editing stages of your writing process.

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2.5: Editing

The process of editing is an ongoing activity for all writers. From the time they come up with a possible topic, they begin editing their ideas and directions in which to go. Once they begin to write, however, the editing takes a new path. Writers edit their own work by reading with fresh eyes and deciding if words need to be moved around or changed. They look for misspellings and awkward wording, and they rework for the sake of clarity. They ask themselves, “Is this saying what I think it does? Am I being as clear as possible? Is there a more concise or artful way that I can express this important idea?” They check their work for typos and unintentional repetition of words and phrases, and they check all the grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

However, it is extremely important not to focus on editing too early in the writing process. If a student writes one sentence or paragraph and immediately begins to edit it, they may find that they lose the flow of their ideas. Suddenly, while focusing on how to spell a word, the whole rest of the essay gets put on hold. The inner editor or critic can inhibit writers, causing them to lose flow and to experience perfectionism and writer’s block. Most instructors recommend that writers ban their critics until they have completed their first drafts and revision has taken place. This saves writers the wasted effort that comes with closely editing material that doesn’t make the final cut anyway.

At later points during the document’s creation, an outside set of editorial eyes may be needed—those of a peer, instructor, colleague, or formal editor—to help move that piece of text toward excellence. In addition to the big-picture structural or information-based considerations, the need for a comma or better word may be the focus of editing efforts. Good editing allows the writer to submit the written creation with the confidence that it is the best it can be and stands as something to truly be proud of.

Grammar: The Grand Dame

According to Merriam-Webster, grammar is a system of rules that defines the structure of a language. For most of the USA, that system is Standard American English (SAE). Grammar is the way people use language rules and how words are used in a certain order to form phrases and clauses that relay a meaning for readers. The term “syntax” (the art of sentence structure) goes hand-in-hand with this.

Writers and speakers of any given language are aware that the rules related to grammar and usage of that language are largely appropriated not by formal instruction and memorization but informally and even subconsciously as one grows up listening, speaking and reading. So it’s important to note that, as those who use language every day, students already have internalized essential grammar rules. Most college writers struggle with only one or two main grammar blind-spots, like how to correctly use a comma or semicolon. Once they master these, they can confidently edit their own work.

Language Usage

Writing is all about decision-making. Writers need to ask, “How should I craft this sentence, this paragraph? Given the effect of two possible punctuation marks, which one should I use? What is the effect of this word instead of that one, so similar in meaning but carrying a more negative connotation?” In this way, writing is about making endless choices.

Precision of Words

Sometimes, in early drafting, writers fall back on words that are vague or boring. For example, consider sentences starting with “This” or “It.” Unless the previous sentence made it totally clear what the “This” or the “It” is, the reader will be confused. For example,

Instead of the following: “This is an exciting point in the movie.”

How about this?

“The surprise ending of movie is exciting.”

The same thing goes for starting a sentence with the personal pronoun “It.” See the two sentences below.

Instead of this: “It caused the audience to break into applause.”

Define the “It” like this. “The final scene caused the audience to break into applause.”

To note, this kind of sentence structure is essentially using words as “filler” to take up space within a sentence and creates a sort of vagueness for the reader who will wonder what the subject of the sentence might be. Sometimes such sentence construction is fine, but writers use it too often.

In addition, many students believe that using one of the following words adds an element of description or accentuation to their phrases; however, these specific words are overused by writers and should be given special consideration:

- Really
- Very
- Just

Trick #1: If writers conduct a global search for each of the three words above, they can use them as “red flags” to alert themselves to the perfect place to try to find a better way of saying what they want to say. How does one improve vocabulary? Use a thesaurus and read more.

What’s a word for “very scary”? Frightening.

What’s another way of saying “really hungry”? Famished.

On another note: The phrase “a lot” has generally outrun its usage by the time one reaches college. Generalizations are better avoided, as they are vague and imprecise. Academics prefer statistics and specific, verifiable statements.

Repetition of Words and Phrases

The unintentional repetition of words and phrases is one of the most common oversights writers make. They all have their go-to words—ones that come naturally to them when they speak and write. The general advice is for writers to use a thesaurus to find a synonym for the overused word. However, what if there isn’t a synonym for the word? Look at the paragraph below:

This past summer, I had the opportunity to intern at Sea Life Park. Sea Life Park is known for being an exciting destination for locals and tourists to experience the wonders of sea life from throughout the Pacific. At the park, green sea turtles, or Honu, thrive and even continue to have babies. In addition, dolphins and the Hawaiian monk seals provide visitors with the ability to view these majestic creatures but also learn about their significance within the Pacific Ocean ecosystem and their importance within island culture.

This writer’s paragraph isn’t bad. However, “Sea Life Park” is repeated twice in the first two sentences. In addition, in sentence three, he begins with “At the park” followed by another “sea.” He defended his construction and word choice by stating, “But there isn’t another word for ‘Sea Life Park’.” Indeed, the “find a synonym” strategy would not work in this case just like there isn’t a synonym for “parking lot” or “ice cream sundae.” So another trick has to be used.

Trick #2: If a synonym doesn’t exist, remove the repetitive words and combine the sentences.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to intern at Sea Life Park, known for being an exciting destination for locals and tourists to experience the wonders of sea life from throughout the Pacific.

Replacing the repeated phrase with a comma before “known” does the trick. But wait. The phrase “sea life” appears again a little later in this same sentence. Now what?

Trick #3: Use your creativity to craft an original way of saying the same thing. Instead of “Sea Life Park,” call it “the world-renowned marine playground committed to protection, preservation, and education” and the writer has not only fixed the repetition issue but also introduced wonderfully original prose.

Trick #4: Writers should read everything out loud so the ear can catch what the eye might miss.

Voice, for writers, is something uniquely their own. It’s the way they put words together and involves their distinctive way of looking at the world. It makes one writer’s work stand out from that of others in its originality and authenticity. Key, though, is understanding that the development of one’s writing voice takes time and is ever changing. That’s what makes it so exciting.

Here are samples of sentences from two famous writers. Though both these writers lived in America at approximately the same time, their “voices” are very different. What are the elements that make these sentences so different?

It was very late and everyone had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the daytime the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. (Ernest Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.”)

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care, a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. (William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily.”)

Style: Style is much broader than voice. Some writers have a writing style that's complex and packed with personification, metaphor, and imagery. Other writers have a more straightforward style with more simplicity or directness.

Engaging the Reader

When it comes down to it, writers within the academic setting do best when they acknowledge that what they are trying to produce is reader-based prose—written content that informs the reader of the essential message the writer is wanting to convey and also does so in a manner that is engaging and well-received.

On this note, it is important that the reader is able to follow the path of words, images, and meaning that the writer is wanting to create. Readers can become distracted and disinterested by awkward word choices, unintentional repetition, and incorrect spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation.

Spelling

All writers have words that give them hassles, even if they have learned how to spell those words. Does the word “essence” end with a “ce” or “se”? Does the word “privilege” spend any time on the “ledge”?

By the time one reaches college, one knows if spelling words correctly comes easily or not. And everyone knows that spell-checkers won't pick up every mistake. Writers need to make time for careful editing and proofreading throughout the writing process with an extra special proofreading session before turning in any assignment. In addition, though, here is a trick that can actually help one become a better speller, even into adulthood.

Trick #5: Create a running list of all the words that you tend to misspell. If you find another word, add it to the list. Every time you sit down to write, scroll through your list. You'll find that the spelling will become less of an issue.

Punctuation and Mechanics

Punctuation refers to the “symbols” writers use to help readers understand and process the information they wish to convey through the sentences they write. Somewhat like the notes and rests within a piece of music help musicians move quickly or slowly through a composition, punctuation marks are used for effect.

Mechanics are established rules within a language system, and sometimes include the individual decisions writers make regarding the use of capitalization, underlining, italicizing, numbers versus numerals, the placement of specific punctuation marks, and how this differs throughout English-speaking countries (e.g., “towards” in the UK is often “toward” in the US, and periods and commas always go inside quotation marks in the U.S. but not in Canada).

For examples, see Table 1:

All compound sentences need either a semicolon or a comma conjunction combination. Make sure that a comma is included if there are two independent clauses. Omit the comma if the second clause is subordinate.	Example: Unless the surf is bad, we are going to surf in the morning. Example: The surf is great; we're going surfing.
Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. In the U.S., current style guides place commas and periods inside quotation marks.	Example: She said, “I'm not going with you.” Example: While she said, “I'm sick,” she still came with us.
Absolutes: Avoid them in most all cases.	Example: Like all other eighteen-year-old girls, I love drama.
Use the subjunctive form of the verb with the words “if” and “wish” (i.e., use “were” not “was”).	Example: I wish I were taller. If I were taller, I could play professional volleyball.
Using “so” and “that” right next to each other is often not needed unless you want to make your sentence sound more like an announcement of sorts.	Example: I took a culinary class so that I could show my gratitude toward those who had influenced me.
Using “so” to mean “really” or “very” without using “that” is an error.	Example: I am so grateful to have been a part of a family that has nurtured and emphasized the importance of our heritage. This sentence should read as: I am grateful to have been part of a family who has nurtured and emphasized the importance of our heritage.”

A person “who” versus a person “that.”	Example: I was furious when this happened because the person who was our advisor made the wrong decision.
Only use single quotes when within double quotes. (In UK English, the two would be reversed.)	Example: She declared, “At that moment, that ‘Ah-ha’ moment, I decided to completely move in.”
No “etc.” (which is the abbreviation for et cetera) in formal academic writing in most disciplines.	Example: I would lose the ball, fumble passes, and miss shots, etc. It’s enough to phrase this sentence as: I would falter in many ways including losing the ball, fumbling passes, and missing shots.
Avoid exclamation points in academic writing unless you want it to sound like you are yelling.	Example: I got ready and made it to the bus on time. The period works just fine here.
Be especially mindful of singular and plural subjects with subject-verb agreement.	Example: The source of the problems were my father’s lack of work. This sentence should read as follows: Example: The source [singular] of the problems was [singular] my father’s lack of work.
Colons cannot directly follow verbs.	Example: Incorrect: They all harmoniously incorporate elements such as: romance, humor, and, of course, drama. Better: They all harmoniously incorporate elements such as romance, humor, and, of course, drama. (The “such as” does the trick.)
Do not address the reader directly (i.e., no “you”) unless you mean to.	Example: Incorrect: If you need to buy books, you should go to the college bookstore. Better: Students who need to buy books can go to the college bookstore.
Avoid italics for emphasis and keep them just for foreign words	Incorrect: And one should <i>never</i> follow my footsteps. (The word “never” does not need italicizing.)
The correlative conjunction “not only” needs both words “but” and “also.” But the “also” could be replaced by a comma at the end of the sentence and an “as well.”	Example: I saw how this was not only a significant aspect of my family but also of my culture. Note that no commas are needed within this sentence. Many times people like to add them with this “not only/but (also)” pair unnecessarily.
When explaining the “reason” for something happening, you almost always do not need the word “why.”	Example: It just so happens that teenagers and adults see the world differently, hence the reason [why] adults sometimes cannot comprehend teenage struggles the way teens do. Omit the “why” as it’s not needed.

? Activities

1. Search your draft using the “find” tool for words like “it,” “this,” “really,” “very,” “just” or “you.” See if you can find ways to eliminate these words to make your language sharper, more precise.
2. Read the sentences of your essay in backward order, starting with the last sentence in the essay, and then the one above it, all the way up to the first sentence in the essay. This is a great way to find fragments or to hear where the language is repetitive or unclear.
3. Make an appointment with a tutor or your instructor. Ask for help doing a close editing of two paragraphs with an eye to learning how to identify typical errors in your work, and then apply your learning to the rest of your essay.

Further Resources

Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides free writing resources and instructional material. Visit [The Purdue OWL](https://www.purdue.edu/owl/) (Purdue U Writing Lab, 2019).

For further information on the steps of the writing process and tips for each of those steps, read “[The Writing Process](#)” by Ali Hal ([Daily Writing Tips](#) website, 2019).

For an editing checklist by Mignon Fogarty (also known as “Grammar Girl”), visit “[Grammar Girl’s Editing Checklist](#)” ([Quick and Dirty Tips](#) website, 2019).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Essay Structure

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to do the following:

- Write an essay with introductory, supporting, and concluding paragraphs.
- Formulate a thesis statement.

[3.1: Introduction](#)

[3.2: Opening Paragraphs](#)

[3.3: Body Paragraphs](#)

[3.4: Conclusions](#)

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3.1: Introduction

A Student's Story

As it was Isabel's first day of college, she was excited but nervous about returning to school after 30 years outside of the classroom raising children and taking care of the normal family needs. Butterflies took up residence in her stomach. She headed to the campus food court to get a coffee so as to see her through the early morning course

She walked across campus, found the correct classroom, and took a seat. Without any bell to signal the start of class, the instructor entered, introduced himself and shared general information about the English 100 course. Then, he passed out the syllabus and other handouts. After discussing the syllabus and expectations, the instructor discussed how one of the handouts was something called a "writing diagnostic."

When the instructor said the word "diagnostic," Isabel repeated it with heart racing a bit because it seemed like such a loaded word. She settled herself and glanced around the classroom. Some students looked relaxed while others began to sink in their seats. Questions floated about in her head: "How does one write a diagnostic? What are the actual components of an essay? How am I going to get started?" Instead of tangling with these questions on her own, she decided to be brave and ask one of these questions out loud. She raised her hand.

The instructor acknowledged her, so Isabel spoke, "Could you please repeat the instructions? I'd like a better understanding."

Her instructor explained, "You will have one hour to read the article and write an effective essay that has an introduction, body, and conclusion. At the end of the term, you will complete the same assignment, and I will compare your writing to evaluate your improvement. Please consider this diagnostic to be a means of assessing how I, as the instructor, am able to help you develop your writing over the course of this semester. Are there any more questions?"

Isabel felt more at ease when she thought about the essay assignment from this perspective. The diagnostic was no longer a means of proving what she did not know about essays; she understood that it was designed to measure her learning over the next 15 weeks. She looked forward to delving into the process of enhancing the skills she already possessed. This was the reason she enrolled in the class—so that she could gain the skills to progress to a managerial position at her job, help her family, and be a role-model for her children and their children.

In college, students are required to write various types of essays and reports. These types of college-based compositions are written for many reasons, and their respective purpose will determine the type of essay that is written. Regardless of the type of essay, there are general qualities that all essays have, and there are guidelines on how to write an essay.

A paragraph is a collection of sentences related to a main point. An essay is a combination of paragraphs that can be divided into three major sections: an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Thus, paragraphs function in a variety of ways.

This chapter provides guidelines for how to structure college-level compositions, but these guidelines are meant to be used as a starting point for essay and report writing. There are various ways of writing at any level of one's education or within the professional world. Formats for essays and reports in college change depending on the course, the instructor, and the overriding goals of the assignment. Thus, writers are encouraged to expand the structure, to be creative, and to find their own writing styles.

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3.2: Opening Paragraphs

An introduction exists as the first paragraph in a 5-page essay, and it serves the following purposes:

- Establishes reader interest.
- Introduces the general topic of the essay while establishing the writer's voice, tone, or attitude, toward the subject.
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs.

Establishing Reader Interest

Introductions should begin with an engaging lead or opener (sometimes called a “hook” in middle school or high school) that is devised to evoke readers' interest. Capturing readers' attention motivates them to continue reading. Writers can garner a reader's interest by doing the following:

- Beginning by quoting an expert on the respective topic or an inspirational individual.
- Beginning by offering some statistical evidence that is both informative and intriguing.
- Opening with a striking mental image.
- Appealing to the reader's emotions.
- Raising a question or series of questions.
- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for the essay.
- Including a personal anecdote.
- Stating in the middle of a story with the conclusion of the story existing as the first sentence in the conclusion paragraph.

Transition Sentences

After the opener or hook, writers need to add transition sentences that should introduce the readers to the topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. These important sentences help readers move or “transition” from the hook toward the thesis statement.

A Strong Thesis Statement

An introduction usually contains a thesis statement (i.e., the main point of the essay). A thesis statement is a promise to the reader about what the essay will be about. A thesis is not the topic itself, but rather the writer's angle on the topic. For whatever topic a professor gives, writers must ask themselves, “What do I want to say about it?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful, and confident.

A thesis is usually one sentence long and appears toward the end of the introduction. It is specific, and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how the writer will organize the information.

Specificity

A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. The creation of a thesis statement begins when writers choose a broad subject and then narrow it down until they have pinpointed a specific aspect of that topic. For example, healthcare is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic and essentially answer the following question. “What are the options for individuals without healthcare coverage?”

Precision

A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic pertains to options for individuals without healthcare coverage, then the precise thesis statement must make an exact, related, claim, such as the following: “Limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers.” To elaborate on this topic further, the writer might discuss how limited options impact the lives of the uninsured.

Ability to be Argued

A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement is often not considered arguable. A thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

However, a wise way to think about a thesis statement within a persuasive or “argumentative” essay is to write one that strikes up or furthers a conversation versus creating an argument. Imagine someone reading only your thesis statement and the two of you,

then, having a conversation in which you share your stance, your reader shares his or her stance, and you continue your discussion with the information from your body paragraphs.

Ability to be Demonstrated

For any claim in the thesis, the writer must be able to provide reasons and examples for this opinion. Personal observations can help, or the writer can consult outside sources to demonstrate validity. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.

The demonstration of validity comes from incorporating the voices of the experts—those who have already had their work on your topic published, vetted, and added to the respective canon. Use the strategies of quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing.

Remember that the only way to hit a word or page requirement when writers feel like they have already said everything is to add examples.

Forcefulness

A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that the writer is, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

That being said, college-level thesis statements would do well to not include the word “should,” as a means of trying to sound authoritative so as to make a solid argument.

Confidence

In addition to using forcefulness in their thesis statement, writers must also be confident in their claims. Phrases such as “I feel” or “I believe” actually weaken the readers’ sense of confidence in what they are reading because these phrases imply that the writer may be the only person who feels this way.

Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades readers to have faith in the argument and to open their minds to the point of view of the writer. So, no thesis should contain phrases such as “in my opinion” or “I believe.” These statements reduce credibility and weaken the argument.

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the requirements: specificity, precision, ability to be argued, ability to be demonstrated, forcefulness, and confidence.

- The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the 1986 play *Fences* symbolize the challenges faced by black men who lived through segregation and integration in the United States, and their life stories can be considered as critical to understand the challenge black men continue to face over thirty years later.
- Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one idea proposed so as to deal with illegal immigration; however, contemporary strategies regarding this issue do not address the essential human right for safety along with the essentials of food, clothing, and shelter.
- J. D. Salinger’s character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused and somewhat rebellious young person who voices his disgust with “phonies.” Yet, in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions making him a complicated character within one of Salinger’s most celebrated novels.
- Compared to an absolute divorce, a no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown, although no divorce is easy since the issues involved extend well beyond the monetary and are usually based in an unfortunate undercurrent of misunderstandings and sorrow.
- Discussing the dangers of illegal drug use is with elementary and middle school students is one method that schools use to help dissuade young people from abusing drugs as they grow up. However, children learn a great deal from what they observe making it imperative that parents monitor what their children watch on tv, see in movies, and glean from their friends and family members.
- In today’s challenging professional world, a high school diploma is not a significant enough confirmation of one’s education so as to obtain a stable, lucrative, lifelong job. Therefore, many colleges and universities are offering more online courses making it possible for more individuals to work toward a college degree while still working to make a living.

Avoid Weak Thesis Statements

Here are some pitfalls to avoid when composing a thesis:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of a subject or a description of what the writer will discuss in the essay. *Weak thesis statement:* My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge. Remember, do not refer to your

essay in your essay. By the time one enters college, such strategies for writing thesis statements have passed.

- A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side. *Weak thesis statement:* Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.
- A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end. *Weak thesis statement:* Advertising companies often use sexual or romantic appeal to sell their products.
- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad. *Weak thesis statement:* The life and presidency of Abraham Lincoln was challenging.

Sources

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3.3: Body Paragraphs

If the thesis is the roadmap for the essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows an introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement. The body paragraphs present the evidence the reader has gathered to support the overall thesis. Before writers begin to support the thesis within the body paragraphs, they should find information from a variety of sources that support the topic.

Select Primary Support for the Thesis

Without primary support, the argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points writers choose to expand on the thesis. It is the most important information they select to argue their chosen points of view. Each point they choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph they write. The primary foundational points are further supported by evidentiary details within the paragraphs.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information writers choose must meet the following standards:

Be Specific

The main points they make about the thesis and the examples they use to expand on those points need to be specific. Writers use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon the general ideas. These types of examples give the reader something narrow to focus on, and, if used properly, they leave little doubt about their claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.

Be Relevant to the Thesis

Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove their main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with a great deal of information that could be used to prove the thesis, writers may think all the information should be included in the body paragraphs. However, effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Good writers choose examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to the thesis.

Add Details

The thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. Discussion develops in the body paragraphs. Using detailed support shows readers that the writer has considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance the point of view.

Prewrite to Identify Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

When writers brainstorm on a topic, they essentially make a list of examples or reasons they support the stance. Stemming from each point, the writer should provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, the writer is then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces to use in writing body paragraphs.

Select the Most Effective Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

After writers have engaged in prewriting to formulate working thesis statements, they may have generated a large amount of information, which may be edited later. It is helpful to remember that primary support must be relevant to the thesis. Focusing on the main argument, any ideas that do not directly relate to it can be deleted. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that writers will use only the most convincing information in their body paragraphs. For many first-year writing assignments, students would do well to choose at least three of the most compelling points. These will serve as the content for the topic sentences that will usually begin each of the body paragraphs.

Body Paragraph Structure

One way to think about a body paragraph is that it, essentially, consists of three main parts: the main point or topic sentence, information and evidence that supports the main point, and an example of how the information gives foundation to the main point and the essay's overall thesis. The three parts of a paragraph can be referred to as the following:

P = Point

I = Information

E = Explanation

An Example of Abbreviated Version of P.I.E.

As a pedestrian in Hawai‘i, it is important to be aware of one’s surroundings. In 2018, 43 pedestrians died in car accidents (Gordon 3). Hawai‘i’s roadways can be dangerous, and being vigilant is necessary in order to increase pedestrian safety.

Point: As a pedestrian in Hawai‘i, it is important to be aware of your surroundings.

Information: In 2018, 43 pedestrians died in car accident.

Explanation: Hawai‘i’s roadways can be dangerous, and being vigilant is necessary to increase pedestrian safety.

Use Transitions

Transitional words and phrases help to organize an essay and improve clarity for the reader. Some examples of transitions can be found at “[Transitional Devices](#),” The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL).

? Activities

1. Write a paragraph that contains a main point, follow-up and substantial information, and an explanation about how that information relates to the main point of the paragraph or to the overall thesis of the essay. The topic of your paragraph is up to you. What topic would you like to write about?

P: What is the main point of your paragraph?

I: What information backs up your point?

E: Explain how this information proves that your main point is correct.

Combine these three parts to form a paragraph.

Further Resources

Ashford University Writing Center: “Essay Development: Good paragraph development: as easy as P.I.E.” *Writing resources*.

Works Cited

“43 pedestrians died on Hawaii roadways in 2018. That’s more than the number killed in vehicles.” *HawaiiNewsNow*, 3 January 2019.

Sources

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3.4: Conclusions

Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when approaching the conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade during the labor of writing an essay. However, what good writers remember is that it is vital to put just as much attention into the conclusion as in the rest of the essay. After all, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

A conclusion that does not correspond with the rest of the essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle the reader and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if the student has worked hard to write the introduction and body, the conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

The ideas in the conclusion must conform to the rest of the essay. But in a sense it's easier to think of the conclusion of an essay as making the essay come full circle.

When students are asked what they think about writing conclusions to essays, the response is usually less than enthusiastic. When asked what makes conclusion paragraphs an unsatisfying part of their essay, the responses are often the same.

"I have nothing else to say. I've already said everything."

"I know I'm supposed to summarize my main points, but I feel stupid doing that when I just stated all those points."

A conclusion paragraph that is based primarily in summary is also less than satisfying for readers. It feels almost disrespectful in that a reader might think, "I just read all of that. Do you think I already forgot your main points?"

The good thing is that there's a model that exists for writing conclusion paragraphs for standard essays that lets students forget the summary and leave readers nodding in agreement. The easiest way to craft this style of conclusion paragraph is to model it after the introduction.

A typical introduction, even at the freshman level in college, is formatted as follows:

1. Start with a hook (often called an "opener" or a "lead" in college).
2. Create a few transition sentences that move the reader along from opener to thesis statement.
3. State the thesis.

Then, once all the body paragraphs have been carefully crafted, students are ready to write the conclusion. But, again, everything has been said. So the trick is not to even think about "the conclusion." Instead, they should scroll up to the very beginning of their essay and remind themselves about how it all started. The following exists as an innovative way to write a great conclusion paragraph.

1. Revisit the hook. (If the writer started with a quote, offer another quote. If the writer started with statistics, offer more statistics. If the writer asked a question, answer the question. The reader will get a sense of hearing something like that before and will anticipate that the end of the essay is on its way.)
2. Restate the thesis. (Restating the thesis is important because it reminds the reader of the major arguments the writer has been trying to prove. Sometimes instructors suggest restating the thesis at the beginning of the conclusion, but then students are setting themselves up to have nothing left to say but to summarize.)
3. Finish with a twist. (This final commentary often does particularly well when a sort of global extension is made. If the student's essay is about current strategies being used to combat the devastation associated with the Pacific trash vortex, then a final statement could be something like the following: "Clearly the devastation related to the Pacific trash vortex is far-reaching and has effects beyond sea life and coastal societies. More significant, though, is the fact that human beings live every day as a more globalized society in which we have more in common than many continue to think. Since the Pacific Ocean is the largest and deepest ocean on the planet, it is even more important that we, collectively, give it our greatest care.")

Students also like to finish with a final emphatic statement. This strong closing statement will cause their readers to continue thinking about the implications of their essay; it will make their conclusion, and thus their essay, more memorable. Another powerful technique is to challenge their readers to make changes in either their thoughts or their actions. Challenging their readers to see the subject through new eyes is a powerful way to ease the readers out of the essay.

When closing the essay, writers should not express that they are drawing to a close. Statements such as “In conclusion,” “It is clear that,” “As you can see,” or “In summation” are unnecessary and can be considered trite.

It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in a conclusion:

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting the thesis
- Changing the thesis
- Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in conclusions has an unsettling effect on readers. Raising new points makes reader want more information, which the writer could not possibly provide in the limited space of the final paragraph.

Contradicting or changing the thesis statement causes readers to think that they do not actually have conviction about the topic. After all, they have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. When they change sides or open up their point of view in the conclusion, the reader becomes less inclined to believe the original argument.

By apologizing for the opinion or stating what is tough to digest, the writer is in fact admitting that even they know what they have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. They do not want readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

Sources

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Types of Essays

Learning Objectives

Student will be able to do the following after reading this chapter:

- Apply essay structure to various rhetorical modes.
- Provide the required components of a specific essay assignment.

4.1: Introduction

4.2: Narration

4.2.1: Memoir or Personal Narrative- Learning Lessons from the Personal

4.2.1.1: Exploring the Past to Understand the Present

4.2.1.2: Trailblazer

4.2.1.3: Glance at Genre- Conflict, Detail, and Revelation

4.3: Process Analysis

4.4: Evaluation

4.5: Comparison and Contrast

4.6: Persuasion

4.6.1: Persuasion/Argument

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4.1: Introduction

A Student's Story

David asked his instructor why students were required to write different types of essays. Instructor Kahaiali'i explained that learning to do a variety of types of writing allows students to determine the best way to approach a range of writing situations in the future.

"In life, an essay you might write to the newspaper arguing against building a light rail system in Honolulu might be argumentative, while a report written for a boss that is meant to inform her about a problem in a factory would use an entirely different tone and structure. The ability to be flexible about one's mode, based on circumstances, is useful in the real world.

"For this class, we will learn how to write a variety of types of essays by using mode guidelines. These guidelines provide a clearer idea of expectations for each essay, but you will also learn to be flexible and to experience many types of writing so that you can apply a range of skills to future writing you'll need to do. While we explore four modes of writing in this class, you will discover that the toolkit of writing skills you'll build will allow you to use many modes, as needed, in the future."

David nodded. Although he appreciated that this course was going to be challenging, he knew that he was improving his skills for the job market. Since written communication skills are in demand, he realized the importance of learning these skills.

The Rhetorical Modes

Rhetorical modes, also known as patterns of development or genres, are simply the ways in which people effectively communicate through language. Sometimes writers incorporate a variety of modes in any one essay. For example, a persuasive essay may include paragraphs showing cause and effect, description, and narrative. The rhetorical mode writers choose depends on the purpose for writing. Rhetorical modes are a set of tools that will allow students greater flexibility and effectiveness in communicating with their audience and expressing ideas.

Here are typical modes of essays taught in first-year writing courses:

- **Cause and effect** discusses the relationship between causes and effects, starting either with causes or effects, and using facts to explain how they are linked.
- **Classification and division**, often used in science, takes large ideas and divides them into manageable chunks of information, classifying and organizing them into types and parts.
- **Comparison and contrast** analyzes the similarities and/or differences between two subjects to learn or discuss them more deeply.
- **Definition** clarifies the meaning of terms and concepts, providing context and description for deeper understanding of those ideas.
- **Description** provides detailed information using adjectives that appeal to the five senses (what people see, hear, smell, taste, and touch) as well as other vivid details that help readers visualize or understand an item or concept.
- **Evaluation** analyzes and judges the value and merit of an essay, a concept, or topic.
- **Illustration** provides examples and evidence in detail to support, explain, and analyze a main point or idea.
- **Narrative** uses fictional or nonfictional stories in a chronological sequence of events, often including detailed descriptions and appeals to the senses and emotions of readers while storytelling to reveal a theme or moment.
- **Persuasion** (i.e., argumentation) logically attempts to convince readers to agree with an opinion or take an action; the argument also acknowledges opposing viewpoints and accommodates and/or refutes them with diplomatic and respectful language, as well as provides precise and accurate evidence and other expert supporting details.
- **Process analysis** describes and explains, step by step, chronologically, in detail, and with precision and accuracy, how to do something or how something works.

This chapter will focus on the narrative, evaluative, process analysis, and persuasive rhetorical modes.

An introduction to college writing is based on the understanding that the primary underlying skills needed for academic writing involve summary, analysis, and synthesis of information into one's own words, citing sources as needed, and analyzing and evaluating ideas with the confidence of one who feels part of a given community. The skills needed for good writing do not just consist of memorizing rules. Instead, they come from a skills-based approach through reading analytically the work of others and discussing and writing to learn concepts thoroughly and deeply. The writing skills come from mirroring the writing elements that

suit each individual student with support from well-researched material. Then students show their growth by embracing these skills in writing.

Each of the following sections provides links to real student essays to help students conceptualize and produce essays in various modes. These samples should be used as guidelines to help meet essay expectations, and should not be substituted for students' original ideas.

? Activities

1. Read a printed or online essay or article. A letter to the editor or an editorial from a newspaper would be perfect. Then, with a partner, identify the modes of writing found in the essay. Analyze the different choices the writer has made about language and organization to express a point of view.
2. Select, read, and annotate a sample student essay in a specific style as provided in this link. Note in the margins or on another sheet of paper what rhetorical mode each paragraph uses, how those modes and paragraphs support the overall rhetorical mode of the essay, and whether each paragraph does so successfully or not. Discuss in teams of four and summarize findings to report to the rest of the class.

Sources

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4.2: Narration

The Purpose of Narrative Writing

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time a person tells a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident, the individual engages in a form of narration. A narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is made up, or imagined; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as desired.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on the writer's purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories can depart from real people and events because the writers' intentions are not to describe real-life events. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful for writers to understand their purpose from the beginning. Is it important that writers recount history, either their own or someone else's? Or does their interest lie in reshaping the world in their own image—depending on how writers would like to see it or how they imagine it could be? Our answers will go a long way in shaping the stories people tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. Authors want the audience to be moved by their stories—through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly they tell their stories, the more emotionally engaged the audience is likely to be.

The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in chronological order—the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and events are typically organized by time. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story.

The following are the other basic components of a narrative:

- Plot. The events as they unfold in sequence.
- Characters. The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist.
- Conflict. The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- Theme. The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, authors begin by deciding whether to write a factual or fictional story. Next, they engage in prewriting strategies such as freewriting about topics that are of general interest to them.

Once authors have a general idea of their writing, they sketch out the major events of the story in order to develop the plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically, and will climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as authors describe the events and characters in their narrative. They want the readers to emotionally engage with the world that they create.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook the reader into wanting to read more. The writer should try opening the essay with an event that is interesting, to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, the conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon readers the ultimate thesis of the piece. The ending of the story for the main character may be positive or negative. Writers include vivid details in their stories using the five senses so the reader will be able to experience the story.

Code-Switching

Writers use language in a variety of ways. They may use dialogue to convey details that accurately represent the characters and setting of their local story. Or, they may remember the voices of family members. How are they different from other voices? In Hawai'i, there are many languages, including Hawai'i Creole English (Pidgin). Pidgin varies depending on place and time. The

spelling of Pidgin words is up to the writer, and it's based on how the words sound. "What" could be spelled "wat" or "wot." Writers may switch between languages (e.g., Pidgin and English) depending on circumstances. This is called code-switching. Accurate representation of dialogue increases the authenticity of a story.

? Activities

Most stories have a main character who wants to achieve a goal (e.g., surviving a wipe out while surfing, winning a championship, passing a course, graduating high school). There are obstacles that a main character encounters while trying to achieve a goal (e.g., strong waves, a highly skilled opponent, procrastination, self-doubt). Then the story shows the main character's response to obstacles and whether or not the goal is achieved. If your topic is autobiographical, think of a memory that you don't mind sharing with the class. Regardless if the story is autobiographical or fictional, plan the characters and plot. As you write your short story, the story may turn out differently than you expected, and that's fine. This is a starting point.

1. Character Exercise for Your Narrative Essay

1. How many characters will you have in your story?
2. Who are these characters? Describe each of the characters. For each character, list information on their backstory, their qualities, their goals/desires. How will these characters interact with one another?
3. Will you use first person ("I") or third person ("He/She") to tell this story?
4. Whose point of view will you tell the story from? Through which character's eyes will the reader experience the story from?

2. Plot Exercise for Your Narrative

A. Introduction and Rising Action

1. Who is the main character (protagonist) of this story?
2. What is the main character's goal/desire?
3. Who/what is the obstacle your main character experiences when trying to achieve a goal/desire?
4. What does the main character do when encountering this obstacle?

B. Climax

1. Is the main character successful or unsuccessful in achieving his/her goal/desire?

C. Falling Action

1. What happens after the climax?

D. Resolution

1. What happens at the end of the story? Is this a happy ending? What is the lesson learned?

E. Setting

1. Where does the story take place?

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.2.1: Memoir or Personal Narrative- Learning Lessons from the Personal



Figure 4.1 Personal narratives and memoirs give the narrator’s perspective on a life experience. Here, a Florida family is having a makeshift meal together at a shelter set up during Hurricane Charley in 2004 for people who had to evacuate their homes. How do you imagine the parents and children are feeling and getting along during this time? What might the children, now adults, say about their memories of the hurricane? Family relationships and living through natural disasters are frequent subjects of personal writing.

(credit: “Photograph by Mark Wolfe” by Mark Wolfe/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Chapter Outline

4.2.1.1: Exploring the Past to Understand the Present

4.2.1.2: Trailblazer

4.2.1.3: Glance at Genre- Conflict, Detail, and Revelation

Introduction

Since pen was first put to paper, authors have been recording their personal experiences in order to perpetuate them, share meaningful lessons learned, or simply entertain an audience. Indeed, even as far back as Roman ruler Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE), who wrote accounts of his epic battles, authors have written to preserve history, seek acclaim for accomplishments, and pass down wisdom. Writing about your own life can feel alternately satisfying, terrifying, and exhilarating. It allows you to share meaningful personal experiences, to reflect on them, and to connect on a new level with your audience. Personal writing can reveal more than just events you’ve experienced—it tells your audience who you are as you relate personal experiences to convey humor, compassion, fears, and beliefs.

Language Lens Icon

A **personal narrative** is a form of nonfiction writing in which the author recounts an event or incident from their life. A **memoir** is a type of nonfiction writing in which the author tells a first-person version of a time period or an event in their life. Because the two genres, or forms of writing, share more similarities than differences, they are covered here together. Personal writing, whether a narrative or a memoir, is an opportunity to share your lived experiences with readers. A personal narrative tells a story and often includes memories and **anecdotes** (short, amusing, or interesting stories about something that happened in real life) to relate events and ideas. Like all good writing, personal narratives have an overarching **theme** (message you want to impart to your readers) and a purpose beyond the story itself. Although personal narratives usually follow the traditional narrative arc of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, personal writing has several unique features.

Unlike some forms of academic writing, personal writing welcomes the use of **first-person point of view** (narrator participates in events), and narratives and memoirs often have a narrow focus.

The key to effective personal writing is to know your audience and purpose. You may write to relay an event, to teach a lesson, or to explore an idea. You may write to help provide relief from stages of deep emotion (a process called *catharsis*), to evoke an emotional response, or simply to entertain readers. Above all, a personal narrative or memoir tells about an individual's experience or a series of events in a way that emotionally engages readers. The more clearly and vividly you share your experience, the more likely readers will be moved.

This chapter presents an excerpt from American writer Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), a memoir about his years as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River. Studying this text and Twain's use of the components of personal narrative will help you understand how authors create meaningful accounts of personal events. Later in the chapter, you too will create a personal narrative about an important event in your life.⁴

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4.2.1.1: Exploring the Past to Understand the Present

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Read for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating.
- Read in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes.

Language Lens Icon

Personal writing is unique in that it tells *your* story. Because it is a form of storytelling, there may be a tendency to discount personal writing as less academic or less valuable a skill than more formal writing. Although it may allow for greater freedom in style and content, personal writing is valuable in its own right because it enables you to make sense of the world as you—not others—experience it.

Two genres of this type of writing are personal narratives and memoirs. A **genre** is a category of writing that features compositions with distinct characteristics, styles, content, and formats. These two genres belong to the larger family of **creative nonfiction**, a term that applies to the kind of nonfiction writing that shares many traits with fiction writing. The main difference is that the plots, settings, and characters come from real life rather than an author's imagination. (For more about the characteristics of literary nonfiction, see Print or Textual Analysis: What You Read.) Works of creative nonfiction include American writers Sebastian Junger's (b. 1962) *The Perfect Storm* (1997), Jon Krakauer's (b. 1954) *Into Thin Air* (1997), and Terry Tempest Williams's (b. 1955) *Refuge* (1991). Shorter pieces appear regularly in popular literary magazines, especially in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *The Atlantic*, as well as in periodicals such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Writers of narrative nonfiction commonly borrow stylistic and formal techniques from the fast-paced visual narratives of film and television as well as from the innovative language of poetry, fiction, and drama. These influences encourage a multifaceted, multidimensional prose style to keep pace with the multifaceted and multidimensional real world. In addition to memoirs and personal narratives, biographies, autobiographies, and literary journalism are considered creative nonfiction.

Differences between Memoir and Personal Narrative

Both a memoir and a personal narrative are accounts of personal experiences written in a narrative style, but there are some differences. A memoir is an account of certain incidents in a person's life, often from a specific period of time. The narrator is a character in the story and reflects on past events to draw a conclusion based on those events. Memoirs focus on how the author remembers a part of their own life. On the other hand, personal narratives typically center on one major event through which the narrator reveals thoughts, feelings, and possibly related experiences. Like other works in the narrative genre, personal narratives and memoirs develop setting, plot, characterization, and dialogue.

The word *memoir* comes from the French *mémoire*, meaning "memory." Personal writing relies on memory but is not necessarily an account of every detail of the event the author is writing about. If this were the case, it could make for dry and tedious reading, contrary to what most authors seek—audience engagement. The more important aim is to create a composition that is emotionally authentic and conveys the core sentiment of an event, time period, or lesson and its impact on you, the writer. In the next section, you will meet an author who does just that. He reflects on deeply personal events from his own life as they relate to broader cultural and social issues. The subject of your personal narrative or memoir should not be just you, though you will tell a story from your life. The overall message of the story should be about something bigger—a universal understanding, a lesson learned, a common human experience. The more readers can relate to your story through the details you include, the more it will mean to them.

The Cultural Aspect

 Cultural Lens Icon

Personal writing provides a unique opportunity to explore cultural contexts. **Culture**—shared values, customs, arts, and traits of a social group—is at the heart of personal narratives and memoirs and should be part of their central focus. Including historical information, anecdotes, and vivid details in your writing, as well as using a specific and relevant English variety, helps you depict the cultures that are part of your life and enhances readers' understanding. Thus, readers are likely to experience deeper **empathy** and emotional responses in connection to the larger issues presented. You also provide opportunities for culture to be shared as a common human experience.

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4.2.1.2: Trailblazer

Memoir Trailblazer: Ta-Nehisi Coates

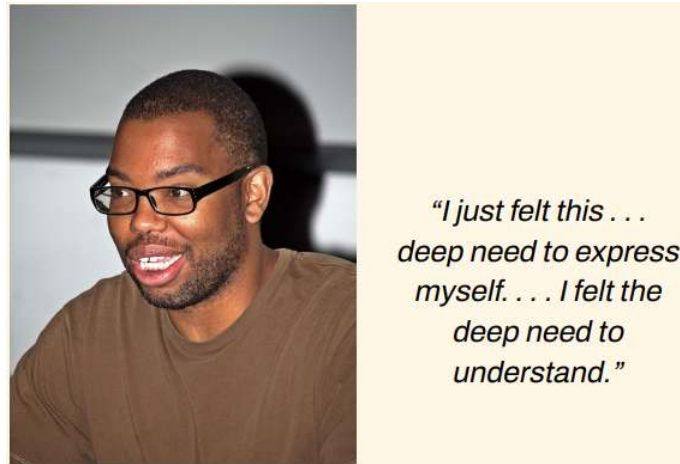


Figure 4.2 Author Ta-Nehisi Coates often frames current events from the perspective of his own lived experiences. (credit: “Ta Nehisi Coates 2 BBF 2010 Shankbone” by David Shankbone/ Wikicommons, CC BY 3.0)

The Storyteller's Tools: Context and Voice

Ta-Nehisi Coates (b. 1975) is a best-selling author, journalist, and educator. His writing explores complex issues such as race relations, urban policing, and racial identity, often focusing on his personal experiences as a person of color. Coates was born in Baltimore, Maryland. His mother was a teacher, his father a librarian and founder of the Black Classic Press, which publishes and republishes significant works by and about lesser-known people of African descent. Reading the works of these authors instilled in Coates a lifelong love of reading and learning and a desire to experience the world outside his neighborhood.

Cultural Lens Icon

Coates began his writing vocation at age 17, first exploring the genre of poetry. He studied journalism at Howard University for five years but did not graduate. However, he did write and begin earning bylines as a young writer, publishing articles in popular periodicals such as *Washington Monthly*, *Mother Jones*, and *Time*. In 2008, he became a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, often writing articles and covering stories about national current events. Among other topics, he has written about Barack Obama (b. 1961) as the first Black president and the shooting of Florida teen Trayvon Martin (1995–2012).

True to the genre of personal narrative, Coates focuses his writing not only on his lived experiences but also on their meaning in the context of larger cultural and social issues, specifically examining race relations and racial equity. In 2008, Coates published his first book, the critically acclaimed memoir *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*. In it, he writes about his childhood, especially his memories of his father. A former member of the Black Panther Party (founded in 1966), Coates’s father raised him and his six siblings as a family unit in West Baltimore. Coates’s father and the children’s four mothers raised the siblings together. Though they didn’t all live together, they were a continuing and active presence in one another’s lives.



Figure 4.3 Bobby Seale (left; b. 1936) and Huey P. Newton (right; 1942–1989) founded the Black Panther Party in 1966 in response to police violence and racism. (credit: “Black and white poster of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale” by Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Public Domain)

Coates credits his unusual upbringing with providing him both stability and early access to influential “Afrocentric” literature, which would influence his life and career. His memoir reflects the steps his father took to encourage his son’s development into adulthood, from reading all types of books to exploring the neighborhood to helping him grapple with what it means to be a Black man in America. This lived experience is central to the personal narrative he creates in *The Beautiful Struggle*.

Coates’s best-known essay, “The Case for Reparations,” which proposes reparations for slavery, was published in *The Atlantic* in June 2014. Framing his argument around the history of slavery, Coates paints a picture detailing the connections among slavery, race, and economics, specifically focusing on the modern Chicago housing crisis and policy. “The essence of American racism is disrespect,” he proposes.

The next year, Coates published the best seller *Between the World and Me*, a personal narrative written as a letter to his teenage son. In this book, recounting his own upbringing in Baltimore’s violent inner city during the crack cocaine epidemic, Coates explores the idea that the structure of American society fosters white supremacy. He reveals his wish for his son, now “growing into consciousness”: “that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable.” In 2019, Coates published his first novel, *The Water Dancer*, a work of historical fiction about a slave who helps in the Underground Railroad.

In addition to writing, Coates is an educator. From 2012 to 2014, he was a visiting professor at MIT, and in 2014, he joined the faculty of the City University of New York as a journalist-in-residence. Coates compares writing to a refining process: by applying pressure to yourself, you develop new muscles. He calls writing “an act of physical courage” that relies on the revision process to translate thought to page: “I . . . consider the entire process about failure, and I think that’s . . . why more people don’t write.”

Coates uses **doubling** in his writing. Because he is both protagonist and narrator, he sees himself as both subject and object, both character and storyteller, and at once a participant and an observer in his narration. Such doubling is often symbolic in memoirs, represented by paired events or mirroring.

You can watch Advice on Writing (<https://openstax.org/r/adviceonwriting>) to learn more of Coates’s advice to writers such as yourself. You can also read some of his articles (<https://openstax.org/r/articles>) to study his writing style. Listen as American correspondent Martha Teichner (b. 1948), interviews Coates on CBS Sunday Morning (<https://openstax.org/r/cbsundaymorning>), November 5, 2017.

Discussion Questions

1. How might Coates’s use of personal stories influence the emotions of his readers?
2. How might Coates use personal anecdotes and current events to create commentary on broad historical ideas? What personal events can you link to more wide-ranging ideas or issues?
3. What is the impact of the cultural and lived experiences that Coates weaves into his personal writing? How would the impact differ if he wrote in a more academic style?
4. Coates says his writing process is about pressure and failure. In what way is failure part of the development of narrative writing?

5. On what turning points or important events might Coates focus in his memoir when discussing his father?

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4.2.1.3: Glance at Genre- Conflict, Detail, and Revelation

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify common formats and design features used to develop a personal narrative or memoir.
- Show that genre conventions are shaped by purpose, culture, and expectation.

In personal writing genres, you share experiences of your life, centering them on a specific theme or memory. Unlike an autobiography, which typically extends across an entire lifetime or at least a number of years, memoirs and personal narratives are shaped by a narrower focus, with more specific storytelling surrounding a time period or an event. When writing in these personal genres, authors seek to make an emotional connection with their audience to relate an experience, emotion, or lesson learned.

Characteristics of Memoirs and Personal Narratives

Language Lens Icon

One way to approach a memoir or personal narrative is to think of it as a written series of photographs—snapshots of a period of time, moment, or sequence of events connected by a theme. In fact, writing prose snapshots is analogous to constructing and arranging a photo album composed of separate images. Photo albums, when carefully assembled from informational snapshots, tell stories with clear beginnings, middles, and endings. However, they show a lot of white space between one picture and the next, with few transitions explaining how the photographer got from one scene to another.

Visual Learning Style Icon

In other words, while photo albums tell stories, they do so piecemeal, requiring viewers to fill in or imagine what happens between shots. You also might think of snapshots as individual slides in a slideshow or pictures in an exhibition—each the work of the same maker, each a different view, all connected by some logic, the whole presenting a story.

Written snapshots function in the same way as visual snapshots, each connected to the next by white space. Sometimes written snapshots can function as a series of complete and independent paragraphs, each an entire thought, without obvious connections or transitions to the preceding or following paragraph. White space between one snapshot and another gives readers breathing space, allowing them time to digest one thought before continuing to the next. It also exercises readers' imaginations; as they participate in constructing logic that offers textual meaning, the readers themselves make connections and construct meaning. At other times, snapshots flow more directly, one after another, through chronological, circular, parallel, or other structures to move from event to event.

The secret to using snapshots successfully in your writing is to place them carefully in an order that conveys a theme and creates an unbreakable thread. And as with visual snapshots, writers must carefully choose which moments to include—and which to omit. Because they tell stories, memoirs and personal narratives share aspects of the fictional narrative genre. In writing them, you will use crafting tools to tell a vivid and purposeful story that takes into consideration your personal experience and the needs of your reader.

The Story Teller's Dilemma: Clarity of Action

Language Lens Icon

How you construct your story is as important as the story you choose to tell. Deciding on the most effective way the way to tell the story—that is, deciding what framework to use—helps you develop clarity of action to lead readers to the theme or message you seek to develop. Various components work together to bring clarity, but most often in a memoir or personal narrative, clarity comes from plot and character development. Narratives often follow a general structure called an *arc* to develop characters and plot and build the emotional impact of a story. Look at Figure 4.4 for an idea of what a story arc looks like.



Figure 4.4 Narrative arc (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

This arc, also called a *narrative arc* or a *plot triangle*, is composed of the following elements:

- The **exposition** sets up the narrative. It introduces characters and setting and establishes the primary conflict of the story, allowing readers to learn the who, what, when, where, and why of the events that will unfold.
- Next, the **rising action** fully develops the conflict. This developed series of events, the longest part of the narrative, produces increasing tension that engages readers.
- The **climax** is the turning point of the narrative, in which the story reaches its highest point of tension and conflict. It is the moment when some kind of action must be taken.
- In the **falling action**, the conflict begins to be resolved, and the tension lessens.
- Finally, during the **resolution**, the conflict is resolved, and the narrative ends. In memoirs and personal narratives, the resolution often includes or precedes a reflection that examines the broader implications of the theme or lessons learned. Of course, as in real life, conflicts are not always resolved, but the narrator can still reflect on the outcome of the situation.

Although many narratives and memoirs follow this plot-driven arc, narratives can also focus on character arcs. Character-driven narratives explore an individual, most often the narrator, and their development. The stories focus on creating an emotional connection between the character and the reader. Both plot and character arcs may be, and often are, present in memoirs and personal narratives.

Regardless of whether the focus is on plot or characters, conflict is synonymous with the reason for telling your story—it is the driving force. Conflict is often the main challenge faced by a character, and it urges the story along by engaging readers through tension and encouraging them to keep reading. Without conflict, your memoir or personal narrative will lack an overall theme. The major conflict is the undercurrent that drives each scene and is often developed by an **inciting incident**. Introduced in the exposition and developed in the rising action, this incident sets the **mood** of the story and engages readers. After the story's climax, where the conflict reaches its peak, the tension gradually resolves during the falling action and moves toward resolution, during which you can explicitly or implicitly explore the theme that ties the story elements together. Sometimes the resolution is accompanied by a **revelation**, in which the narrator or reader understands something about the bigger picture, such as a lesson learned from the events recounted or knowledge about the general human condition. Of course, each scene or section should have its own conflict, connected in some way to the overarching message of your writing. As you write, ask yourself, What's the conflict? By identifying the conflict explicitly, you will ensure that it remains central to your narrative.

Two important aspects of plot structure regarding time in a memoir are *chronos* and *kairos*. **Chronos** is the sequence of events told according to their order. This order is often chronological and linear, but not always—it can be interrupted, fragmented, circular, or otherwise out of sequence and can sometimes include flashbacks. Chronos develops themes by the telling of events. **Kairos**, on the other hand, is the Greek concept of timeliness. Events told through the lens of kairos are often transcendental, an argument that is made at the right time, often rooted in a cultural moment or movement.

Other important aspects of personal writing overlap with the narrative genre. Both reader engagement and plot rely largely on vivid details and sensory descriptions to move readers through the story. For more information on narrative elements that may enhance your personal narrative or memoir, revisit Literacy Narrative: Building Bridges, Bridging Gaps.

Key Terms for Memoir or Personal Narrative Writing

- **Anecdotes:** a short, interesting story or event told to demonstrate a point or amuse the audience.
- **Bias:** the inclusion or exclusion of certain events and facts, the decisions about word choice, and the consistency of tone. All work together to convey a particular feeling or attitude. Bias comes from a specific stance or worldview and can limit a text, particularly if that bias is left unexamined.

- **Characters:** fictional people (or other beings) created in a work of literature. The narrator of a memoir or personal narrative is the nonfiction equivalent of the main character.
- **Climax:** the point of highest level of interest and emotional response in a narrative.
- **Conclusion:** in narrative writing, the resolution. It is the point at which the narrator has reached a decision.
- **Conflict:** the major challenge that the main character faces.
- **Doubling:** a mirroring of events, objects, characters, or concepts in a memoir.
- **Exposition:** the beginning section of a narrative that introduces the characters, setting, and plot.
- **Falling action:** the section of the plot after the climax in which tension from the main conflict is decreased and the narrative moves toward the conclusion, or resolution.
- **Flashback:** a scene that interrupts the chronological order of the main narrative to return to a scene from an earlier time.
- **Foreshadowing:** hints of what is to come in the text.
- **Mood:** the atmosphere of the text, often achieved through details, description, and setting.
- **Plot:** the events that make up a narrative or story.
- **Point of view:** the perspective from which a narrative is told. Memoirs and personal narratives usually use the first-person point of view, or tell the story through the eyes of the narrator.
- **Resolution:** the point at which a story's conflict is settled; the conclusion of a narrative.
- **Revelation:** a discovery about a person, event, or idea that shapes the plot.
- **Rising action:** a series of events in the plot in which tension surrounding the major conflict increases and the plot moves toward its climax.
- **Setting:** when and where a narrative occurs. Setting is revealed through narration and details.
- **Theme:** the underlying idea that reveals the author's message about a narrative.
- **Vivid details:** sensory language and detailed descriptions that help readers gain a deeper and fuller understanding of ideas and events in the narrative.
- **Voice:** the combination of vocabulary, tone, sentence structure, dialogue, and other details that make a text authentic and engaging. Voice is the "identity" or "personality" of the writer and includes the specific English variety used by the narrator and characters.

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4.3: Process Analysis

The Purpose of a Process Analysis

A process analysis essay explains how to do something or how something works. In either case, the formula for a process analysis essay remains the same. The process is articulated into clear, definitive steps. Almost everything writers do involves following a step-by-step process. From riding a bike as children to learning various jobs as adults, writers initially needed instructions to effectively execute the task. Likewise, they have likely had to instruct others, so they know how important good directions are—and how frustrating it is when they are poorly written.

The Structure of a Process Analysis

The process analysis essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the goal of the process. The organization of a process analysis essay typically follows chronological order. The steps of the process are conveyed in the order in which they usually occur.

Body paragraphs will be constructed based on the aforementioned steps. If a particular step is complicated and needs a lot of explaining, then it will likely take up a paragraph on its own. But if a series of simple steps is easier to understand, then the steps can be grouped into a single paragraph. Words such as first, second, third, next, and finally, are helpful cues to orient the reader and organize the content of essay.

Writing a Process Analysis Essay

1. Choose a topic that is interesting, is relatively complex, and can be explained in a series of steps.
2. As with other rhetorical writing modes, choose a process that you know well so you can more easily describe the finer details of each step in the process. A thesis statement should come at the end of an introduction, and it should state the final outcome of the process one is describing.
3. Body paragraphs are composed of the steps in the process. Each step should be expressed using strong details and clear examples. Use time transition phrases to help organize steps in the process and to orient the reader.
4. The conclusion should thoroughly describe the result of the process described in the body paragraphs.

? Activities

1. In the writing process, it's important to brainstorm and organize your thoughts. Write a list of ten processes that you are familiar with (e.g., cooking rice, surfing, playing a game). Be daring. Include processes that others may not be familiar with. From this list, circle three processes that you are comfortable explaining. Pick one process. What process did you pick?
2. Create an outline or list that includes instructions that a person needs to do to complete this process. Imagine a person who has never done this process before. Show your outline or list to a person in class. Based on this information, is there a clear picture of how to complete this task? Is the person able to perform this task? What instructions need to be added, changed, or deleted? As an additional step, the person could follow instructions to actually perform this task.

? Further Resources

See examples of students' essays in *Mānoa Horizons: A Journal of Undergraduate Research, Creative Work, and Innovation* (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2019).

Sources

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4.4: Evaluation

This section discusses the purpose and structure of evaluation, as many students prepare to write their own evaluative essays.

The Purpose of Evaluative Writing

Writers evaluate arguments in order to present an informed and well-reasoned judgment about a subject. While the evaluation will be based on their opinion, it should not seem opinionated. Instead, it should aim to be reasonable and unbiased. This is achieved through developing a solid judgment, selecting appropriate criteria to evaluate the subject, and providing clear evidence to support the criteria.

Evaluation is a type of writing that has many real-world applications. Anything can be evaluated. For example, evaluations of movies, restaurants, books, and technology ourselves are all real-world evaluations.

The Structure of an Evaluation Essay

Evaluation essays are structured as follows.

Subject

First, the essay will present the **subject**. What is being evaluated? Why? The essay begins with the writer giving any details needed about the subject.

Judgement

Next, the essay needs to provide a **judgment** about a subject. This is the thesis of the essay, and it states whether the subject is good or bad based on how it meets the stated criteria.

Criteria

The body of the essay will contain the **criteria** used to evaluate the subject. In an evaluation essay, the criteria must be appropriate for evaluating the subject under consideration. Appropriate criteria will help to keep the essay from seeming biased or unreasonable. If authors evaluated the quality of a movie based on the snacks sold at the snack bar, that would make them seem unreasonable, and their evaluation may be disregarded because of it.

Evidence

The **evidence** of an evaluation essay consists of the supporting details authors provide based on their judgment of the criteria.

For example, if the subject of an evaluation is a restaurant, a judgment could be “Kay’s Bistro provides an unrivaled experience in fine dining.” Some authors evaluate fine dining restaurants by identifying appropriate criteria in order to rate the establishment’s food quality, service, and atmosphere. The examples are the evidence.

Another example of evaluation is literary analysis; judgments may be made about a character in the story based on the character’s actions, characteristics, and past history within the story. The scenes in the story are evidence for why readers have a certain opinion of the character.

Job applications and interviews are more examples of evaluations. Based on certain criteria, management and hiring committees determine which applicants will be considered for an interview and which applicant will be hired.

? Activities

1. Evaluate a restaurant. What do you expect in a good restaurant? What criteria determines whether a restaurant is good?
2. List three criteria that you will use to evaluate a restaurant. Then dine there. Afterwards, explain whether or not the restaurant meets each criteria, and include evidence (qualities from the restaurant) that backs your evaluation.
3. Give the restaurant a star rating. (5 Stars: Excellent, 4 Stars: Very Good, 3 Stars: Good, 2 Stars: Fair, 1 Star: Poor). Explain why the restaurant earned this star rating.

Further Resources

See examples of students' essays in [Mānoa Horizons: A Journal of Undergraduate Research, Creative Work, and Innovation](#) (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2019).

Sources

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4.5: Comparison and Contrast

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of comparison and contrast in writing.
- Explain organizational methods used when comparing and contrasting.
- Understand how to write a compare-and-contrast essay.

THE PURPOSE OF COMPARISON AND CONTRAST IN WRITING

Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar, while contrast in writing discusses elements that are different. A compare-and-contrast essay, then, analyzes two subjects by comparing them, contrasting them, or both.

The key to a good compare-and-contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities. For example, if you wanted to focus on contrasting two subjects you would not pick apples and oranges; rather, you might choose to compare and contrast two types of oranges or two types of apples to highlight subtle differences. For example, Red Delicious apples are sweet, while Granny Smiths are tart and acidic. Drawing distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience's understanding of that category, which is the purpose of the compare-and-contrast essay.

Similarly, to focus on comparison, choose two subjects that seem at first to be unrelated. For a comparison essay, you likely would not choose two apples or two oranges because they share so many of the same properties already. Rather, you might try to compare how apples and oranges are quite similar. The more divergent the two subjects initially seem, the more interesting a comparison essay will be.

WRITING AT WORK

Comparing and contrasting is also an evaluative tool. In order to make accurate evaluations about a given topic, you must first know the critical points of similarity and difference. Comparing and contrasting is a primary tool for many workplace assessments. You have likely compared and contrasted yourself to other colleagues. Employee advancements, pay raises, hiring, and firing are typically conducted using comparison and contrast. Comparison and contrast could be used to evaluate companies, departments, or individuals.

Exercise 4.5.1

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward contrast. Choose one of the following three categories. Pick two examples from each. Then come up with one similarity and three differences between the examples.

- Romantic comedies
- Internet search engines
- Cell phones

Exercise 4.5.2

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward comparison. Choose one of the following three items. Then come up with one difference and three similarities.

- Department stores and discount retail stores
- Fast food chains and fine dining restaurants
- Dogs and cats

THE STRUCTURE OF A COMPARISON AND CONTRAST ESSAY

The compare-and-contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both and the reason for doing so. The thesis could lean more toward comparing, contrasting, or both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example that leans more toward contrasting.

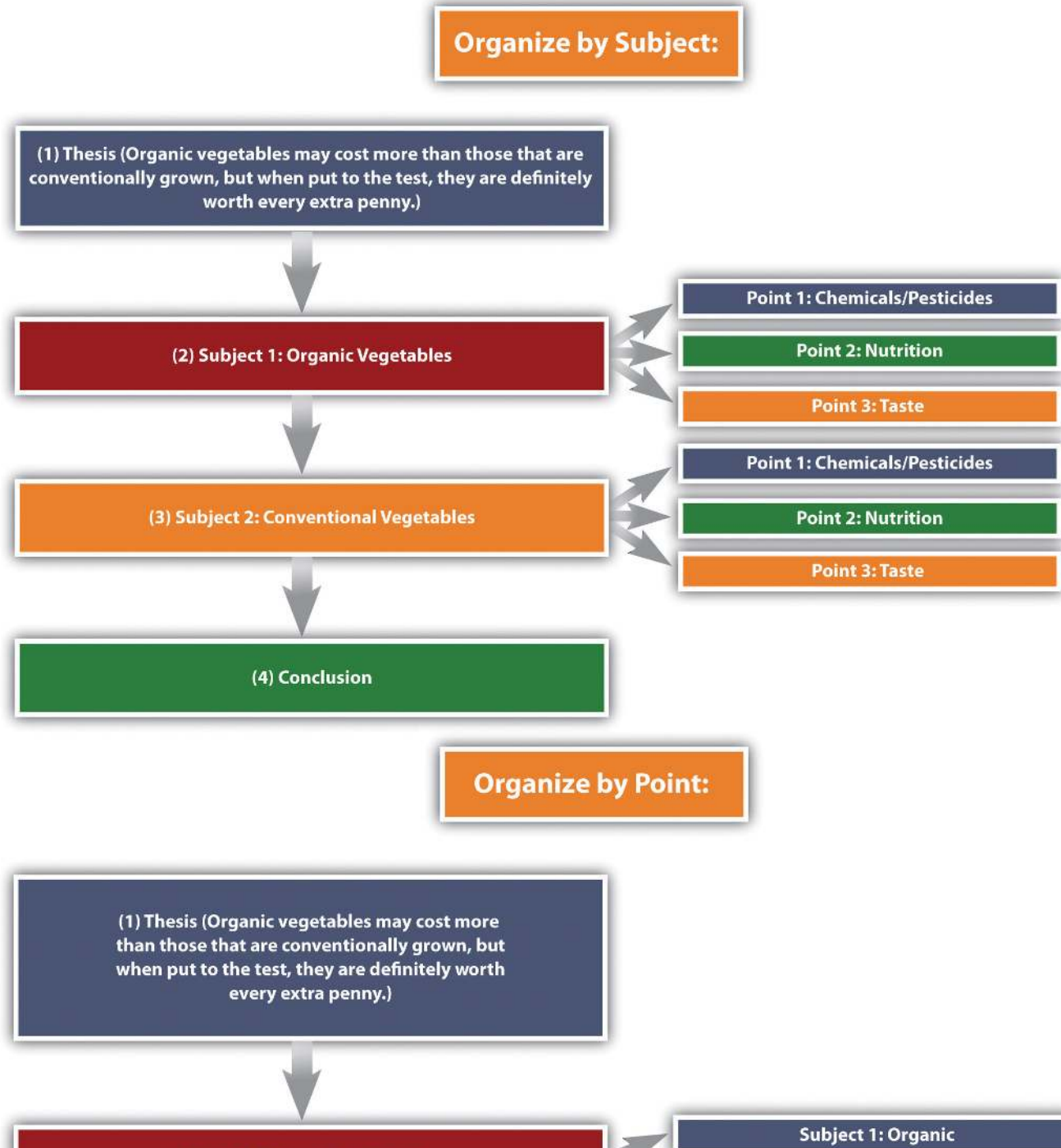
Thesis statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny.

Here the thesis sets up the two subjects to be compared and contrasted (organic versus conventional vegetables), and it makes a claim about the results that might prove useful to the reader.

You may organize compare-and-contrast essays in one of the following two ways:

- According to the subjects themselves, discussing one then the other
- According to individual points, discussing each subject in relation to each point

See Figure 10.1 “Comparison and Contrast Diagram”, which diagrams the ways to organize our organic versus conventional vegetables thesis.



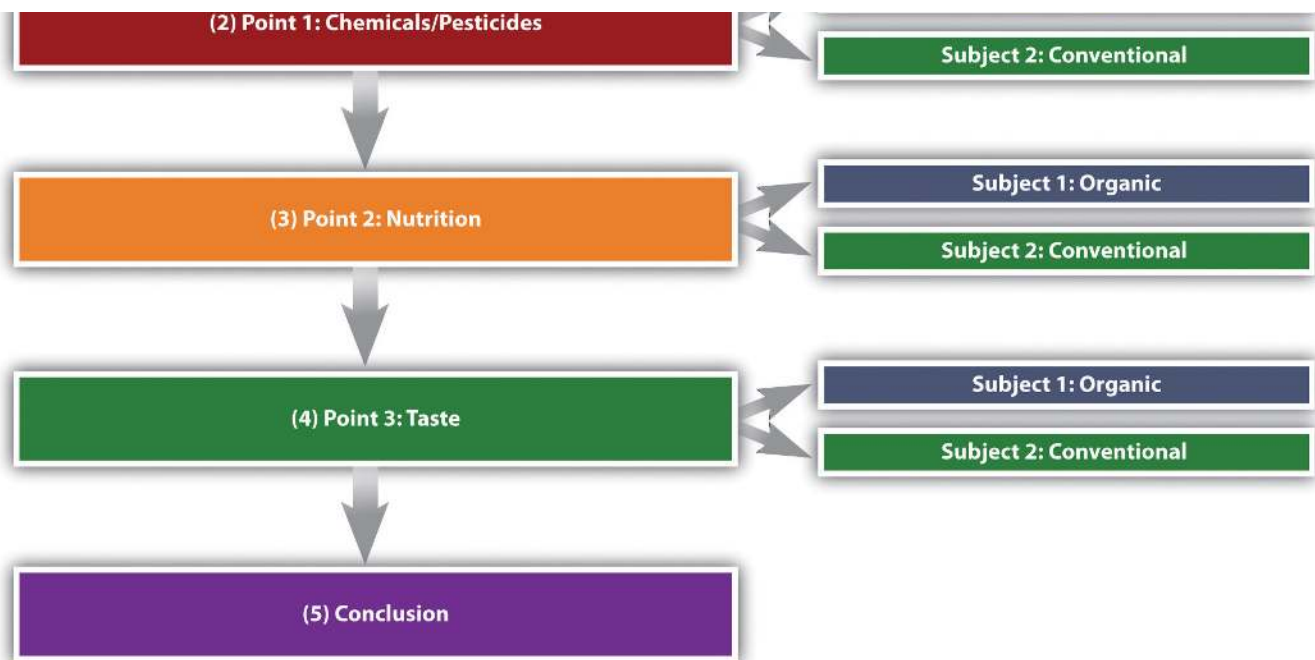


Figure 10.1

The organizational structure you choose depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

Given that compare-and-contrast essays analyze the relationship between two subjects, it is helpful to have some phrases on hand that will cue the reader to such analysis. See Table 10.3 “Phrases of Comparison and Contrast” for examples.

Table 10.3 - Phrases of Comparison and Contrast

Comparison	Contrast
one similarity	one difference
another similarity	another difference
both	conversely
like	in contrast
likewise	unlike
similarly	while
in a similar fashion	whereas

Exercise 4.5.3

Create an outline for each of the items you chose in Exercise 1 & 2. Use the point-by-point organizing strategy for one of them, and use the subject organizing strategy for the other.

WRITING A COMPARISON AND CONTRAST ESSAY

First choose whether you want to compare seemingly disparate subjects, contrast seemingly similar subjects, or compare and contrast subjects. Once you have decided on a topic, introduce it with an engaging opening paragraph. Your thesis should come at the end of the introduction, and it should establish the subjects you will compare, contrast, or both as well as state what can be learned from doing so.

The body of the essay can be organized in one of two ways: by subject or by individual points. The organizing strategy that you choose will depend on, as always, your audience and your purpose. You may also consider your particular approach to the subjects

as well as the nature of the subjects themselves; some subjects might better lend themselves to one structure or the other. Make sure to use comparison and contrast phrases to cue the reader to the ways in which you are analyzing the relationship between the subjects.

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay and reinforces your thesis.

WRITING AT WORK

Many business presentations are conducted using comparison and contrast. The organizing strategies—by subject or individual points—could also be used for organizing a presentation. Keep this in mind as a way of organizing your content the next time you or a colleague have to present something at work.

Exercise 4.5.4

Choose one of the outlines you created in Exercise 3, and write a full compare-and-contrast essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, well-defined and detailed paragraphs, and a fitting conclusion that ties everything together.

key takeaways

- A compare-and-contrast essay analyzes two subjects by either comparing them, contrasting them, or both.
- The purpose of writing a comparison or contrast essay is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities between two subjects.
- The thesis should clearly state the subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both, and it should state what is to be learned from doing so.
- There are two main organizing strategies for compare-and-contrast essays.
- Organize by the subjects themselves, one then the other.
- Organize by individual points, in which you discuss each subject in relation to each point.
- Use phrases of comparison or phrases of contrast to signal to readers how exactly the two subjects are being analyzed.

References

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4.6: Persuasion

Writers of persuasive essays take a stand on a controversial issue and give well-researched arguments to support this position. This section will help students define the persuasive essay as well as understand its purpose and structure.

What is an Argument?

In today's society, arguments are all around us, in our every waking moment throughout the day, whether in online ads or in the messages one reads on one's favorite box of cereal. The ability to think critically in terms of deciding what to believe is highly important due to the fact that individuals are bombarded by arguments, on the internet and elsewhere, on a daily basis. Deciding what arguments to accept or reject not only makes for a good essay, but has implications for success in life and for one's future career.

Understanding the nature of argument is essential to writing a good persuasive essay. So, what is argument? It is not the act of proving who is right or wrong. Television and social media convey argument as a means of proving one's point for the sake of arguing. This is not argument. Ancient rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates understood argument in terms of truth-seeking, and conceptualized it as a means of preventing war. In this vein, good writers engage in truth-seeking to find out what is valid so that they may communicate truths to others. Sometimes in this process of truth-seeking, the writers themselves may change their minds on a given topic. Leaders such as Queen Lili'uokalani and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrate argument as a means of engaging in truth-seeking. See [A Letter of Protest](#) (Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawai'i, 1898) and [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#) (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., AU, University of Alabama, April 16, 1963).

Structure of a Persuasive Essay

Before students begin creating persuasive essays, they should engage in preliminary research. Persuasive essays often include quotes or paraphrases from experts or statistics from academic studies. These essays must also demonstrate the writer's ability to think critically and to avoid logical errors.

Note: Persuasive essays often require research, so students should see the Research and Plagiarism chapter of this text before drafting the essay.

After writers have conducted some preliminary research to enter the conversation, they will be ready to begin writing. Drafting should include at least four aspects:

- Introduction and thesis
- Strong arguments and evidence in support of thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- A compelling and satisfying conclusion

Creating an Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general issue. The role of this paragraph is to do the following:

- Create interest.
- Introduce a controversial topic.
- Include a thesis statement that clearly presents the writer's position on the chosen issue, and the major points to be discussed. Instructors will give students further guidelines on where the thesis should appear, but it is usually located at the very end of the introduction.

Strong Arguments and Evidence in Support of the Thesis

The body of the persuasive essay presents the reasons for the writer's position on the issue. Writers should provide at least three solid reasons for their position.

When developing arguments and evidence, a writer would be wise to do the following:

- Provide at least one paragraph for each reason that is presented (though some reasons may require more than one paragraph). Clearly state each reason in a topic sentence.

- Provide sufficient evidence for each reason. Much of the evidence will come from research, though writers can effectively integrate their own knowledge as evidence.
- Explain ideas thoroughly and carefully, connecting one's sources together smoothly and logically.
- Provide follow-up discussion or explanation for the researched information one has provided.
- Remember that arguments are usually “won” or “lost” on the quantity and quality of the evidence.

Ways to Persuade

There are three primary ways to appeal to the emotion and response of readers: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos

Ethos is the appeal to what is right, fair and trustworthy. For example, if Aaron is arguing for more access to parks in Hawai'i for individuals who are disabled, he could do so by pointing out that many citizens who happen to have some sort of disability pay taxes that support these parks and yet are denied access simply due to design. The unfairness of this situation would appeal to the readers' sense of what is right or fair.

Logos

Logos appeals to the reader's logic and reason. If Aaron is arguing for the need to make college tuition more affordable or even free, such as is the case in Norway, Sweden, and Germany, among other countries, and he uses statistics about the number of students who would not be able to obtain a college degree without some country-wide assistance, he is appealing to his reader's logic.

Pathos

An argument with pathos appeals to the reader's emotions. In his essay in favor of students joining a sports team in high school, he could highlight his own experience of overcoming fears and physical challenges while running in high school. Such an approach would pull the heartstrings of his readers who are touched by his success due to the self-discipline, social connections, and physical strength he developed through running on a team.

Addressing Opposing Ideas and the Author's Position

Any good argument anticipates the opposing arguments and attempts to answer or refute its main points. In refuting the opposing point, writers do the following:

1. Address at least one major opposing point. Writers briefly summarize viewpoints on the other side of the argument.
2. Provide reasons and evidence showing the weaknesses in this opposing idea. They may address more than one opposing viewpoint.

Conclusion: Call to Action

The conclusion should provide insight into the significance of the issue. Most important is the fact that such a conclusion would do well not to use the word “should” as in the following. “In order for the United States to increase college attendance, encourage young people to seek out higher education and advanced knowledge to be used within the professional world, and truly support the process of learning, making college tuition more affordable or even free is key.”

If writers have proven their stance within the body paragraphs using examples and quoted, paraphrased, or summarized information from professionals within the given community, a “should” isn't needed because the reader has already been convinced.

? Activities

1. Take a look at advertisements for products. How are advertisers trying to persuade you to purchase their product?
 - What facts (logos) does the advertiser provide?
 - What emotions do you feel after viewing the advertisement?
 - What occurred in the advertisement to cause these emotions (pathos)?
 - What occurred in the advertisement that appealed to your sense of morals and ethics (ethos)?
 - Overall, was the advertisement effective to persuade you to purchase their product? Why or why not?

Further Resources

- Read more about writing a thesis statement in the handout by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: [Thesis Statements](#), The Writing Center.
- Watch the following video to learn more about persuasive appeals: [Ethos, Pathos, Logos](#)
- Read more about counterarguments and the language used to signal the counterargument and refutation in this handout by Harvard College Writing Center: [Counterargument](#), Writing Resources.
- See sample persuasive essays in “Chapter 15: Introduction to Sample Essays,” Writing for Success.
- Other sample persuasive essays are “Online Monitoring: A Threat to Employee Privacy in the Wired Workplace”; (Hacker), and “[Performance Enhancement through Biotechnology Has No Place in Sports](#)”; (Hacker). These essays are excellent references because they contain notes in the margins that explain the components of the essays and MLA format.
- Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). “[Transitional Devices](#),” The Purdue OWL.

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4.6.1: Persuasion/Argument

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of persuasion in writing.
- Identify bias in writing.
- Assess various rhetorical devices.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Understand the importance of visuals to strengthen arguments.
- Write a persuasive essay.

THE PURPOSE OF PERSUASIVE WRITING

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion. The act of trying to persuade automatically implies more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

tip

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we engage in. On some level, we all want to be right, and we want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the right one.

THE STRUCTURE OF A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

The following five features make up the structure of a persuasive essay:

- Introduction and thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- Strong evidence in support of claim
- Style and tone of language
- A compelling conclusion

CREATING AN INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and states the writer's point of view.

tip

Avoid forming a thesis based on a negative claim. For example, "The hourly minimum wage is not high enough for the average worker to live on." This is probably a true statement, but persuasive arguments should make a positive case. That is, the thesis statement should focus on how the hourly minimum wage is low or insufficient.

ACKNOWLEDGING OPPOSING IDEAS AND LIMITS TO YOUR ARGUMENT

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must be sure to acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word.

Acknowledging points of view different from your own also has the effect of fostering more credibility between you and the audience. They know from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space.

It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience. Audience members will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and audience members will trust your argument as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but she admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation alone cannot end these problems since guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might disagree with this writer's argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to the ideas. See Table 10.5 "Phrases of Concession" for some useful phrases of concession.

Table 10.5 - Phrases of Concession

although	granted that	of course
still	though	yet

Exercise 4.6.1.1

Try to form a thesis for each of the following topics. Remember the more specific your thesis, the better.

- Foreign policy
- Television and advertising
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Gender roles and the workplace
- Driving and cell phones

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Choose the thesis statement that most interests you and discuss why.

BIAS IN WRITING

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly colored clothes or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful and reasonable address of opposing sides.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth and the better the final product will be.

The weakness of bias is when the bias begins to take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using I too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

THE USE OF I IN WRITING

The use of I in writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can potentially have on your writing.

Be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound overly biased. There are two primary reasons:

1. Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader's attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of I is no different.

2. The insertion of I into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. I is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentence is underlined:

Smoking is bad.

I think smoking is bad.

In the first sentence, the rightful subject, smoking, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of I and think replaces smoking as the subject, which draws attention to I and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

CHECKLIST

Developing Sound Arguments

Does my essay contain the following elements?

- An engaging introduction
- A reasonable, specific thesis that is able to be supported by evidence
- A varied range of evidence from credible sources
- Respectful acknowledgement and explanation of opposing ideas
- A style and tone of language that is appropriate for the subject and audience
- Acknowledgement of the argument's limits
- A conclusion that will adequately summarize the essay and reinforce the thesis

FACT AND OPINION

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views, or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation must have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions. Experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience.

For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and vice versa.

In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

tip

The word prove is frequently used in the discussion of persuasive writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another proves the argument, but proving an argument is often not possible. No evidence proves a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is debatable. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported, explained, and persuaded.

Exercise 4.6.1.2

On a separate sheet of paper, take three of the theses you formed in Exercise 1, and list the types of evidence you might use in support of that thesis.

Exercise 4.6.1.3

Using the evidence you provided in support of the three theses in Exercise 2, come up with at least one counterargument to each. Then write a concession statement, expressing the limits to each of your three arguments.

USING VISUAL ELEMENTS TO STRENGTHEN ARGUMENTS

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if you can see how the disparity looks graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often try to convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.

WRITING AT WORK

When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get across your idea. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective timesaving tool. Quantitative visuals in business presentations serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing. They should make logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Quantitative visuals should be pictures that might appeal to your audience's emotions. You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace.

WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Start by acknowledging and explaining points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. Also state the limits of your argument. This too helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated.

Make sure that your style and tone are appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice.

Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis.

Exercise 4.6.1.4

Choose one of the topics you have been working on throughout this section. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, clear explanations of all the evidence you present, and a strong conclusion.

key takeaways

- The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion.
- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- A thesis that expresses the opinion of the writer in more specific terms is better than one that is vague.

- It is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.
- It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.
- To persuade a skeptical audience, you will need to use a wide range of evidence. Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence that you might use in explaining your point.
- Make sure that your word choice and writing style is appropriate for both your subject and your audience.
- You should let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.
- You should be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound more biased than it needs to.
- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- Opinions are personal views, or judgments, that cannot be proven.
- In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

References

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Research

Research motivates most of our writing, whether formally or informally. It is not, however, a natural skill. Though many of us may navigate the Internet with ease, the type of research necessary for college writing requires skilled practice and obeys certain rules. Here, we'll see an overview of these rules and procedures and review the correct way to incorporate others' thoughts in our own work.

Within your own campus community, and with each new class, you may find different standards and expectations for research will apply. This book cannot cover every example; however, it should give you a basis from which to build. As you encounter more demanding research requirements, never hesitate to reach out to the real research experts on your campus: your college librarians!

[5.1: Research Skills](#)

[5.1.1: Introduction](#)

[5.1.2: The Research Process](#)

[5.1.3: Citing Sources](#)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.1: Research Skills

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to achieve the following:

- Use all the steps of the research process to write an informed essay or report.
- Generate a suitable area of focus for research-based academic writing.
- Distinguish which sources are credible and appropriate for a college paper.
- Cite quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material in order to appropriately give others credit for their original words, ideas, and overall content.
- Cite resources ethically (without plagiarism).
- Use a style guide to create an academic, properly formatted essay or report.

5.1.1: Introduction

5.1.2: The Research Process

5.1.3: Citing Sources

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5.1.1: Introduction

A Students' Story

Jaden and Karen are two very different students, both of whom are taking English 100. When asked to write a research-based essay, Jaden copies text directly from internet sources and pastes it into his document as he stays up late and tries to meet the morning deadline for turning in his essay. Karen, on the other hand, has been researching for the past four weeks, finding ideal resources, jotting down her own ideas and significant facts into a Google Doc or in her notebook, always recording exactly what page and paragraph number from which the information came. She was able to use the sources she found in a way that is ideal for college-level writing—to allow them to provide support for her own, original, unique ideas.

Karen gave herself time to gain more knowledge and, therefore, more expertise regarding her topic so that all her studying and gained knowledge would help her become informed for this particular research-based assignment, as well as giving her practice for similar writing assignments that would come her way throughout her college career. Karen had based her writing on her own ideas and then cited others' appropriately, which she continued to do throughout the semester. Her professor praised Karen for her creativity, thoroughness, and organization, along with her correctly citing her sources.

As Karen continued to grow in confidence, she decided to apply for a position as a writing tutor through her college's peer mentoring program. Once hired, she would not only earn a paycheck, but she would also gain valuable experience helping others understand the intricacies involved in the research and writing processes while sharing her own stories regarding how to succeed in college.

Jaden, however, was asked by his professor to make an appointment to meet with her. When he arrived at her office, she invited him to take a seat. "Where did you find your content for this report?" she asked.

A bit befuddled, he answered, "Through researching it . . . like with sources I found on the internet and in articles I found about my topic. They're all listed in my Works Cited." He reached for the paper and flipped to the back pages. "See. These sources. And I included the intext citations here." He pointed to another section within the body of his report. "And here."

His professor knew that Jaden's report was not only suffering from his failure to commit to the number of hours necessary for such a research-based project but that he had also never adequately learned how to incorporate the words and ideas of experts of others with his own words and ideas in a way that allowed already-existing information to fortify his original writing . . . not replace it.

Such plagiarism—taking the work of others and using it as his own—could involve department chairs and even college deans, the threat of failing a course, or, in extreme cases, suspension. However, particular consideration needed to be given to the fact that Jaden had been writing his research-based essays like this for years, and he had still made it to college. Was he at fault for beginning his report too late and thinking an all-nighter and what was largely a cut-and-paste job could save him? Certainly. But how many instructors before this had just let it slide because he had "included the intext citations"?

One successful habit Karen used was not only reading but also engaging with the source she discovered during the research process. She interacted with the texts by jotting down observations on printouts of articles regarding what the writers' ideas made her think about. For online sources, she created two columns on a page in her notebook: (1) notes and citations of what the author was saying, and (2) her thoughts, opinions, analysis, or evaluation of each source along with her own, original ideas that came to mind as she was reading.

What Karen did was participate in the existing dialogue about her topic—the conversation that was taking place among the established experts—and contribute by "publishing" (by submitting her essay by the deadline to her professor) her own original ideas as well as her analysis and evaluation of what others said. This practice also resulted in her own synthesis of her previous knowledge with her newly gained knowledge and her continued analytical thinking, innovation, and creation of written knowledge about that topic. She learned that writing allows the individual doing so to enter the conversation, which is what academia, especially at the college level, is all about.

Jaden's instructor helped him understand how to properly incorporate the ideas of others within his essay through using a body paragraph from his own essay that was largely composed from content that he had obtained from an outside source. She asked Jaden to use two different colored highlighters to identify the phrases that were in his own voice and that were written from his own knowledge and those that came from an outside source. The professor explained the 70/30 rule, which says that 70% of an essay should be in the original voice of the writer and a maximum of 30% can be in the voice of an established expert on the subject, noting that some prefer more of a 60/40 percentage.

The instructor showed Jaden how to follow quoted, paraphrased, or summarized content with standard intext citations within parentheses. She also showed him how to intersperse such important information with sentences he crafted on his own. "State it again in your own words. Explain in your own words how that information relates to the overall focus of your section. Connect that information to more information that will follow," she explained. "And when you get to the end of your paragraph with more information from an outside source, finish up with your own wise voice."

"I can do that," Jaden said. "How come nobody ever showed me how to do that? I've been getting away with this kind of research-based writing for years."

The focus of English 100 is the types of writing students will encounter in college and their careers. Most of the majors students choose require them to conduct extensive research all the way through college. So the students' job is to learn how to do it so as to demonstrate their researching skills and increasing knowledge.

An introduction to college writing is based on understanding that the primary underlying skill of academic writing at the college level lies within analysis and the ability to synthesize information into one's own words, citing sources as needed, with the confidence of one who feels part of a given community. The skills needed for good research-based writing involve reading the work of experts, assimilating that information with one's own brilliant (and evolving) ideas, possibly mirroring some of the writing that suits each individual student, and becoming a clear, creative, and confident writer in his or her own right.

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5.1.2: The Research Process

To succeed in college, students need to develop solid research skills that will benefit them throughout and beyond their academic career. They must focus, in and out of class, on doing the following:

- Identifying an area of focus
- Identifying the audience
- Using campus library resources to find information
- Determining if information is scholarly and credible
- Citing sources accurately, avoiding plagiarism, and creating a final written composition using the appropriate style guide

Identifying an Area of Focus

Any student writer's initial task is to make sure he or she understands what the instructor is asking for. Precious time can be wasted if students begin their research without a clear picture of what their end product should look like and how it should read. Once an essay is assigned, and some initial contemplation and research on the student's part, it is a great time to make an appointment with an instructor.

Conscientious college writers begin thinking about and researching essay topics immediately after being given the assignment. As we all know, brainstorming can be a solid way to record important initial ideas. At the end of a brainstorming session, writers can begin to see patterns of interest, which will become perfect places to begin research. Avenues within writer's researching often need to remain fluid initially so student writers can determine what kind of resources are available regarding the respective the topic. This flexibility allows students to narrow or broaden topics into a thesis that might not be obvious at first.

Identifying the Audience

All writing is created for a specific audience. Writers must identify the specific reader they want to reach. If they are writing for a general audience, what is the best way to capture a wide range of readers' interests? Should they provide background information that general readers would not necessarily know? Are they writing for an audience already well versed in this topic, and, if so, does this mean writers can use more scholarly language and include less background information?

Using Campus Library Resources and the Internet to Find Information

Research-based writing is only as credible as the sources the writer uses. Therefore, students should start with the college library catalogs and databases. There, a writer can find reference materials (e.g., encyclopedias and dictionaries), books, multimedia resources, as well as the most valuable resource of all, the college librarian. Librarians are trained with the most up-to-date strategies to access scholarly and popular resources that are available to students and usable for college projects. These days, many of these resources can be accessed online from home, which makes learning to use the tools of the library even more important and valuable.

The internet is increasingly used to find sources for academic essays. However, much of what is found on the web is not appropriate for college work. Note, too, that a simple internet search may not allow students to access full articles of ideal credible and scholarly sources whereas going through one's college or university library main page will allow full and free access.

Some of the skills that good writers use as part of information competency include the following:

- Accessing the library search engines
- Determining the best search terms
- Narrowing or expanding search results
- Finding the best books, articles, and other sources through the library catalog

Determining if Information is Credible

Evaluating the quality of resources is an essential skill, especially in today's world. People are inundated with media of various kinds, much of which tries to get us to buy something or to think in a certain way, so perhaps one of the most essential skills to learn is information literacy. The biggest challenge student researchers have is based in the fact that there is such a vast quantity of information available that could potentially be used for a research-based paper. However, there exists a significant range between

highly credible, relevant information and that which is not. Materials found online are usually less reliable than those curated and made available through library resources purchased through the college.

Because “facts” can be accessed in just a few moments, it can be tempting to assume that they are just that—factual. More recently and more often, free online information is not fact, not verifiable through citations, and not credible. In addition, new kinds of sources are available, such as a live news feeds or any one of the array of social media options, thus necessitating a variety of ways of assessing information. As such, understanding how to research is key, especially in this new era when content can be skewed in a number of ways.

Evaluating sources is detective work. The researcher needs to make decisions about what to search for, how to search, and what type of information is credible and academically appropriate. For example, a student who is writing about the Great Pacific Garbage Vortex will find many sources available through library-based searches, as well as through online resources that could be more current. However, information that comes from the website of a company that produces petrochemicals and plastics will not be as valuable as a source that comes from scholarly research found through the UH Library System.

The following are some questions students need to ask of every source they are considering for an academic paper:

- Is this source relevant to the topic? Does it give background, explain concepts, and offer support for or an alternative viewpoint on the topic?
- Is it considered a credible source? What is the expertise of the person who wrote it? How current is it? Where was it published? What was the source of funding for this publication? Would that funding source add bias to the material? Are there references that indicate where the information has come from? Is it scholarly or written for a general audience? What does the language used in the source suggest about the purpose of the piece or the scholarliness of the writers?

Depending on the answers to these questions, writers can feel secure with sources that are relevant and credible. Papers that use high-quality sources get better results and better grades with the sharing of important information with professors and other readers.

? Activities

1. Write assignments about a topic that is not only interesting to you, but that also encourages you to write about that topic with a strong sense of responsibility to the larger audience or the greater good. (Readings and assignments are most ideal when they can be individualized, relevant to your major area of academic focus. Suggestions of such essay topics can be found at the end of this chapter.)
2. Researched Persuasive Essay: In two minutes, brainstorm or list the biggest problems you wish could be solved in the world. In another two minutes, list the biggest problems you have noticed in the nation. In one minute, list the biggest problems in your state. In another minute, list the biggest problems in your community, town, area, ahupua‘a. Take three minutes to list your personal values, beliefs, and priorities, and number them in order of importance. Then take five minutes to review your prioritized personal lists and select one of the “big problems,” from any of the lists, that match up with your values, beliefs, and priorities. This will help you to select topics you care deeply about and can engage with.
3. Once you have selected a topic for a persuasive argument involving research to back up your key idea, spend five minutes freewriting, brainstorming, listing your main claim (i.e., persuasive argument) about a debatable issue. After listing your main claim, list all possible key ideas that back up the main claim, as well as all the solutions and opposing perspectives (i.e., counterclaims) you can think of. Then spend 10 minutes with a partner or a team of three to four peers, discussing your ideas and gathering feedback and additional ideas, and noting down what your partner or team said. Then spend 10 minutes creating an outline or informal list organizing your thesis statement and the key points that become the topic sentences of your paragraphs.

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5.1.3: Citing Sources

Citing Sources Accurately, Avoiding Plagiarism, and Creating a Final Research Project

By using the references page and in-text citations of research articles, Karen was able to scout out even more helpful information on her topic. She learned the value of those in-text citations and lists of works consulted when she was reading something interesting and wanted to learn more. When an article cited the name of the original source's author, title, publication information, and direct online link, she was able to go to the original source and dive deeper into the information she was passionate about learning. She also reviewed her syllabus, the formatting and documentation style it indicated, and the style guides themselves.

Every publisher, profession, and academic discipline has its own style guide, which provides standards, expectations, and guidelines for formatting written work, for documenting research, whether read or conducted, and for citing outside sources that help inform readers and other potential writers. Publishers and professors expect written work (i.e., essays and reports) to meet the standards set in these style guides. Information about the five most important, most common style guides used in academic disciplines can be found in the Further Resources box at the end of this chapter.

A research-based essay that conforms to the conventions of a style guide signals to the reader that the writer has joined the academic conversation and should be taken seriously. It also indicates the writer's respect for the thoughts and ideas of others. In addition, the reader learns where to go to find other information on the topic. When writers do not turn in a research paper with the correct format, it is analogous to showing up in board shorts to a job interview.

Citation Management

While using a style guide requires attention to detail, the process can be simplified by using a variety of free tools that help students make a Works Cited (in MLA) or References (in APA) page. For example, many students use an add-on for Google Docs called [EasyBib Bibliography Creator](#), or [Zotero](#), a free online tool to help students to organize research materials into academic formats.

Another tool is [BibMe: Free Bibliography & Citation Maker](#), and even [Purdue OWL](#) offers generator options.

While these tools make many of the tasks of conforming to a style guide easier, students should always check the final outcome with the style guides themselves because the order in which the citation is generated often comes out wrong for various reasons, often because of the way in which the information was entered. It is important for writers to double-check for little "errors" in punctuation and capitalization. Sometimes the generator places titles inaccurately in ALL CAPS. Sometimes hyphens are placed where dashes should be. If the quotation marks and apostrophes are in a serif font in the body of the essay, writers need to be sure the quotation marks and apostrophes look the same in the references section.

Using Sources Correctly

Karen found 15 different sources she could use for her 10-page analytical report for her psychology class. She discovered that only nine were fully credible and appropriate for the topic and for college-level writing. In contrast, Jaden went with the first two sources that popped up in his internet search and copied and pasted paragraphs from the sources directly into his document. In addition, he promptly forgot where he got the information and what the title of each was called. He did not notice if there were author names or publication dates. He did not know what form the list of sources at the end of the paper should be in. All of these oversights lessened the quality of his work. Plagiarism (i.e., using the words and ideas of another writer without proper attribution) could cause Jaden to receive a failing grade for his essay and perhaps be grounds for suspension.

Annotations and Citations: Be Accurate and Precise

Karen consulted various free online guides to ensure that her in-text citations and list of works cited were correct and complete. Jaden had missed this significant information when it had been presented in class. When he had that unfortunate required meeting with his professor regarding his plagiarized essay, the fact that he did not understand the importance of this element in the process of crafting his essay was a glaring concern. Was it one that was fixable within his essay at this point in the semester? Not likely.

Annotation: The Basics

It is important to take notes when researching, and to accurately use credible sources. When deep-diving into the information written by others, be sure to take accurate notes, indicating the following:

- Whether the source material borrowed is verbatim (i.e., copied word for word) or paraphrased and summarized (i.e., rewritten in one's own words)
- The page number and paragraph number, if identifiable, from which the information came
- The publication information required for the citation at the end in the style that the professor requires

For MLA-style papers, information such as the author's first and last name, the title of the article, title of the book, publication, magazine, or webpage, publication volume, number, or series, name of the publisher, publication date, and URL, DOI, or link (if the source is online) are all required.

Note: MLA uses the word "Accessed" to denote the date on which the information on the web was obtained. However, for the newest edition MLA 8, it is not required to add this information at the end of the Works Cited entry, but it is especially encouraged when there is no copyright date listed on a website.

Helpful Annotation Tools

Besides paper, index cards or sticky notes, there are various other methods and software applications (apps) with which to organize source citations, quotations, paraphrases, and summaries, along with one's own ideas and outlines. These include [Microsoft OneNote](#), [Evernote](#), and [EndNote](#).

Documentation and Citation

To use sources correctly and appropriately, give appropriate credit following the sentence, paragraph, or general area that uses outside source information.

For MLA style, use in-text citations following direct quotes, paraphrasing, or summarizing, with author(s) last name(s) and page numbers (if available) within parentheses. (The information in the in-text citation will be whatever the first word is in the Works Cited entry. For that reason, it can be easier to add in in-text citations after the Works Cited page has been created.)

For example, see the following:

"The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (McKenna 5).

Or, if using a signal phrase, the in-text citation will be like this:

The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (5).

For APA style, writers use the author(s) last name(s) followed by a comma and the year of publication.

"The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (McKenna, 2018).

Essentially, all individuals deserve credit for their hard work. But even more important is the fact the student's own ideas, as expressed through writing, are what professors look for. The student's words should be informed by the research, not usurped by it. Since the grade one earns is based on the value of the content and how it is communicated through the written word, it's the student's voice that matters to the professor. So writers should supplement and support the original content by incorporating outside sources through quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or paraphrasing, following each instance with in-text citations.

Quote. To repeat or copy a group of words from a document or speech, typically with an indication that one is not the original author or speaker. Quotes work well when the material is difficult to paraphrase in a unique way.

Paraphrase. To express the meaning of something written or spoken using different words, especially to achieve greater clarity.

Summarize. To give a brief statement of the main points of something longer.

An important thing to remember about quoting is that sometimes the material a writer would like to borrow directly is longer than four lines of typed text. If this is the case, writers will need to use something called an "extract," sometimes referred to as a "block quote." In an extract or block quote, the quotation marks are removed from the quoted material, and the entire section being quoted is indented one tab from the left-hand margin. Note that in this case the period goes before the in-text citation.

A Word About "Drive-By" Citations

Another strategy some writers use is what some educators call "drive-by" citations. These are references to a work that make a very quick appearance. Then the student writer moves on without discussing the connection between the student's work and the ideas in the citation. This kind of incorporation of the words or ideas of others is to be avoided as it adds little value.

The List at the End of the Paper

To use sources correctly, it's also critically important to give appropriate credit in a list at the end of any college research paper. There are a variety of names and titles for these lists, depending on the style and style guides.

Works Cited (MLA). A Works Cited list is an alphabetical list of works cited, or sources specifically referenced in the body of the paper. All works that have been quoted or paraphrased should be included. Works read but not referenced in the body of the paper should be left off this list.

References (APA). A References list is similar to a Works Cited list; this is the term used when citing sources using [APA](#) (American Psychological Association) style. The page should be titled “References” and arranged alphabetically by author last name.

Bibliography (APA). A Bibliography lists all the material consulted in preparing an essay, whether the essay has actually referred to and cited the work or not.

Annotated Bibliography. An annotated bibliography is a list of citations of books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph—the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

Notes

Using notes and bibliography is preferred by those writing within the humanities, including literature, history, and the arts. With this approach, sources are cited in numbered footnotes or endnotes. Each note corresponds to a superscript (raised) numeral within the document. Sources are also usually listed in a separate bibliography.

The author-date approach is more common in the sciences and social sciences. With this approach, sources are briefly cited in the document, usually in parentheses, by author last name and year of publication. Each in-text citation matches up with an entry in a Reference list, where full bibliographic information is provided.

Plagiarism, Ethics, and Academic Integrity

When Jaden was being reprimanded by his professor, he did not understand what he had done wrong. He had copied and pasted text before, and his high school teachers had not noticed. Now he could lose the ability to complete his other courses, if he was expelled from college. He could even lose the opportunity to return to the campus for any future pursuits. He requested help, and the Professor and Dean sent him to the College Writing Center for additional tutoring on research methods and academic integrity, and to the Learning Center for mentoring and counseling about time management, prioritization, and focus. As a new writing tutor, Karen helped Jaden to read and annotate the syllabus information on academic integrity, plagiarism, and online resources for research.

Academic honesty is fundamental in a college environment. It is essential for academic writers to understand the ethical use of other people's words and ideas. College instructors expect students to fulfill their academic obligations through honest and independent effort. Students need to demonstrate academic integrity: the respectful and truthful attribution of credit to those who have provided words and ideas that are used in research assignments. The reason that plagiarism is treated seriously at the college is that it is seen as an academic crime or simply cheating.

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

Research writing should present a writer's thinking, supported and illuminated by the thinking and writing of others. Distinguishing between the two is paramount to academic integrity. Desperate students sometimes purchase an essay from a website and submit it as original course work. More often, writers plagiarize due to sloppiness, haste or ignorance. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, writers need to do the following:

- Understand what types of information must be cited
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized
- Distinguish what information is composed of facts or general statements that are common knowledge

What is Common knowledge? Common knowledge is a fact or general statement that is commonly known. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that fruit juices contain sugar; this is well known and well-documented. However, if a writer

explained the differences between the chemical structures of the glucose molecule and how sugar is related to today's levels of obesity in America, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

What is Fair Use? Writers are allowed to quote, paraphrase, or summarize material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. The concept of "fair use" means that writers may legitimately use brief excerpts from source material to support and develop their own ideas. For instance, a journalist might excerpt a few lines from a recently released film when writing a movie review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

The 70/30 and 15% Rules: The 70/30 Rule says that approximately 70% of the written content should be original words and ideas from the student writer, with up to 30% from outside sources. The 15% Rule is that student writers should never use more than 15% of direct quotes from sources. If the writing goes over this amount, the voice of the student is not strong enough.

Value Your Own Voice

Plagiarism is the result of students who lack confidence in their ability to communicate in writing. It also frequently happens because students have not yet mastered the college success skills of time management, prioritization, and focus. In addition, some students value the ethos and authority of the writing of experts, even at the cost of valuing their own words, phrasing, and ideas. They may be afraid to say things in their own way. But college is partly about students finding their own voices and building confidence in communicating. Students remember that quotes and sources shouldn't drive their papers. Their own original ideas should.

Here are two techniques one could use to avoid plagiarism when researching and writing using sources:

- After reading and annotating a research report, put it aside. Without looking at it, freewrite a summary.
- Only use direct quotes when a source's original words provide a unique and critical perspective that can't be paraphrased or briefly summarized.

A Note About Time Management While Researching

Students make time for research in order to develop important college success skills. When professors introduce writing assignments based on research, they hope that students will be excited about their potential topics. Professors encourage students to start researching as soon as possible, so they see what problems rise to the surface: What sources have already been written about the topic? Who is studying and writing about the same area? What makes that individual, researcher, and expert worth listening to? And what gives their work authority and credibility?

Some college students vastly underestimate the time needed to conduct the kind of research that gives them expertise on a topic. Those with lower grades have often simply not planned, nor have they spent enough time immersing themselves in the research process and content so they can become more knowledgeable or "expert" on the field. This is often when plagiarizing happens. Time management is essential.

? Activities

- Put away a plagiarized essay and tell the instructor or peer mentor what you wrote, recalling your ideas in your own words (mentioning a source or two as appropriate). You talk; the instructor or peer mentor types. Then review what was typed and see how powerful and effective your own words were. You should gain increased confidence in your own voice and ability to communicate.
- Take out two highlighters and draw through your own words with one color, and through information from an outside source with another color. Learn to recognize how much of the content is your own, and learn the 70/30 Rule.

Further Resources

For each of these styles, a link to a free online guide from Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) is provided. Should the links to specific pages change, please search the [The Purdue OWL](#). Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

"[MLA \(Modern Language Association\): The arts and humanities](#)." The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

"[American Psychological Association \(APA\): Education, psychology, and the social sciences](#)." The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“[The Chicago Manual of Style \(CMOS\): The world of publishing](#).” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“[Associated Press \(AP\): Journalism such as magazines and newspapers](#).” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“[American Medical Association \(AMA\): Medicine, health, and biological sciences](#).” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Critical Reading

Most college writing begins as a response to a reading — whether assigned or found. As more and more interaction moves online, we are required daily to sort through written information with a swift and critical eye. Yet few of us are trained in how to determine what is and is not believable. Critical reading skills are vital to navigating college and the wider world, as this section's reading addresses.

[6.1: Research and Critical Reading \(Part 1\)](#)

[6.2: Research and Critical Reading \(Part 2\)](#)

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6.1: Research and Critical Reading (Part 1)

Learning Objectives

- Read critically to discover the meaning, purpose, and content of a piece
- Respond critically to written works using reading strategy

INTRODUCTION

Good researchers and writers examine their sources critically and actively. They do not just compile and summarize these research sources in their writing, but use them to create their own ideas, theories, and, ultimately, their own, new understanding of the topic they are researching. Such an approach means not taking the information and opinions that the sources contain at face value and for granted, but to investigate, test, and even doubt every claim, every example, every story, and every conclusion. It means not to sit back and let your sources control you, but to engage in active conversation with them and their authors. In order to be a good researcher and writer, one needs to be a critical and active reader.

This chapter is about the importance of critical and active reading. It is also about the connection between critical reading and active, strong writing. Much of the discussion you will find in this chapter is fundamental to research and writing, no matter what writing genre, medium, or academic discipline you read and write in. Every other approach to research writing, every other research method and assignment offered elsewhere in this book is, in some way, based upon the principles discussed in this chapter.

Reading is at the heart of the research process. No matter what kinds of research 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, and so on. 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 their subjects’ ideas and views on the topic you are investigating. Even if you are studying photographs, cultural artifacts, and other non-verbal research sources, you are reading them, too by trying to connect them to their cultural and social contexts and to understand their meaning. Principles of critical reading which we are about to discuss in this chapter apply to those research situations as well.

I like to think about reading and writing as not two separate activities but as two tightly connected parts of the same whole. That whole is the process of learning and making of new meaning. It may seem that reading and writing are complete opposite 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 meaning and new knowledge. Similarly, good writing does not come from nowhere but is usually based upon, or at least influenced by 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.

We will begin this chapter with the definition of the term “critical reading.” We will consider its main characteristics and briefly touch upon ways to become an active and critical reader. Next, we will discuss the importance of critical reading for research and how reading critically can help you become a better researcher and make the research process more enjoyable. Also in this chapter, a student-writer offers us an insight into his critical reading and writing processes. This chapter also shows how critical reading can and should be used for critical and strong writing. And, as all other chapters, this one offers you activities and projects designed to help you implement the advice presented here into practice.

WHAT KIND OF READER ARE YOU?

You read a lot, probably more than you think. You read school textbooks, lecture notes, your classmates’ papers, and class websites. When school ends, you probably read some fiction, magazines. But you also read other texts. These may include CD liner notes, product reviews, grocery lists, maps, driving directions, road signs, and the list can go on and on. And you don’t read all these texts in the same way. You read them with different purposes and using different reading strategies and techniques. The first step towards becoming a critical and active reader is examining your reading process and your reading preferences. Therefore, you are invited to complete the following exploration activity.

Exercise 6.1.1: Analyzing Your Reading Habits

List all the reading you have done in the last week. Include both “school” and “out-of school” reading. Try to list as many texts as you can think of, no matter how short and unimportant they might seem. Now, answer the following questions.

- What was your purpose in reading each of those texts? Did you read for information, to pass a test, for enjoyment, to decide on a product you wanted to buy, and so on? Or, did you read to figure out some complex problem that keeps you awake at night?
- You have probably come up with a list of different purposes. How did each of those purposes influence your reading strategies? Did you take notes or try to memorize what you read? How long did it take you to read different texts? Did you begin at the beginning and read till you reached the end, or did you browse some texts? Consider the time of day you were reading. Consider even whether some texts tired you out or whether you thought they were “boring.” Why?
- What did you do with the results of your reading? Did you use them for some practical purpose, such as buying a new product or finding directions, or did you use them for a less practical purpose, such as understanding some topic better or learning something about yourself and others?

When you finish, share your results with the rest of the class and with your instructor.

Having answered the questions above, you have probably noticed that your reading strategies differed depending on the reading task you were facing and on what you planned to do with the results of the reading. If, for example, you read lecture notes in order to pass a test, chances are you “read for information,” or “for the main” point, trying to remember as much material as possible and anticipating possible test questions. If, on the other hand, you read a good novel, you probably just focused on following the story. Finally, if you were reading something that you hoped would help you answer some personal question or solve some personal problem, it is likely that you kept comparing and contrasting the information that you read with your own life and your own experiences.

You may have spent more time on some reading tasks than others. For example, when we are interested in one particular piece of information or fact from a text, we usually put that text aside once we have located the information we were looking for. In other cases, you may have been reading for hours on end taking careful notes and asking questions.

If you share the results of your investigation into your reading habits with your classmates, you may also notice that some of their reading habits and strategies were different from yours. Like writing strategies, approaches to reading may vary from person to person depending on our previous experiences with different topics and types of reading materials, expectations we have of different texts, and, of course, the purpose with which we are reading.

Life presents us with a variety of reading situations which demand different reading strategies and techniques. Sometimes, it is important to be as efficient as possible and read purely for information or “the main point.” At other times, it is important to just “let go” and turn the pages following a good story, although this means not thinking about the story you are reading. At the heart of writing and research, however, lies the kind of reading known as critical reading. Critical examination of sources is what makes their use in research possible and what allows writers to create rhetorically effective and engaging texts.

KEY FEATURES OF CRITICAL READING

Critical readers are able to interact with the texts they read through carefully listening, writing, conversation, and questioning. They do not sit back and wait for the meaning of a text to come to them, but work hard in order to create such meaning. Critical readers are not made overnight. Becoming a critical reader will take a lot of practice and patience. Depending on your current reading philosophy and experiences with reading, becoming a critical reader may require a significant change in your whole understanding of the reading process. The trade-off is worth it, however. By becoming a more critical and active reader, you will also become a better researcher and a better writer. Last but not least, you will enjoy reading and writing a whole lot more because you will become actively engaged in both.

One of my favorite passages describing the substance of critical and active reading comes from the introduction to their book *Ways of Reading*, whose authors David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky write:

Reading involves a fair measure of push and shove. You make your mark on the book and it makes its mark on you. Reading is not simply a matter of hanging back and waiting for a piece, or its author, to tell you what the writing has to say. In fact, one of the difficult

things about reading is that the pages before you will begin to speak only when the authors are silent and you begin to speak in their place, sometimes for them—doing their work, continuing their projects—and sometimes for yourself, following your own agenda (1).

Notice that Bartholomae and Petrosky describe reading process in pro-active terms. Meaning of every text is “made,” not received. Readers need to “push and shove” in order to create their own, unique content of every text they read. It is up to you as a reader to make the pages in front of you “speak” by talking with and against the text, by questioning and expanding it.

Critical reading, then, is a two-way process. As reader, you are not a consumer of words, waiting patiently for ideas from the printed page or a web-site to fill your head and make you smarter. Instead, as a critical reader, you need to interact with what you read, asking questions of the author, testing every assertion, fact, or idea, and extending the text by adding your own understanding of the subject and your own personal experiences to your reading.

The following are key features of the critical approach to reading:

- No text, however well written and authoritative, contains its own, pre-determined meaning.
- Readers must work hard to create meaning from every text.
- Critical readers interact with the texts they read by questioning them, responding to them, and expanding them, usually in writing.
- To create meaning, critical readers use a variety of approaches, strategies, and techniques which include applying their personal experiences and existing knowledge to the reading process.
- Critical readers seek actively out other texts, related to the topic of their investigation.

The following section is an examination of these claims about critical reading in more detail.

TEXTS PRESENT IDEAS, NOT ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

In order to understand the mechanisms and intellectual challenges of critical reading, we need to examine some of our deepest and long-lasting assumptions about reading. Perhaps the two most significant challenges facing anyone who wants to become a more active and analytical reader is understanding that printed texts do not contain inarguable truths and learning to question and talk back to those texts. Students in my writing classes often tell me that the biggest challenge they face in trying to become critical readers is getting away from the idea that they have to believe everything they read on a printed page. Years of schooling have taught many of us to believe that published texts present inarguable, almost absolute truths. The printed page has authority because, before publishing his or her work, every writer goes through a lengthy process of approval, review, revision, fact-checking, and so on. Consequently, this theory goes, what gets published must be true. And if it is true, it must be taken at face value, not questioned, challenged, or extended in any way.

Perhaps, the ultimate authority among the readings materials encountered by college belongs to the textbook. As students, we all have had to read and almost memorize textbook chapters in order to pass an exam. We read textbooks “for information,” summarizing their chapters, trying to find “the main points” and then reproducing these main points during exams. I have nothing against textbook as such, in fact, I am writing one right now. And it is certainly possible to read textbooks critically and actively. But, as I think about the challenges which many college students face trying to become active and critical readers, I come to the conclusion that the habit to read every text as if they were preparing for an exam on it, as if it was a source of unquestionable truth and knowledge prevents many from becoming active readers.

Treating texts as if they were sources of ultimate and unquestionable knowledge and truth represents the view of reading as consumption. According to this view, writers produce ideas and knowledge, and we, readers, consume them. Of course, sometimes we have to assume this stance and read for information or the “main point” of a text. But it is critical reading that allows us to create new ideas from what we read and to become independent and creative learners.

Critical reading is a collaboration between the reader and the writer. It offers readers the ability to be active participants in the construction of meaning of every text they read and to use that meaning for their own learning and self-fulfillment. Not even the best researched and written text is absolutely complete and finished. Granted, most fields of knowledge have texts which are called “definitive.” Such texts usually represent our best current knowledge on their subjects. However, even the definitive works get revised over time and they are always open to questioning and different interpretations.

READING IS A RHETORICAL TOOL

To understand how the claim that every reader makes his or her meaning from texts works, it is necessary to examine what is known as the rhetorical theory of reading. The work that best describes and justifies the rhetorical reading theory is Douglas Brent's 1992 book *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing*. I like to apply Brent's ideas to my discussions of critical reading because I think that they do a good job demystifying critical reading's main claims. Brent's theory of reading is a rhetorical device that puts significant substance behind the somewhat abstract ideas of active and critical reading, explaining how the mechanisms of active interaction between readers and texts actually work.

Briefly explained, Brent treats reading not only as a vehicle for transmitting information and knowledge, but also as a means of persuasion. In fact, according to Brent, knowledge equals persuasion because, in his words, "Knowledge is not simply what one has been told. Knowledge is what one believes, what one accepts as being at least provisionally true." (xi). This short passage contains two assertions which are key to the understanding of mechanisms of critical reading. Firstly, notice that simply reading "for the main point" will not necessarily make you "believe" what you read. Surely, such reading can fill our heads with information, but will that information become our knowledge in a true sense, will we be persuaded by it, or will we simply memorize it to pass the test and forget it as soon as we pass it? Of course not! All of us can probably recall many instances in which we read a lot to pass a test only to forget, with relief, what we read as soon as we left the classroom where that test was held. The purpose of reading and research, then, is not to get as much as information out of a text as possible but to change and update one's system of beliefs on a given subject (Brent 55-57).

Brent further states:

The way we believe or disbelieve certain texts clearly varies from one individual to the next. If you present a text that is remotely controversial to a group of people, some will be convinced by it and some not, and those who are convinced will be convinced in different degrees. The task of a rhetoric of reading is to explain systematically how these differences arise—how people are persuaded differently by texts (18).

Critical and active readers not only accept the possibility that the same texts will have different meanings for different people, but welcome this possibility as an inherent and indispensable feature of strong, engaged, and enjoyable reading process. To answer his own questions about what factors contribute to different readers' different interpretations of the same texts, Brent offers us the following principles that I have summarized from his book:

- Readers are guided by personal beliefs, assumptions, and pre-existing knowledge when interpreting texts. You can read more on the role of the reader's pre-existing knowledge in the construction of meaning later on in this chapter.
- Readers react differently to the logical proofs presented by the writers of texts.
- Readers react differently to emotional and ethical proofs presented by writers. For example, an emotional story told by a writer may resonate with one person more than with another because the first person lived through a similar experience and the second one did not, and so on.

The idea behind the rhetorical theory of reading is that when we read, we not only take in ideas, information, and facts, but instead we "update our view of the world." You cannot force someone to update their worldview, and therefore, the purpose of writing is persuasion and the purpose of reading is being persuaded. Persuasion is possible only when the reader is actively engaged with the text and understands that much more than simple retrieval of information is at stake when reading.

One of the primary factors that influence our decision to accept or not to accept an argument is what Douglas Brent calls our "repertoire of experience, much of [which] is gained through prior interaction with texts" (56). What this means is that when we read a new text, we do not begin with a clean slate, an empty mind. However unfamiliar the topic of this new reading may seem to us, we approach it with a large baggage of previous knowledge, experiences, points of view, and so on. When an argument "comes in" into our minds from a text, this text, by itself, cannot change our view on the subject. Our prior opinions and knowledge about the topic of the text we are reading will necessarily "filter out" what is incompatible with those views (Brent 56-57). This, of course, does not mean that, as readers, we should persist in keeping our old ideas about everything and actively resist learning new things. Rather, it suggests that the reading process is an interaction between the ideas in the text in front of us and our own ideas and pre-conceptions about the subject of our reading. We do not always consciously measure what we read according to our existing systems of knowledge and beliefs, but we measure it nevertheless. Reading, according to Brent, is judgment, and, like in

life where we do not always consciously examine and analyze the reasons for which we make various decisions, evaluating a text often happens automatically or subconsciously (59).

Applied to research writing, Brent's theory of reading means the following:

- The purpose of research is not simply to retrieve data, but to participate in a conversation about it. Simple summaries of sources is not research, and writers should be aiming for active interpretation of sources instead
- There is no such thing as an unbiased source. Writers make claims for personal reasons that critical readers need to learn to understand and evaluate.
- Feelings can be a source of shareable good reason for belief. Readers and writers need to use, judiciously, ethical and pathetic proofs in interpreting texts and in creating their own.
- Research is recursive. Critical readers and researchers never stop asking questions about their topic and never consider their research finished.

ACTIVE READERS LOOK FOR CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS

Earlier on, I mentioned that one of the traits of active readers is their willingness to seek out other texts and people who may be able to help them in their research and learning. I find that for many beginning researchers and writers, the inability to seek out such connections often turns into a roadblock on their research route. Here is what I am talking about.

Recently, I asked my writing students to investigate some problem on campus and to propose a solution to it. I asked them to use both primary (interviews, surveys, etc.) and secondary (library, Internet, etc.) research. Conducting secondary research allows a writer to connect a local problem he or she is investigating and a local solution he or she is proposing with a national and even global context, and to see whether the local situation is typical or atypical.

One group of students decided to investigate the issue of racial and ethnic diversity on our campus. The lack of diversity is a "hot" issue on our campus, and recently an institutional task force was created to investigate possible ways of making our university more diverse.

The students had no trouble designing research questions and finding people to interview and survey. Their subjects included students and faculty as well as the university vice-president who was charged with overseeing the work of the diversity task force. Overall, these authors have little trouble conducting and interpreting primary research that led them to conclude that, indeed, our campus is not diverse enough and that most students would like to see the situation change.

The next step these writers took was to look at the websites of some other schools similar in size and nature to ours, to see how our university compared on the issue of campus diversity with others. They were able to find some statistics on the numbers of minorities at other colleges and universities that allowed them to create a certain backdrop for their primary research that they had conducted earlier.

But good writing goes beyond the local situation. Good writing tries to connect the local and the national and the global. It tries to look beyond the surface of the problem, beyond simply comparing numbers and other statistics. It seeks to understand the roots of a problem and propose a solution based on a local and well as a global situation and research. The primary and secondary research conducted by these students was not allowing them to make that step from analyzing local data to understanding their problem in context. They needed some other type of research sources.

At that point, however, those writers hit an obstacle. How and where, they reasoned, would we find other secondary sources, such as books, journals, and websites, about the lack of diversity on our campus? The answer to that question was that, at this stage in their research and writing, they did not need to look for more sources about our local problem with the lack of diversity. They needed to look at diversity and ways to increase it as a national and global issue. They needed to generalize the problem and, instead of looking at a local example, to consider its implications for the issue they were studying overall. Such research would not only have allowed these writers to examine the problem as a whole but also to see how it was being solved in other places. This, in turn, might have helped them to propose a local solution.

Critical readers and researchers understand that it is not enough to look at the research question locally or narrowly. After conducting research and understanding their problem locally, or as it applies specifically to them, active researchers contextualize their investigation by seeking out texts and other sources which would allow them to see the big picture.

Sometimes, it is hard to understand how external texts which do not seem to talk directly about you can help you research and write about questions, problems, and issues in your own life. In her 2004 essay, "Developing 'Interesting Thoughts': Reading for

Research,” writing teacher and my former colleague Janette Martin tells a story of a student who was writing a paper about what it is like to be a collegiate athlete. The emerging theme in that paper was that of discipline and sacrifice required of student athletes. Simultaneously, that student was reading a chapter from the book by the French philosopher Michel Foucault called *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault’s work is a study of the western penitentiary system, which, of course cannot be directly compared to experiences of a student athlete. At the same time, one of the leading themes in Foucault’s work is discipline. Martin states that the student was able to see some connection between Foucault and her own life and use the reading for her research and writing (6). In addition to showing how related texts can be used to explore various aspects of the writer’s own life, this example highlights the need to read texts critically and interpret them creatively. Such reading and research goes beyond simply comparing of facts and numbers and towards relating ideas and concepts with one another.

FROM READING TO WRITING

Reading and writing are the two essential tools of learning. Critical reading is not a process of passive consumption, but one of interaction and engagement between the reader and the text. Therefore, when reading critically and actively, it is important not only to take in the words on the page, but also to interpret and to reflect upon what you read through writing and discussing it with others.

CRITICAL READERS UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REACTING AND RESPONDING TO A TEXT

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 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 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 not wrong and not worthy of our attention. Doing so would be reacting to the text based only on emotions and on our pre-set 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 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.

- Read the text several times, taking notes, asking questions, and underlining key places.
- 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 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 informed and critical response to it.

CRITICAL READERS RESIST OVERSIMPLIFIED BINARY RESPONSES

Critical readers learn to avoid simple “agree-disagree” responses to complex texts. Such way of thinking and arguing is often called “binary” because it allows only two answers to every statement and every questions. But the world of ideas is complex and, a much more nuanced approach is needed when dealing with complex arguments.

When you are asked to “critique” a text, which readers are often asked to do, it does not mean that you have to “criticize” it and reject its argument out of hand. What you are being asked to do instead is to carefully evaluate and analyze the text’s ideas, to understand how and why they are constructed and presented, and only then develop a response to that text. Not every text asks for an outright agreement or disagreement. Sometimes, we as readers are not in a position to either simply support an argument or reject it. What we can do in such cases, though, is to learn more about the text’s arguments by carefully considering all of their aspects and to construct a nuanced, sophisticated response to them. After you have done all that, it will still be possible to disagree with the arguments presented in the reading, but your opinion about the text will be much more informed and nuanced than if you have taken the binary approach from the start.

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6.2: Research and Critical Reading (Part 2)

TWO SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES

To illustrate the principles laid out in this section, consider the following two reading responses. Both texts respond to a very well known piece, “A Letter from Birmingham Jail,” by Martin Luther King, Jr. In the letter, King responds to criticism from other clergymen who had called his methods of civil rights struggle “unwise and untimely.” Both student writers were given the same response prompt:

After reading King’s piece several times and with a pen or pencil in hand, consider what shapes King’s letter. Specifically, what rhetorical strategies is he using to achieve a persuasive effect on his readers? In making your decisions, consider such factors as background information that he gives, ways in which he addresses his immediate audience, and others. Remember that your goal is to explore King’s text, thus enabling you to understand his rhetorical strategies better.

Example Student A

Martin Luther King Jr’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is a very powerful text. At the time when minorities in America were silenced and persecuted, King had the courage to lead his people in the struggle for equality. After being jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, King wrote a letter to his “fellow clergymen” describing his struggle for civil rights. In the letter, King recounts a brief history of that struggle and rejects the accusation that it is “unwise and untimely.” Overall, I think that King’s letter is a very rhetorically effective text, one that greatly helped Americans to understand the civil rights movement.

Example Student B

King begins his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by addressing it to his “fellow clergymen.” Thus, he immediately sets the tone of inclusion rather than exclusion. By using the word “fellow” in the address, I think he is trying to do two things. First of all, he presents himself as a colleague and a spiritual brother of his audience. That, in effect, says “you can trust me,” “I am one of your kind.” Secondly, by addressing his readers in that way, King suggests that everyone, even those Americans who are not directly involved in the struggle for civil rights, should be concerned with it. Hence the word “fellow.” King’s opening almost invokes the phrase “My fellow Americans” or “My fellow citizens” used so often by American Presidents when they address the nation.

King then proceeds to give a brief background of his actions as a civil rights leader. As I read this part of the letter, I was wondering whether his readers would really have not known what he had accomplished as a civil rights leader. Then I realized that perhaps he gives all that background information as a rhetorical move. His immediate goal is to keep reminding his readers about his activities. His ultimate goal is to show to his audience that his actions were non-violent but peaceful. In reading this passage by King, I remembered once again that it is important not to assume that your audience knows anything about the subject of the writing. I will try to use this strategy more in my own papers.

In the middle of the letter, King states: “The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.” This sentence looks like a thesis statement and I wonder why he did not place it towards the beginning of the text, to get his point across right away. After thinking about this for a few minutes and re- reading several pages from our class textbook, I think he leaves his “thesis” till later in his piece because he is facing a not- so-friendly (if not hostile) audience. Delaying the thesis and laying out some background information and evidence first helps a writer to prepare his or her audience for the coming argument. That is another strategy I should probably use more often in my own writing, depending on the audience I am facing.

REFLECTING ON THE RESPONSES

To be sure, much more can be said about King’s letter than either of these writers have said. However, these two responses allow us to see two dramatically different approaches to reading. After studying both responses, consider the questions below.

- Which response fulfills the goals set in the prompt better and why?
- Which responses shows a deeper understanding of the texts by the reader and why?
- Which writer does a better job at avoiding binary thinking and creating a sophisticated reading of King’s text and why?
- Which writer is more likely to use the results of the reading in his or her own writing in the future and why?
- Which writer leaves room for response to his text by others and why?

CRITICAL READERS DO NOT READ ALONE AND IN SILENCE

One of the key principles of critical reading is that active readers do not read silently and by themselves. By this I mean that they take notes and write about what they read. They also discuss the texts they are working with, with others and compare their own interpretations of those texts with the interpretations constructed by their colleagues.

As a college student, you are probably used to taking notes of what you read. When I was in college, my favorite way of preparing for a test was reading a chapter or two from my textbook, then closing the book, then trying to summarize what I have read on a piece of paper. I tried to get the main points of the chapters down and the explanations and proofs that the textbooks' authors used. Sometimes, I wrote a summary of every chapter in the textbook and then studied for the test from those summaries rather than from the textbook itself. I am sure you have favorite methods of note taking and studying from your notes, too.

But now it strikes me that what I did with those notes was not critical reading. I simply summarized my textbooks in a more concise, manageable form and then tried to memorize those summaries before the test. I did not take my reading of the textbooks any further than what was already on their pages. Reading for information and trying to extract the main points, I did not talk back to the texts, did not question them, and did not try to extend the knowledge which they offered in any way. I also did not try to connect my reading with my personal experiences or pre-existing knowledge in any way. I also read in silence, without exchanging ideas with other readers of the same texts. Of course, my reading strategies and techniques were dictated by my goal, which was to pass the test.

Critical reading has other goals, one of which is entering an on-going intellectual exchange. Therefore it demands different reading strategies, approaches, and techniques. One of these new approaches is not reading in silence and alone. Instead, critical readers read with a pen or pencil in hand. They also discuss what they read with others.

STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING READING AND WRITING

If you want to become a critical reader, you need to get into a habit of writing as you read. You also need to understand that complex texts cannot be read just once. Instead, they require multiple readings, the first of which may be a more general one during which you get acquainted with the ideas presented in the text, its structure and style. 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.

UNDERLINE INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT PLACES IN THE TEXT

Underline words, sentences, and passages that stand out, for whatever reason. Underline the key arguments that you believe the author of the text is making as well as any evidence, examples, and stories that seem interesting or important. Don't be afraid to "get it wrong." There is no right or wrong here. The places 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.

TAKE NOTES

Take notes on the margins. If you do not want to write on your book or journal, attach post-it notes with your comments to the text. Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about what you read is the best way to make sense of it, especially, if the text is difficult.

Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about what you read will help you not only to remember the argument which the author of the text is trying to advance (less important for critical reading), but to create your own interpretations of the text you are reading (more important).

Here are some things you can do in your comments

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

WRITE EXPLORATORY RESPONSES

Write 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 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 readings, it is important to keep one thing in mind, and that is their purpose. 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 resist the urge to make conclusions or think that you have found out everything about your reading. When it comes to exploratory reading responses, lack of closure and presence of more leads at the end of the piece is usually a good thing. Of course, you should always check with your teacher for standards and 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, and your readers will appreciate your work because it will help them 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 a 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.

USE READING FOR INVENTION

Use reading and your responses to start your own formal writing projects. Reading is a powerful invention tool. While preparing to start a new writing project, go back to the readings you have completed and your responses to those readings in search for possible topics and ideas. Also look through responses your classmates gave to your ideas about the text. Another excellent way to start your own writing projects and to begin research for them is to look through the list of references and sources at the end of the reading that you are working with. They can provide excellent topic-generating and research leads.

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. In the right column, right your reaction and responses to them. Be as formal or informal as you want. Record words, passages, and ideas from the text that you find useful for your paper, 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 you are working with and use that reading to create your own paper.

DON'T GIVE UP

If the text you are reading seems too complicated or “boring,” that might mean that you have not attacked it aggressively and critically enough. Complex texts are the ones worth pursuing and investigating because they present the most interesting ideas.

Critical reading is a liberating practice because you do not have to worry about “getting it right.” As long as you make an effort to engage with the text and as long as you are willing to work hard on creating a meaning out of what you read, the interpretation of the text you are working with will be valid.

IMPORTANT: So far, we have established that no pre-existing meaning is possible in written texts and that critical and active readers work hard to create such meaning. We have also established that interpretations differ from reader to reader and that there is no “right” or “wrong” during the critical reading process. So, you may ask, does this mean that any reading of a text that I create will be a valid and persuasive one? With the exception of the most outlandish and purposely-irrelevant readings that have nothing to do with the source text, the answer is “yes.” However, remember that reading and interpreting texts, as well as sharing your interpretations with others are rhetorical acts. First of all, in order to learn something from your critical reading experience, you, the reader, need to be persuaded by your own reading of the text. Secondly, for your reading to be accepted by others, they need to be persuaded by it, too. It does not mean, however, that in order to make your reading of a text persuasive, you simply have to find “proof” in the text for your point of view. Doing that would mean reverting to reading “for the main point,” reading as consumption. Critical reading, on the other hand, requires a different approach. One of the components of this approach is the use of personal experiences, examples, stories, and knowledge for interpretive and persuasive purposes. This is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

ONE CRITICAL READER'S PATH TO CREATING A MEANING: A CASE STUDY

Earlier on in this chapter, we discussed the importance of using your existing knowledge and prior experience to create new meaning out of unfamiliar and difficult texts. In this section, I'd like to offer you one student writer's account of his meaning-making process. Before I do that, however, it is important for me to tell you a little about the class and the kinds of reading and writing assignments that its members worked on.

All the writing projects offered to the members of the class were promoted by readings, and students were expected to actively develop their own ideas and provide their own readings of assigned texts in their essays. The main text for the class was the anthology *Ways of Reading* edited by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky that contains challenging and complex texts. Like for most of his classmates, this approach to reading and writing was new to Alex who had told me earlier that he was used to reading “for information” or “for the main point”.

In preparation for the first writing project, the class read Adrienne Rich's essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision.” In her essay, Rich offers a moving account of her journey to becoming a writer. She makes the case for constantly “revising” one's life in the light of all new events and experiences. Rich blends voices and genres throughout the essay, using personal narrative, academic argument, and even poetry. As a result, Rich creates the kind of personal-public argument which, on the one hand, highlights her own life, and on the other, illustrates that Rich's life is typical for her time and her environment and that her readers can also learn from her experiences.

To many beginning readers and writers, who are used to a neat separation of “personal” and “academic” argument, such a blend of genres and styles may seem odd. In fact, one of the challenges that many of the students in the class faced was understanding why Rich chooses to blend personal writing with academic and what rhetorical effects she achieves by doing so. After writing informal responses to the essay and discussing it in class, the students were offered the following writing assignment:

Although Rich tells a story of her own, she does so to provide an illustration of an even larger story—one about what it means to be a woman and a writer. Tell a story of your own about the ways you might be said to have been named or shaped or positioned by an established or powerful culture. Like Rich (and perhaps with similar hesitation), use your own experience as an illustration of both your own situation and the situation of people like you. You should imagine that the assignment is a way for you to use (and put to the test) some of Rich's terms, words like “re-vision,” “renaming,” and “structure.” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 648).

Notice that this assignment does not ask students to simply analyze Rich's essay, to dissect its argument or “main points.” Instead, writers are asked to work with their own experiences and events of their own lives in order to provide a reading of Rich which is affected and informed by the writers' own lives and own knowledge of life. This is critical reading in action when a reader creates his or her one's own meaning of a complex text by reflecting on the relationship between the content of that text and one's own life.

In response to the assignment, one of the class members, Alex Cimino-Hurt, wrote a paper that re-examined and re-evaluated his upbringing and how those factors have influenced his political and social views. In particular, Alex was trying to reconcile his own and his parents' anti-war views with the fact that a close relative of his was fighting in the war in Iraq as he worked on the paper. Alex used such terms as "revision" and "hesitation" to develop his piece.

Like most other writers in the class, initially Alex seemed a little puzzled, even confused by the requirement to read someone else's text through the prism of his own life and his own experiences. However, as he drafted, revised, and discussed his writing with his classmates and his instructor, the new approach to reading and writing became clearer to him. After finishing the paper, Alex commented on his reading strategies and techniques and on what he learned about critical reading during the project:

ON PREVIOUS READING HABITS AND TECHNIQUES

Previously when working on any project whether it be for a History, English, or any other class that involved reading and research, there was a certain amount of minimalism. As a student I tried to balance the least amount of effort with the best grade. I distinctly remember that before, being taught to skim over writing and reading so that I found "main" points and highlighted them. The value of thoroughly reading a piece was not taught because all that was needed was a shallow interpretation of whatever information that was provided followed by a regurgitation. [Critical reading] provided a dramatic difference in perspective and helped me learn to not only dissect the meaning of a piece, but also to see why the writer is using certain techniques or how the reading applies to my life.

ON DEVELOPING CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

When reading critically I found that the most important thing for me was to set aside a block of time in which I wouldn't have to hurry my reading or skip parts to "Get the gist of it." Developing an eye for...detail came in two ways. The first method is to read the text several times, and the second is to discuss it with my classmates and my teacher. It quickly became clear to me that the more I read a certain piece, the more I got from it as I became more comfortable with the prose and writing style. With respect to the second way, there is always something that you can miss and there is always a different perspective that can be brought to the table by either the teacher or a classmate.

ON READING RICH'S ESSAY

In reading Adrienne Rich's essay, the problem for me wasn't necessarily relating to her work but instead just finding the right perspective from which to read it. I was raised in a very open family so being able to relate to others was learned early in my life. Once I was able to parallel my perspective to hers, it was just a matter of composing my own story. Mine was my liberalism in conservative environments—the fact that frustrates me sometimes. I felt that her struggle frustrated her, too. By using quotations from her work, I was able to show my own situation to my readers.

ON WRITING THE PAPER

The process that I went through to write an essay consisted of three stages. During the first stage, I wrote down every coherent idea I had for the essay as well as a few incoherent ones. This helped me create a lot of material to work with. While this initial material doesn't always have direction it provides a foundation for writing. The second

stage involved rereading Rich's essay and deciding which parts of it might be relevant to my own story. Looking at my own life and at Rich's work together helped me consolidate my paper. The third and final stage involved taking what is left and refining the style of the paper and taking care of the mechanics.

ADVICE FOR CRITICAL READERS

The first key to being a critical and active reader is to find something in the piece that interests, bothers, encourages, or just confuses you. Use this to drive your analysis. Remember there is no such thing as a boring essay, only a boring reader.

- Reading something once is never enough so reading it quickly before class just won't cut it. Read it once to get your brain comfortable with the work, then read it again and actually try to understand what's going on in it. You can't read it too many times.
- Ask questions. It seems like a simple suggestion but if you never ask questions you'll never get any answers. So, while you're reading, think of questions and just write them down on a piece of paper lest you forget them after about a line and a half of reading.

CONCLUSION

Reading and writing are rhetorical processes, and one does not exist without the other. The goal of a good writer is to engage his or her readers into a dialog presented in the piece of 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 ideas of others.

Reading what others have to say and responding to them help 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.

Reading and writing are inextricably connected, and I hope that this chapter has shown you ways to use reading to inform and enrich you writing and your learning in general. The key to becoming an active, critical, and interested reader is the development of varied and effective reading techniques and strategies. I'd like to close this chapter with the words from the writer Alex Cimino-Hurt: "Being able to read critically is important no matter what you plan on doing with your career or life because it allows you to understand the world around you."

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Annotated Bibliography- Gathering, Evaluating, and Documenting Sources



Figure 14.1 Academic writers often create annotated bibliographies to inform readers about sources and to analyze the information sources provide. Annotated bibliographies are especially useful in argumentative and scientific research. (credit: “Wikimedia Design edit-a-thon 16” by Sebastian ter Burg/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Chapter Outline

- [7.1: Compiling Sources for an Annotated Bibliography](#)
- [7.2: Glance at Form- Citation Style, Purpose, and Formatting](#)
- [7.3: Writing Process- Informing and Analyzing](#)

Introduction

As an author, you will spend a great deal of time crafting your compositions to ensure that your ideas, thesis statements, and arguments come across to readers clearly and with authority. The way to present a strong, persuasive argument is through thorough analysis and solid evidence obtained from credible sources. Because sources are so important, creating an annotated bibliography can be a cornerstone of the argumentative research writing process.

This chapter shows how to develop an annotated bibliography for the argumentative research project presented in Writing Process: Integrating Research. An annotated bibliography shows the authority present in each of the sources and explains why each was chosen. The information in the annotated bibliography helps readers understand the role a bibliography plays in gathering and using sources to support an argument. Later in the chapter, you will apply the principles presented to create your own annotated bibliography for one of the assignments in this course—perhaps your own argumentative research paper, as outlined in Writing Process: Integrating Research.

If you are creating an annotated bibliography, you may not have created a research log, as addressed in Research Process: Making Notes, Synthesizing Information, and Keeping a Research Log. However, as you work through this chapter, consult Research Process: Making Notes, Synthesizing Information, and Keeping a Research Log for additional information about locating, analyzing, and incorporating sources.

By creating an annotated bibliography, you move beyond simply collecting sources to interacting with them. When writing annotations, you read each source more closely than you would otherwise, think about it more critically, and strengthen your own claims on the topic. An annotated bibliography thus provides you with perspectives beyond your own ideas and helps you understand where your claims fit into the broader body of knowledge on the topic, or “the conversation.” Annotated bibliographies

help other scholars by providing an overview of the sources and breadth of knowledge about the research surrounding a given topic.

Culture Lens Icon

Writing an annotated bibliography is an opportunity to practice expectations of convention; there are many rules to follow depending on the format and style you write in. But it can also be an opportunity to challenge convention in both the content and the style of your writing. A growing movement in academics fosters anti-racist practice, which embraces stylistic choices based on culture. That is to say, so-called standard language ideologies are no longer seen as “better” or even “correct.” Rather, an ever-evolving idea of language awareness increasingly allows students and their instructors to explore cultural expression of ideas.

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7.1: Compiling Sources for an Annotated Bibliography

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Integrate your ideas with ideas from related sources.
- Locate, compile, and evaluate primary, secondary, and tertiary research materials related to your topic.

A **bibliography** is a list of the sources you use when doing research for a project or composition. Named for the Greek terms *biblion*, meaning “book,” and *graphos*, meaning “something written,” bibliographies today compile more than just books. Often they include academic journal articles, periodicals, websites, and multimedia texts such as videos. A bibliography alone, at the end of a research work, also may be labeled “References” or “Works Cited,” depending on the citation style you are using. The bibliography lists information about each source, including author, title, publisher, and publication date. Each set of source information, or each individual entry, listed in the bibliography or noted within the body of the composition is called a **citation**.

Bibliographies include formal documentation entries that serve several purposes:

- They help you organize your own research on a topic and narrow your topic, thesis, or argument.
- They help you build knowledge.
- They strengthen your arguments by offering proof that your research comes from trustworthy sources.
- They enable readers to do more research on the topic.
- They create a community of researchers, thus adding to the ongoing conversation on the research topic.
- They give credit to authors and sources from which you draw and support your ideas.

Annotated bibliography expand on typical bibliographies by including information beyond the basic citation information and commentary on the source. Although they present each formal documentation entry as it would appear in a source list such as a works cited page, an annotated bibliography includes two types of additional information. First, following the documentation entry is a short **description** of the work, including information about its authors and how it was or can be used in a research project. Second is an **evaluation** of the work’s validity, reliability, and/or bias. The purpose of the annotation is to summarize, assess, and reflect on the source. Annotations can be both explanatory and analytical, helping readers understand the research you used to formulate your argument. An annotated bibliography can also help you demonstrate that you have read the sources you will potentially cite in your work. It is a tool to assist in the gathering of these sources and serves as a repository. You won’t necessarily use all the sources cited in your annotated bibliography in your final work, but gathering, evaluating, and documenting these sources is an integral part of the research process.

Compiling Sources

Research projects and compositions, particularly argumentative or position texts, require you to collect sources, devise a thesis, and then support that thesis through analysis of the evidence, including sources, you have compiled. With access to the Internet and an academic library, you will rarely encounter a shortage of sources for any given topic or argument. The real challenge may be sorting through all the available sources and determining which will be useful.

The first step in completing an annotated bibliography is to locate and compile sources to use in your research project. At the beginning, you do not need to be highly selective in this process, as you may not ultimately use every source. Therefore, gather any materials—including books, websites, professional journals, periodicals, and documents—that you think may contain valuable ideas about your topic. *But where do you find sources that relate to your argument? And how do you choose which sources to use?* This section will help you answer those questions and choose sources that will both enhance and challenge your claim, allowing you to confront contradictory evidence and **synthesize** ideas, or combine ideas from various sources, to produce a well-constructed original argument. See Research Process: Accessing and Recording Information for more information about sources and synthesizing information.

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

In your research, you likely will use three types of sources: primary, secondary, and tertiary. During any research project, your use of these sources will depend on your topic, your thesis, and, ultimately, how you intend to use them. In all likelihood, you will need to seek out all three.

Primary Sources

Primary sources allow you to create your own analysis with the appropriate rhetorical approach. In the humanities disciplines, **primary sources** include original documents, data, images, and other compositions that provide a firsthand account of an event or a time in history. Typically, primary sources are created close in time to the event or period they represent and may include journal or diary entries, newspaper articles, government records, photographs, artworks, maps, speeches, films, and interviews. In scientific disciplines, primary sources provide information such as scientific discoveries, raw data, experimental and research results, and clinical trial findings. They may include published studies, scientific journal articles, and proceedings of meeting or conferences.

Primary sources also can include student-conducted interviews and surveys. Other primary sources may be found on websites such as the Library of Congress (https://openstax.org/r/Library_of), the Historical Text Archive (https://openstax.org/r/Historical_Text), government websites, and article databases. In all academic areas, primary sources are fact based, not interpretive. That is, they may be commenting on or interpreting something else, but they *themselves* are the source. For example, an article written during the 1840s condemning the practice of enslavement may interpret events occurring then, but it is a primary source document of its time.

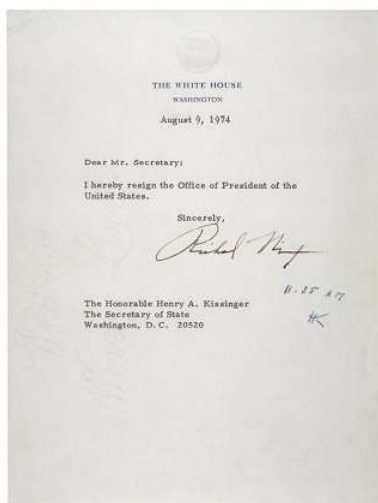


Figure 14.2 This letter of resignation by President Richard Nixon (1913–1994), written in 1974, is an example of a primary source. (credit: “Letter of Resignation of Richard M. Nixon, 1974” by Former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon, officially a work of the U.S. government/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

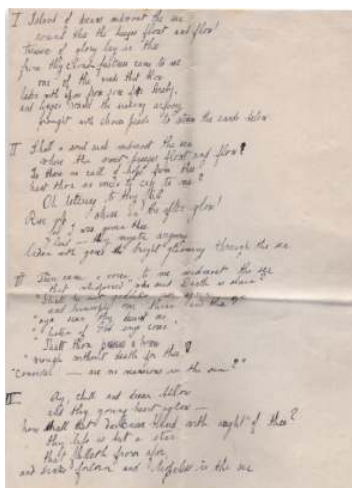


Figure 14.3 Original poetry, such as this mirror-writing poem by Caroline Fitzgerald, is an example of a primary source. Manuscripts, journals, and diaries are primary sources. (credit: “Caroline Fitzgerald poem in mirror writing flipped” by Caroline Fitzgerald (1865–1911)/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)



Figure 14.4 This map of Scandinavia from 1730 is an example of a primary source. (credit: “1730 Homann Map of Scandinavia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Baltics - Geographicus – Scandinavia” by Johann Homann (1664–1724)/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)



Figure 14.5 Government documents, such as the United States Constitution, are primary sources. (credit: “Constitution of the United States, page 1” by U.S. National Archives and Records Administration/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources, unlike primary sources, are interpretive. They often provide a secondhand account of an event or research results, analyze or clarify primary sources and scientific discoveries, or interpret a creative work. These sources are important for supporting or challenging your argument, addressing counterarguments, and synthesizing ideas. Secondary sources in the humanities disciplines include biographies, literary criticism, and reviews of the fine arts, among other sources. In the scientific disciplines, secondary sources encompass analyses of scientific studies or clinical trials, reviews of experimental results, and publications about the significance of studies or experiments. In some instances, the same item can serve as both a primary and a secondary source, depending on how it is used. For example, a journal article in which the author analyzes the impact of a clinical trial would serve as a secondary source. But if you instead count the number of journal articles that feature reports on a particular clinical trial, you might use them as primary sources because they would then serve as data points.

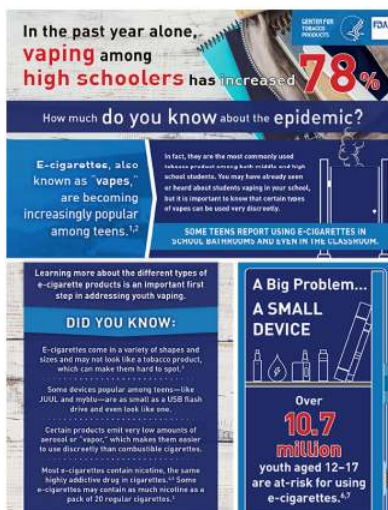


Figure 14.6 Infographics are secondary sources that combine text and graphics to summarize information about a topic. (credit: “Youth Vaping Risks” by nhs.gov/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Table 14.1 provides examples of how primary and secondary sources often relate to one another.

Table 14.1 Primary and secondary sources

Discipline	Primary Source Example	Secondary Source Example
Literature	Wilfred Owen’s poem “Dulce et Decorum est”	Essay analyzing World War I poetry
Psychology	Raw data from a study testing the effects of a medication on bipolar disorder	Book evaluating different approaches to treating bipolar disorder in patients
Politics and Government	Transcript of John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech	Website analyzing the themes present in John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech
History	Diary of a soldier who fought in the Civil War	Textbook entry about the battles of the Civil War
Fine Art	Native American pottery	Newspaper article about the importance of honoring Native American art
Performing Arts	Recording of a live concert	Critical review of a concert published in a magazine

Tertiary Sources

In addition to primary and secondary sources, you can use a tertiary source to summarize or digest information from primary and/or secondary sources. Because tertiary sources often condense information, they usually do not provide enough information on their own to support claims. However, they often contain a variety of citations that can help you identify and locate valuable primary and secondary sources. Researchers often use tertiary sources to find general, historical, or background information as well as a broad overview of a topic. Tertiary sources frequently placed in the secondary-source category include reference materials such as encyclopedias, textbooks, manuals, digests, and bibliographies. For more discussion on sources, see *The Research Process: Where to Look for Existing Sources*.



Figure 14.7 Textbooks are examples of tertiary sources. (credit: “Programming language textbooks” by User:K.lee/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Authoritative Sources

Not all sources are created equally. You likely know already that you must vet sources—especially those you find on the Internet—for legitimacy, validity, and the presence of bias. For example, you probably know that the website Wikipedia is not considered a trustworthy source because it is open to user editing. This accessibility means the site’s authority cannot be established and, therefore, the source cannot effectively support or refute a claim you are attempting to make, though you can use it at times to point you to reliable sources. While so-called bad sources may be easy to spot, researchers may have more difficulty discriminating between sources that are authoritative and those that pose concerns. In fact, you may encounter a general hierarchy of sources in your compilation. Understanding this hierarchy can help you identify which sources to use and how to use them in your research.

Peer-Reviewed Academic Publications

This first tier of sources—the gold standard of research—includes academic literature, which consists of textbooks, essays, journals, articles, reports, and scholarly books. As scholarly works, these sources usually provide strong evidence for an author’s claims by reflecting rigorous research and scrutiny by experts in the field. These types of sources are most often published, sponsored, or supported by academic institutions, often a university or an academic association such as the Modern Language Association (MLA). Such associations exist to encourage research and collaboration within their discipline, mostly through publications and conferences. To be published, academic works must pass through a rigorous process called **peer review**, in which scholars in the field evaluate it anonymously. You can find peer-reviewed academic sources in library catalogs, in article databases, and through Google Scholar online. Sometimes these sources require a subscription to access, but students often receive access through their school.

Academic articles, particularly in the social and other sciences, generally have most or all of the following sections, a structure you might recognize if you have written lab reports in science classes:

- **Abstract.** This short summary covers the purpose, methods, and findings of the paper. It may discuss briefly the implications or significance of the research.
- **Introduction.** The main part of the paper begins with an introduction that presents the issue or main idea addressed by the research, establishes its importance, and poses the author’s thesis.
- **Review.** Next comes an overview of previous academic research related to the topic, including a synthesis that makes a case for why the research is important and necessary.
- **Data and Methods.** The main part of the original research begins with a description of the data and methods used, including what data or information the author collected and how the author used it.
- **Results.** Data and methods are followed by results, detailing the significant findings from the experiment or research.
- **Conclusion.** In the conclusion, the author discusses the results in the context of the bigger picture, explaining the author’s position on how these results relate to the earlier review of literature and their significance in the broad scope of the topic. The author also may propose future research needs or point out unanswered questions.
- **Works Cited or References.** The paper ends with a list of all sources the author used in the research, including the review of literature. This often-overlooked portion of the composition is critical in evaluating the credibility of any paper that involves research.



Figure 14.8 Articles from peer-reviewed academic journals such as this one are among the most credible sources you can use. (credit: “The perception of odor objects in everyday life a review on the processing of odor mixtures” by Thierry Thomas-Danguin, Charlotte Sinding, et al./Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0)

Credible Nonacademic Sources

These sources, including articles, books, and reports, are second in authority only to peer-reviewed academic publications. Credible nonacademic sources are often about current events or discoveries not yet reviewed in academic circles and often provide a wider-ranging outlook on your topic. Peer-reviewed texts tend to be narrow and specific, whereas nonacademic texts from well-researched sources are often more accessible and can offer a broader perspective. These three major categories generally provide quality sources:

- Information, white papers, and reports from government and international agencies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the United States government
- Longer articles and reports from major newspapers, broadcast media, and magazines that are well regarded in academic circles, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the BBC, and the *Economist*
- Nonacademic books written by authors with expertise and credentials, who support their ideas with well-sourced information

To find nonacademic sources, search for .gov or .org sites related to your topic. A word of caution, however: know that sources ending in .org are often advocacy sites and, consequently, inherently biased toward whatever cause they are advocating. You also can look at academic article databases and search articles from major newspapers and magazines, both of which can be found online.

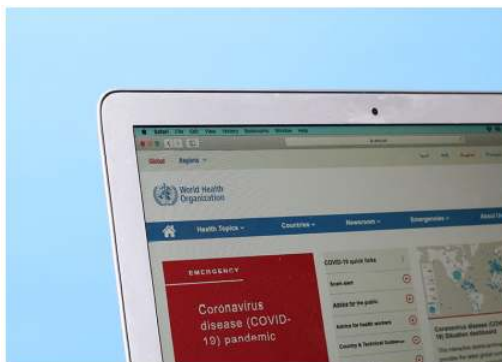


Figure 14.9 Information from credible sources, such as the World Health Organization, provides value to your research. (credit: “WHO World Health Organization on Coronavirus pandemic COVID-19” by <https://www.nursetogether.com/Wikimedia> Commons, CC BY 4.0)

Short Informational Texts from Credible Websites and Periodicals

The next most authoritative sources are shorter newspaper articles or other pieces on credible websites. These articles tend to be limited in scope, as their authors report on a single issue or event. Although they do not often provide in-depth analysis, they can be a source of credible facts to support your argument. Alternatively, they can point you in the direction of more detailed or rigorous sources that will enhance your research by tracing the original texts or sources on which the articles are based. Usually, you can find these sources through Internet searches, but sometimes you may have difficulty determining their credibility.

Judging Credibility

To judge credibility, begin by looking for the author or organization publishing the information. Most periodical compositions contain a short “About the Author” blurb at the beginning or end of the article and often include a link to the author’s credentials or to more information about them. Using this information, you can begin to determine their expertise and, potentially, any agenda the author or organization may have. For example, expect a piece discussing side effects of medical marijuana written by a doctor to present more expertise than the same piece written by a political lobbyist. You also can determine whether bias is present; for example, the organization may promote a particular way of thinking or have an agenda that will influence the content and language of the composition. In general, look for articles written with neutral expertise.

The CRAAP Test

You may find the CRAAP test a helpful and easy-to-remember tool for testing credibility. This checklist provides you with a method for evaluating any source for both reliability and credibility. CRAAP stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. The CRAAP test, as shown in Table 14.2, includes questions that can be asked of any source.

Table 14.2 CRAAP test questions

Currency	When was the information published, revised, or updated? Does your topic require current information? Are links within the source current?
Relevance	Does the information relate to your topic or support your thesis? Who is the intended audience of the source? What is the purpose of the source?
Authority	Who is the publisher, sponsor, or source? What are the author’s credentials and/or qualifications? Does the URL reveal anything about the source?
Accuracy	Where does the information come from? What evidence is used to support the information, and can it be verified? Are there elements of bias? Has the information been reviewed?
Purpose	What is the author’s purpose for creating the source? Is the information based on facts, opinion, or propaganda? What biases are present? Are biases recognized?

Sources with Clear Bias or Unclear Authority

The final type of source encompasses nearly everything else. Although they cannot be considered credible or valid to support your argument or claims, these sources are not necessarily useless. Especially when you are compiling sources at the beginning of a project, those with clear bias or unclear authority can be useful as you explore all facets of a topic, including positions within an argument. These sources also can help you identify topics on which to base your search terms and can even point you toward more credible sources.



Figure 14.10 Websites and periodicals with clear bias or without clear authority may be useful in pointing you in the direction of more credible sources. (credit: skylarvision/Pixabay, CC0 1.0)

Locating Sources

Academic article databases are the best starting places for finding sources. There are too many databases to cover them all in this chapter, but you would be wise to familiarize yourself with those to which you have access through your school or program. For further information on databases, see *The Research Process: Where to Look for Existing Sources*. In the long run, this knowledge will save you a good deal of time and a possible headache.

You will want to start with your college library website, which includes access to sources paid for by your institution. As a student, you should be able to access these quickly and easily. Another popular and wide-ranging database is Google Scholar (https://openstax.org/r/Google_Scholar). Google Scholar is helpful for finding sources across a wide range of topics. One drawback, however, is that it catalogues nearly all disciplines, so the results can be vast and unfocused. Therefore, when using Google Scholar, be as specific as possible, and add your academic discipline as a keyword. For example, when searching for information on climate change, add the keyword “environment” or “politics” depending on your research angle; otherwise, the results will include all disciplines and potentially bury the articles you seek. Google Scholar also has a feature labeled “Cited by,” which shows you other papers that cite the article in their review of literature relate to the topic. *Writing Process: Informing and Analyzing* contains more information about focusing your searches. Like clues to a mystery, one search can lead you to a wealth of related articles.

When you are able to identify potential sources by reading their abstracts or using Google Scholar, you may at times land on a publisher’s website that requires you to pay to read the full article. When you find yourself in a situation such as this, record information about the article—author(s), article title, journal title, publication date. It is likely that you will be able to use your school’s database to access the article. For information about other databases, consult *The Research Process: Where to Look for Existing Sources*.

Just as writing is **recursive**, requiring you to go back and forth between different stages of the process, you will likely return to your annotated bibliography at different points. You may begin by looking for sources related to your topic, or you may choose or narrow your topic after an initial database search for sources. If your project has a variety of possible topics, you may even start with a current issue of a leading journal in the field, find an article that interests you, and use that article to shape your topic selection. As a bonus, you will have your first reputable source. Later, as you refine your thesis, reasoning, and evidence, you may find yourself returning to your search for sources. Consider this hypothetical situation: You are developing an argument that examines the risk factors of childhood trauma that surface in later life. As you analyze the data from your sources, it occurs to you to find out whether any documented correlation exists between early trauma and resilience. So you return to Google Scholar and your university’s academic database to find more research based on this idea in order to revise your analysis by adding the new viewpoint.

One difficulty may be homing in on the keywords that will lead you to the sources you need. At this point, sources from the last two categories discussed may come into play: short pieces from credible websites and newspapers and other texts with clear bias or unclear authority. Less credible sources may lead you to better ones, particularly if you can identify the keywords used in them and then apply those keywords within academic databases. For more on developing useful keywords, consult *The Research Process: Where to Look for Existing Sources*.

Boolean Operators

Keyword searches can become frustrating, either yielding so much information that it seems impossible to sort through or narrowing the search so much that you miss important potential sources. One way to remedy this situation is to become familiar with **Boolean operators**, the basis of mathematical sets and database logic. Rather than searching with natural language only, you can use these operators to focus your search. The three basic Boolean operators are **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**. Using these operators

helps you search by linking necessary information, excluding irrelevant information, and focusing information. For example, if you have some pieces of information from tertiary sources, you may be able to use Boolean operators to find additional useful sources. A search string such as *artificial intelligence (title) AND Buiten (author) AND 2019 (year)* can yield the exact journal source you need. Here is a brief review of how to use the three operators:

- Use **AND** to narrow search results and tell the database to include *all* search terms in finding sources. If you want to find sources that include all of the search terms entered, use the AND operator. In Figure 14.11, the darkest blue triangular section in the center of the Venn diagram represents the result set for this search, including all three terms. In many databases, including Google, AND is implied between each word. To exclude AND, use quotation marks. For example, Google would translate the search term *ethics artificial intelligence* as *ethics AND artificial AND intelligence*. To make your phrases more specific, use the AND operator combined with quotation marks: “*ethics*” AND “*artificial intelligence*”.

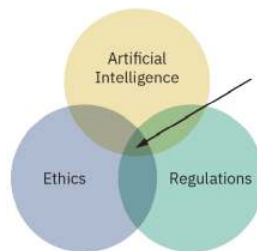


Figure 14.11 Search results for AND (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

- Use **OR** to connect two or more similar concepts and broaden your results, telling the search engine that any of your search terms can appear in the results it gives you. The Boolean operator OR is represented by Figure 14.12. Using the OR operator gives you a very large set of results.

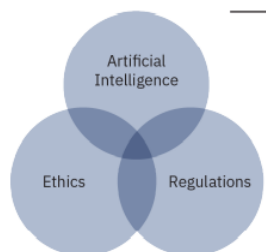


Figure 14.12 Search results for OR (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

- Use **NOT** to exclude results from a search. This operator can help you narrow your search, telling the search engine to ignore names or words you do not want included in your results. For example, if you know you don’t want self-driving cars in your search results, you might search for “*artificial intelligence*” NOT “*self-driving cars*”.

Choosing Sources

Choosing sources to include in your annotated bibliography may seem overwhelming. However, if you can find a few good academic articles as a starting point, use them to guide your research. Academic articles are efficient, scrutinized by experts in their fields, and organized in ways that aid readers in identifying key findings that relate to their argument. The following tips will help you choose solid sources to guide your research:

- **Look for relevant scholarly articles.** Even the briefest Google search can yield an overwhelming amount of content. Sift through it by looking first through academic databases to find high-quality sources relevant to your research.
- **Read abstracts.** As you sift through scholarly articles, you can get a good idea of what each one is about by reading the abstract. It includes the findings and will show you in about 100 words whether the paper holds relevance to your research.
- **Skim.** Once you have determined that an article may be useful, skim each section to glean the information you need. Closer and more extensive reading can come later as you develop and support your argument.
- **Avoid getting bogged down** in technical information or industry-specific jargon. The benefit of reading peer-reviewed research is that you know the reviewers have determined it to be solidly constructed. Therefore, even if you don’t understand some portions completely, you can still feel confident about using relevant information from the article.

- **Work smarter** by using the research provided. Once you have identified an article that is helpful to your research, use it to find more like it. Search for other publications by the authors; researchers often spend much of their careers researching one overarching topic or theme. Use the review of literature to identify related articles that may add to your research. You can also use the article's bibliography to find additional sources. Or reverse engineer the process: use article databases to find other articles that cite the article in their literature reviews.

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7.2: Glance at Form- Citation Style, Purpose, and Formatting

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Successfully apply citation conventions to your writing, understanding the ideas of intellectual property that motivate their use.
- Compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with ideas from related sources.

Citation Styles

Academic writing encompasses a variety of citation styles. Depending on the type of source, most of these styles include varieties of similar information: author's name, title of work, publisher, location of publishing company, journal, website link, and sometimes the DOI (digital object identifier). The citation style you choose often will coincide with the academic discipline involved. Major citation styles include the following:

- **American Psychological Association (APA):** Often used in education, psychology, and science fields
- **Modern Language Association (MLA):** Often used in humanities fields
- **Chicago or Turabian Style:** Often used in business, history, and fine arts fields

Your instructor most often will assign a particular style for students to use. In this book, for example, the primary focus is on MLA Documentation and Format, although APA Documentation and Style is covered as well.

You can also visit the official MLA Style Center (https://openstax.org/r/MLA_Style). Another excellent and comprehensive source on citation format is Purdue University's Online Writing Lab ([https://openstax.org/r/ Purdue_University](https://openstax.org/r/Purdue_University)) (OWL). A citation in MLA format of a website with no listed author name would look like the following example:

"Food Preparation Workers." *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1 Sept. 2020, www.bls.gov/ooh/food-preparation-and-serving/food-preparation-workers.htm.

Annotated Citations

Language Lens Icon

An annotated bibliography goes further than the citation entry. Beginning with the formal citation as shown above, it continues with information about the text, discussing the work's author(s), authority, and impact on or usefulness to the research project. Most annotated bibliographies also present a short critical analysis of the source. Annotations are written in paragraph form. Depending on the purpose of your project and the instructions given, your annotations may range from relatively simple summaries to thorough analyses of your sources and how you will use them. Typically, you will provide this information in one or two paragraphs of around 100 to 200 words total.

Look at the following sample annotation, which is two paragraphs long and consists of just over 150 words. It not only establishes the credibility of the publisher of the website, in this case a United States government organization, but also summarizes the conclusions of the source, including an analysis of future projections for this and similar occupations. It also reflects on how the source contributes to the research and how it helps shape the argument proposed in the research project.

"Food Preparation Workers." *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1 Sept. 2020, www.bls.gov/ooh/food-preparation-and-serving/food-preparation-workers.htm.

Authority: This web page is produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, part of the United States Department of Labor. This agency collects and disseminates the latest economic and employment data, including figures on employment and wages. The report provides information such as education needed, median pay, most recent data regarding number of jobs, and employment outlook for the next 10 years.

The web page concludes that the occupational outlook of this profession is declining slightly, with an anticipated 1 percent decline in employment over the 10 years following the publication date, largely as a result of folding food preparation into the duties of counter workers. However, it also projects that employment in the combined occupations of cooks and food

preparation workers will increase 7 percent over the same period of time. This source supports the project's claim that technical education in food services provides beneficial training that leads to employment and helps shape the argument for better funding for technical schools.

Annotated bibliographies are usually ordered alphabetically by the first word in the citation, often the author's last name. In very long lists of citations, you may choose to organize entries by topic, arranging sources into groups that address the topic from similar perspectives or focuses. The entirety of the annotation should be indented. Only the beginning of the source citation, typically the author's last name, is left-aligned. Your paragraphs should be objective, offering comment and criticism based on the reliability, validity, and bias present rather than on your agreement or disagreement with the ideas. Although you can state opinions, do so in the context of the larger project, and provide explanations.

Functions of an Annotated Bibliography

The function of an annotated bibliography can vary according to the purpose of the writing and the stage at which it is completed. These functions often include

- providing a review of literature for research related to a argument;
- formulating a thesis, particularly if you compile the annotated bibliography at the beginning of the writing process;
- demonstrating the amount and quality of your research on a subject or topic;
- providing examples of sources of information available on a topic; and
- supplying items and publications of interest to readers or other researchers.

Parts of an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography allows readers to determine the scope and credibility of the sources you have used in your research. Each annotation goes beyond a summary of the source, providing information that helps readers determine whether to read the entire work. In other words, if someone else were researching the same or a similar topic, your annotations would help them decide whether the sources would be useful and why. Occasionally, confusion may arise about the function and purpose of abstracts versus annotations. As defined, an **abstract** is a purely descriptive summary, typically found at the very beginning of a journal article or in a periodical index. Abstracts are usually short, intended to provide readers with a concise understanding of a paper's basic content, research, and findings. Although **annotations** also can be descriptive, informative, and similarly brief, they are usually evaluative and critical.

A useful and thorough annotation contains three basic parts:

- A **summary** of the source, detailing the topic(s), major arguments and claims, and main ideas discussed.
- An **evaluation** of the source's usefulness to your argument, its validity, its reliability, and any bias present. When you evaluate sources, you discuss the authors and their credentials, any agendas present, and the sources' goals.
- A **reflection** on how the source fits into the puzzle of your research project. You will examine how it shapes your argument and influences your thinking about the topic.

Create an Annotation

Language Lens Icon

With these guidelines and information in mind, you can create an annotation. First, write a summary of typically no more than one or two sentences. Include the name of the author of the work, when and where it was written, and a general description of the content. Here you will need to **paraphrase**, or explain the essential information of the text in your own words. The rest of the annotation is an analysis of the source and a reflection on how you will use it. The evaluation assesses the source's quality and relevance to your topic. Although you often complete an annotated bibliography at the culmination of a work, the analytic nature of the annotated bibliography means that working on it as part of the prewriting process can help you shape your ideas, learn more about your topic, write a thesis, and determine which sources to use while formulating your argument.

Using Sources in Academic Conversation

Academic writing, particularly an assignment in which you create an **argument**—a persuasive text using one or more appeals—to support a claim to support a claim through reasoning and evidence, is somewhat like joining a conversation, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. You contribute your own ideas to an issue, support your claim by citing other sources on the topic, refute counterclaims, and create meaningful rhetorical appeals. With these contributions, you add your writing to the database of

knowledge and opinion regarding that topic. See [Glance at Genre: Introducing Research as Evidence](#) for a more detailed discussion of authors in conversation. As you think about creating your annotated bibliography, keep this conversation in mind.

One way to use sources is to find those that agree with your position and perhaps even those that argue the point in a similar way. While using sources like these isn't necessarily a problem, creating a rhetorical argument is more than simply repeating existing research, no matter how solid or well-regarded it may be. Therefore, try to expand your compilation to include sources that not only provide strong evidence for your claim but also challenge, extend, or focus on a narrow part of your argument. Joining the conversation may mean explaining how your ideas differ from those presented by another author, or it may involve synthesizing the ideas of multiple sources.

You can join the conversation in several ways without simply restating the words of a source. One option is to combine arguments or research findings from associated source ideas in order to create a summary claim or statement. It may be that none of your sources individually point to a result, but connecting some of them may lead you to a broad conclusion. A second option builds on the first, but rather than summarize to draw a conclusion, you would synthesize to make a claim about the consequences or implications of the sources. A third option is to identify and develop areas of agreement or disagreement between sources and between your own claims and the sources you examine. Finally, you may find areas for further study, including unanswered questions raised by the research you analyze.

Key Terms

These are key terms and characteristics of annotated bibliographies.

- **Agenda:** Underlying intentions or motivations of a person or group.
- **Analysis:** Detailed examination of a complex topic, often looking at individual parts, to interpret meanings, themes, and author choices.
- **Annotations:** A note of explanation or comment. Annotations are both descriptive and critical, adding clarity and insight beyond a straightforward summary.
- **bias:** Predisposition, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something.
- **Bibliography.** A list of sources and basic information about them, including author, title, publisher, and publication date.
- **Boolean operators:** The words AND, OR, and NOT used as conjunctions between search terms to combine or exclude keywords in an online database search. Boolean operators help narrow searches.
- **Citation:** A set of information referencing a single source of information used in a writer's research.
- **Format:** The way in which a composition is arranged or organized. In a bibliography, format is the way in which the bibliographical information is presented.
- **Paraphrase:** A restatement, usually for clarity, of a written or spoken text.
- **Peer-reviewed source:** An article or other informational work written by an expert and reviewed anonymously by other experts in the field to ensure the work's overall quality, including its validity.
- **primary sources:** An immediate, firsthand account of a topic or an event from someone connected to it. Original research, including interviews, experiments, surveys, and field observations, is considered a primary source.
- **rigorous:** Exhaustive, thorough, accurate.
- **secondary sources.** A secondhand account of an event or topic, often providing analysis or interpretation.
- **Style:** A set of rules for citing sources in academic writing.
- **Summary:** A brief statement covering the main ideas of an event or written composition.
- **Synthesis:** The combination of ideas to form new conclusions.
- **tertiary sources:** A summary or digest of primary or secondary sources.
- **Thesis:** A statement that identifies a topic and the author's claim, or angle, about that topic.

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7.3: Writing Process- Informing and Analyzing

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Successfully apply citation conventions to your writing, understanding the ideas of intellectual property that motivate their use.
- Evaluate research materials for credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias.
- Compose to discover and reconsider ideas.
- Compose an annotated bibliography that uses correct style conventions and integrates the writer's ideas with ideas from related sources.

Language Lens Icon

Now it is time to try your hand at creating your own annotated bibliography. As you work through identifying and writing about your sources, you may want to seek out additional ones to help support your argument or thesis. This recursive process is similar to the fine-tuning that occurs during the writing process, in which a writer moves fluidly among drafting, editing, and revising. You can return to your annotated bibliography during the course of research and writing to modify, further develop, analyze, and add to your sources. Remember, using a variety of sources can broaden your perspective about your topic by showing how different scholars and popular publications approach it.

Summary of Assignment: Annotated Bibliography

For this assignment, you will create an annotated bibliography based on your research for one of the writing assignments in this course, preferably Writing Process: Integrating Research. After collecting and choosing sources, you will write citations using MLA Documentation and Format and compose a one- or two-paragraph annotation for each source. Remember, the purpose of the annotation is to provide

- a brief summary that allows readers to understand the background of the source and its basic claims; and
- an evaluation and reflection on the source's reliability, its usefulness, and the author's or organization's credibility.

Culture Lens Icon

While the format for your MLA citation should follow the prescriptive pattern from the Handbook, you will decide on the language and structure of the annotations you include. While your topic, personal style, and ideas may lend themselves to a more standardized format, it is possible that they may instead challenge codified conventions in favor of a style more authentic to you.

Auditory & Kinesthetic Learning Style Icons

Another Lens 1. Consider alternatives to a formal annotated bibliography that complements differing learning styles or abilities. If your instructor is amenable, you may informally annotate sources in their margins or use an online annotation program such as Kami (<https://openstax.org/r/Kami>).

Voice to Text Icon

Another Lens 2. Another alternative is to discuss, with a partner or in a small group, each source's credentials, key ideas, and usefulness to your project. In either case, using a graphic organizer similar to the one in the next section should help you organize your ideas.

Quick Launch: Organizing Information

Language Lens & Gathering and Capturing Ideas Icons

Begin by collecting sources. A good way to start is to make a list of keywords, known authors, organizations, and previously identified sources related to your topic. For example, imagine you have been assigned an argument project and chosen artificial intelligence as the topic. Begin, then, with the keywords *artificial intelligence*. A Google search will reveal a wealth of information on the topic, likely too much to help you craft a meaningful argument. However, a basic search will allow you to

- effectively define *artificial intelligence* as “the simulation of human intelligence by machines programmed to mimic human thought and actions”;
- name four types of artificial intelligence: reactive machines, limited memory, theory of mind, and self-aware;
- identify leading industries in which artificial intelligence is already present, such as self-driving cars and virtual butlers; and
- recognize the existence of a spectrum of thought surrounding the ethics and governance of artificial intelligence.

You also may discover some alternative search terms to use, such as *machine learning*, *data mining*, *robotics*, and *neuroscience*. Although you may not ultimately use them in your argument, the sources that you find may point you toward a focused thesis.

When you finish your keyword search, the next step is to search academic databases. Use your library’s resources to find scholarly sources such as journal articles, books, textbooks, expert interviews, and reputable periodical pieces. Aim for five to seven sources to begin with, though you likely will add more as you work on your project. You may already have an idea of what claims you want to make in your argument, but the sources may shape them as well. As you review the sources you collect, choose those that give you a varied range of perspectives on the topic. Remember that you can return to this procedure at various points in your research, adding sources as your needs change and as you refine your claims. While you search for sources, keep in mind the specifics of your research project, and limit your search to sources that specifically support your argument, inform a counterargument, or otherwise add information that enhances your research.

Thesis

Note

Before you choose sources, you must have an idea of what you want to say. If you’re creating an annotated bibliography for the argument described Writing Process: Integrating Research, you likely have already drafted a thesis statement. If you are creating an annotated bibliography for another topic, you will need to draft a working thesis. Your thesis will state your position on the topic. It is often a single clear, concise sentence that reveals your side in the argument. You will use your sources to support the thesis you draft.

These frames may be useful when you draft your working thesis:

- Because _____, [someone] should _____.
- _____ saves _____, reduces _____, and helps _____.
- The lack of _____ shows _____.
- _____ influences _____ and, by extension, _____.
- _____ accurately (inaccurately) portrays _____ because _____.
- _____ is a result of _____, _____, and _____.
- Although some argue that _____, a close examination shows that _____.
- _____ and _____ prove that _____.

Citations and Annotations

Language Lens Icon

For each source you choose, first write the source citation in MLA format. An example of a citation for the research project on artificial intelligence might be:

Buiten, Miriam C. “Towards Intelligent Regulation of Artificial Intelligence.” *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2019, pp. 41–59, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-risk-regulation/article/towards-intelligent-regulation-of-artificial-intelligence

regulation-of-artificial-intelligence/ AF1AD1940B70DB88D2B24202EE933F1B. Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.

After preparing citations for each of your sources, write the annotations. To do this, consider the following:

- The purpose of the work

- For whom the work is written
- How to summarize the content
- The author/organization producing the work
- Distinctive or interesting features of the content (particularly in comparison with other sources)
- The relevance of the work to your topic
- Strengths, weaknesses, and bias present
- Conclusions and implications

To annotate, you will typically begin with a summary of one to three sentences. For longer or more complex sources, the summary may be longer. Then discuss unique features of the content, an evaluation of the source, and a reflection on how the source is useful to your research. For each source, use a graphic organizer such as Table 14.3. It will help you collect the needed information, organize your thoughts, and get started summarizing and analyzing your sources.

Table 14.3 Source evaluation organizer

Source Citation	
Intended Audience	
Main Ideas, Arguments, and Themes Present	
Author's Point of View, Bias, and Expertise	
Comparison with Other Sources on the Topic	
Evaluation of Source's Relevance to Topic	
Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses	
Conclusions Drawn by Author	

Drafting:

Creating an annotated bibliography requires you to read your sources critically. As you first collect your sources, briefly review and examine the information they contain, specifically through the lens of how each can add to your research. As you read more critically, choose those that represent different perspectives on your topic as well as those that have similar viewpoints but arrive at them in different ways or from various angles.

If you have been using a graphic organizer for each source, as suggested, the information you need and your ideas about the source will be right there for you. If you haven't organized your research in this way, now is a good time to do it, when you do not yet need to structure good paragraphs. When it is time for you to write your annotations, having your thoughts already mapped out will make your work easier. For the hypothetical artificial intelligence project, you might organize information for the article cited earlier as shown in Table 14.4.

Table 14.4 Completed source evaluation organizer

Source Citation	Buiten, Miriam C. "Towards Intelligent Regulation of Artificial Intelligence." <i>European Journal of Risk Regulation</i> , vol. 10, no. 1, 2019, pp. 41–59, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-risk-regulation/article/towards-intelligent-regulation-of-artificial-intelligence/AF1AD1940B70DB88D2B24202EE933F1B . Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.
Intendend Audience	The journal is published by Cambridge University Press. Therefore, it is peer reviewed and intended for an academic audience.

Main Ideas, Arguments, and Themes Present	Discusses the unpredictability and difficulty of controlling artificial intelligence and examines what, if anything, can be done to increase transparency, specifically as it relates to biases of algorithms
Author's Point of View, Bias, and Expertise	Buiten is a law and economics professor at the University of Mannheim. She is the author or coauthor of nine publications, and contributed to others, about law and technology and digitalization, competition law, and European law.
Comparison with Other Sources on the Topic	Other sources call for total transparency in legal matters regarding artificial intelligence. This article questions whether such transparency is useful and/or feasible on the basis of current laws
Evaluation of Source's Relevance to Topic	Focuses on legal transparency for artificial intelligence, related to the question of whether artificial intelligence is harmful or helpful to society
Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses	Well-researched; uses dozens of peer-reviewed sources
Conclusions Drawn by Author	Transparency for artificial intelligence will be difficult and expensive to comply with and should be better defined in legal contexts before it is required.

For some sources, you may be unable to find information for each category. In particular, for sources that are very short or from which you use only one or two bits of information, your annotations will not be long or complex, and your graphic organizer may seem sparse. That is to be expected. What is important at this stage is to identify how you will use your resources as they relate to your argument or thesis.

After you have outlined your sources by using the graphic organizer or a similar method, it is time to start writing the actual annotations. Remember the three tasks in writing an annotation:

1. **Summary** the central idea or scope of the source, particularly as it relates to your research project.
2. **Evaluation** the source for authority, author's perspective, reliability, validity, and bias.
3. **Reflect** on how the source affects your research and your thinking.

Your annotated bibliography should include at least some of these functions and, depending on the source, may contain all of them. Below is an example of an annotated bibliography entry for the article on artificial intelligence. The entry begins with the correctly formatted citation, followed by two paragraphs summarizing, evaluating, and reflecting. Because you already have completed the graphic organizer, much of the analysis is already done there. Simply take that thinking and shape it into useful paragraphs, like those the writer created here.

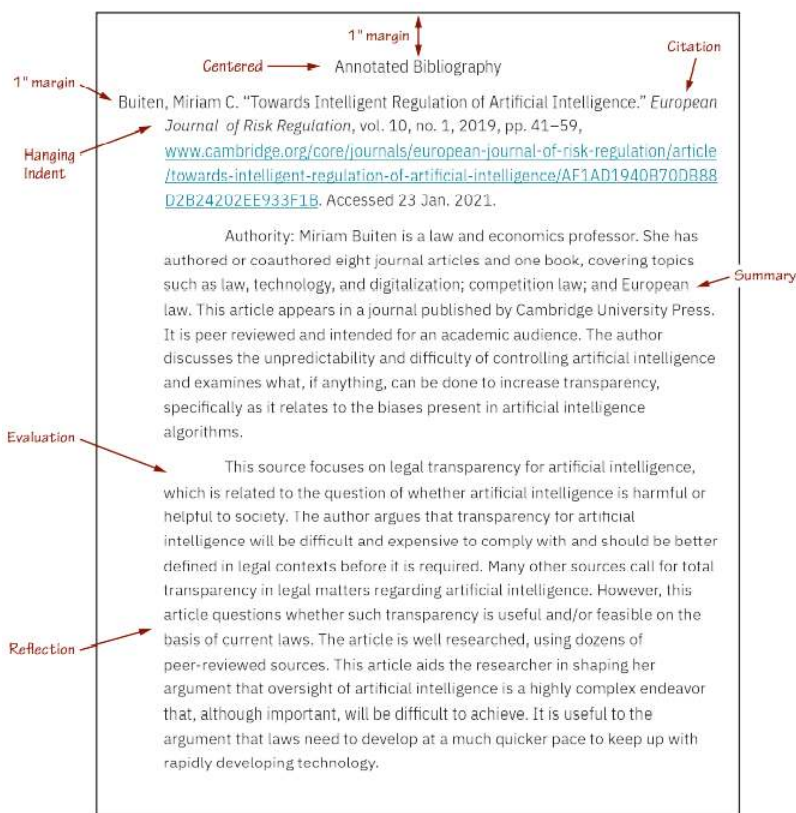


Figure 14.13 Sample annotated bibliography entry (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

You can break down this sample annotation, analyzing each part separately as shown in Figure 14.13.

Buiten, Miriam C. "Towards Intelligent Regulation of Artificial Intelligence." *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2019, pp. 41–59, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-risk-regulation/article/towards-intelligent-regulation-of-artificial-intelligence/AF1AD1940B70DB88D2B24202EE933F1B. Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.

Note

Format. Notice the MLA format, including information listing the author, title, publishing journal, and DOI or link to the article. The reader will be able to find and read the article easily.

Authority: Miriam Buiten is a law and economics professor. She has authored or coauthored eight journal articles and one book, covering topics such as law, technology, and digitalization; competition law; and European law. This article appears in a journal published by Cambridge University Press. It is peer reviewed and intended for an academic audience. The author discusses the unpredictability and difficulty of controlling artificial intelligence and examines what, if anything, can be done to increase transparency, specifically as it relates to the biases present in artificial intelligence algorithms.

Note

Authority. The author is named and introduced with background information establishing her authority in the field. The publishing organization is also named, establishing credibility as a peer-reviewed journal.

Summary. The contents of the text are summarized briefly, allowing readers to quickly understand the topic and scope of the article and to begin to piece together its relevance to the overall research project.

This source focuses on legal transparency for artificial intelligence, which is related to the question of whether artificial intelligence is harmful or helpful to society. The author argues that transparency for artificial intelligence will be difficult and expensive to comply with and should be better defined in legal contexts before it is required. Many other sources call for

total transparency in legal matters regarding artificial intelligence. However, this article questions whether such transparency is useful and/or feasible based on current laws. The article is well researched, using dozens of peer-reviewed sources.

Note

Evaluation. This paragraph includes an evaluative statement that shows the article's validity.

This article aids the researcher in shaping her argument that oversight of artificial intelligence is a highly complex endeavor that, although important, will be difficult to achieve. It is useful to the argument that laws need to develop at a much quicker pace to keep up with rapidly developing technology.

Note

Reflection. This part of the paragraph reveals how the source fits into the research puzzle, noting that it indirectly supports the claim that developing oversight for artificial intelligence is not a simple task and would require the law to evolve quickly.

Style. The annotation is written in third person, referring to "the researcher" and "her," as opposed to using first-person pronouns such as me and I

Formatting

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary depending on the discipline and purpose. Therefore, be clear at the outset which style you need to use. In academic writing, that information often will come from your instructor. Generally, annotated bibliographies will be written in MLA Documentation and Format, APA Documentation and Format, or Chicago style.

This text uses MLA style. MLA source citations follow several principles in place of specific rules. The style has been adapted in recent years to respond to the evolving nature of text in an increasingly digital world. Thus, the MLA Handbook is organized by the process of citation, rather than listing rules for every type of source. However, certain overall guidelines apply. When you cite a source, first identify core elements that are present. Remember from earlier in this chapter that these are author(s), title of source, title of container, version, number, publisher, publication date, and location.

Buiten, Miriam C. "Towards Intelligent Regulation of Artificial Intelligence." *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2019. pp. 41–59. www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-risk-regulation/article/towards-intelligent-regulation-of-artificial-intelligence/AF1AD1940B70DB88D2B24202EE933F1B. Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.

Note

Author. The entry with gold highlighting begins with the author's last name, followed by a comma and the remainder of the name. The author's name is followed by a period.

Title of Source. The title of the source follows the author's name in purple highlighting. The title is either italicized or placed within quotation marks, depending on the type of source, and followed by a period. Book titles are italicized, while print or online articles are placed in quotation marks, as shown.

Title of Container. The container, highlighted in teal, is the larger work to which a source belongs. An article may belong to a website or journal, a song to an album, or a video to a video-sharing site. This container comes next in the citation. It is generally italicized and followed by a comma. However, some sources do not have containers; for example, a book (versus a chapter in a book) or an entire website (versus a single page on a website) is self-contained and thus has no container to cite.

Version. Next, the version is listed, if there is one. For example, a textbook edition or version of a text would appear here, followed by a comma. This citation example doesn't have a version, so that information is skipped.

Number. Some sources, especially academic journals, are part of a numbered sequence as shown in green highlighting. Journals usually have both volume and issue numbers; include both in your citation, separated by commas.

Publisher. The next element in the citation is the publisher, followed by a comma. The publisher does not have to be listed for some sources, including periodicals, works published by the author or editor, websites with the same name as the publisher, or websites that host works but do not actually publish them. Because this sample source is a periodical, no publisher is listed in the citation.

Publication Date. List the most recent date of publication available for the version of the source you used. The date is followed by a comma as shown in red highlighting.

Location. Location, shown in dark and light gray highlighting, refers to where in the source you found the information, including page numbers and URLs. Be as specific as possible, as this information allows readers to return to your source to read it for themselves. When listing a URL, remove the beginning tag of `http://` or `https://`.

Optional elements

You may want to add optional elements to help readers identify the source more easily. These can include the following:

- City of publication, generally only for books that were published before 1900 or whose publishers either have offices in more than one country or are unknown in North America (MLA 8)
- Access date, which is present in the sample annotation
- DOI (digital object identifier), which may be used in place of a URL if available
- Original publication date, if it differs from the publication date used for the citation

Alphabetizing and Indenting

Other rules also apply to MLA citations in a research project. Most of these are formatting and style rules that add to a polished final product. Remember to list sources in alphabetical order according to the author's last name. If the source has more than one author, list it according to the last name of the first author mentioned. If the source has no author named, insert it into your alphabetical list according to the first word in the title. For example, if Miriam C. Buiten's name were not mentioned, you would enter the item under T, the first letter of the first word in the title, Towards. In your bibliography, double-space the citation, and do not leave a space between entries.

In an annotated bibliography, indent the entire annotation in the same manner as the source citation after the first line. In most word processing programs, you can create this formatting by highlighting the citation and annotation paragraphs and then creating a hanging indent. In Microsoft Word, open the Paragraph Settings icon on the Home tab. Under the tab that reads Indents and Spacing, find the section labeled Indentation. On the right side of that section is the label Special. Click the drop-down menu, and choose Hanging. Different word processing programs may require you to create hanging indentations in another way. Consult an MLA guide often to ensure that your citations are correct.

Annotations

Annotations are the most important part of an annotated bibliography. Although there is no set format for writing annotations, remember to write them in paragraph form and to summarize, evaluate, and/or reflect. Annotation lengths will vary depending on the length of the source, how it is used in your project, and how much analysis you do within the annotation. However, a general length of one to two paragraphs consisting of 100 to 200 words is roughly the standard.

Descriptive/Informative and Analytical/Critical Annotations

There are two major types of annotated bibliographies. The first is **descriptive annotations**, or informative, summarizing the material and explaining why the source is useful for your topic. This type of annotated bibliography also points out special features of the text, including any data, graphics, or other characteristics. Although you discuss the author's main arguments and conclusions, you do not analyze or evaluate them. Descriptive annotations are useful for helping readers understand an author's main ideas but less helpful for showing how the source has influenced the research project as a whole.

The other type of annotated bibliography is **analytical bibliography**, or critical. This type includes all the features of a descriptive annotated bibliography, including a summary of the material. In addition, it includes your analysis of the information in each source and explanation of how the source has influenced the development of your research. With analytical or critical annotations, you examine the strengths, weaknesses, and biases present in the author's information and explain how the author's work and conclusions apply to your research.

In projects for this course, especially those using arguments, you will almost always create analytical or critical annotated bibliographies, though the detail in which you analyze may vary from source to source. The detail in these bibliographies will contribute to your knowledge base and provide information for others.

Further Reading

To learn more about creating an annotated bibliography, consider the following sources:

“Annotated Bibliographies.” OWL: *The Purdue Online Writing Lab*, Purdue U, owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/index.html.

Beatty, Luke, and Cynthia A. Cochran. *Writing the Annotated Bibliography: A Guide for Students and Researchers*. Routledge, 2020.

“How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography: The Annotated Bibliography.” *Cornell University Library*, Cornell U, 5 May 2021, guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography.

Works Cited

Krause, Steven D. *The Process of Research Writing*. 2007, www.stevendkrause.com/tprw/.

“MLA Citation Guide (8th Edition): Annotated Bibliography.” *LibGuides at Columbia College (BC)*, LibGuides, 16 June 2021, columbiacollege-ca.libguides.com/mla/annot_bib.

“MLA Formatting and Style Guide.” OWL: *The Purdue Online Writing Lab*, Purdue U, 2021, owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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8.1: Wrong Word

Wrong Word

Wrong word errors are really common and are number one on the list. Sometimes, we make a wrong word error when we are using the thesaurus and trying to find the biggest word we can find in order to make ourselves sound really smart. This isn't the greatest strategy. Sometimes, it's better just to be simple, and it's always better just to be clear.

We also have to be careful of the spell checker. Sometimes, we misspell words, and then the spell checker makes a change to a word we don't want. Of course, we may be in a hurry and never even notice. Take a look at this sentence to see the problems wrong word errors can create:

- Sometimes, I will just sit and watch strangers in the crowd, but it is defiantly awful when I accidentally make eye contact with one of them.

In this sentence, writing "defiantly" when we mean "definitely", *definitely* changes the meaning in the sentence.

Here is the sentence again with the correct word:

- Sometimes, I will just sit and watch strangers in the crowd, but it is definitely awful when I accidentally make eye contact with one of them.

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8.2: Comma After Introductory Element

Comma After Introductory Element

It's important to remember that introductory words and phrases—any words or phrases that come before the main clause in a sentence—should be set off with a comma. Here is an example of a sentence that does not include the required comma and then the correction:

- (Missing Comma) In case you were wondering I never allow myself to be exposed to direct sunlight unless I have my scarf, my sunglasses, and a large umbrella.
- In case you were wondering, I never allow myself to be exposed to direct sunlight unless I have my scarf, my sunglasses, and a large umbrella.

For more information on this comma rule, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

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8.3: Documentation Common Error

Documentation Common Error

Incomplete or Missing Documentation

The third most common error on the list relates to proper documentation. It's so important to remember to cite all borrowed information. No matter your documentation style, whether it is APA format, MLA format, or Chicago Style, all require some kind of citation for quoted, paraphrased, and summarized material.

REMEMBER: You must not only cite people's words, but you must also cite their ideas. Errors of this nature can get you into a lot of trouble because incomplete or missing documentation is plagiarism.

For more information on proper documentation in APA, MLA, or Chicago Style, be sure to check out the [Citation & Documentation](#) area of the Excelsior OWL.

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8.4: Pronoun Reference

Pronoun Reference

Pronoun reference errors also make the list because pronouns seem to give a lot of beginning writers some trouble. A pronoun reference error occurs when you use a pronoun like "he" or "she", and it's not clear what that pronoun refers to. Here is an example:

- When Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker were battling with their light sabers, he became angry.

Who does "he" refer to? It isn't clear. A pronoun should clearly refer to its antecedent (the word it replaces), so if the antecedent is not clear, you need to revise. Here's an example of how you might correct the pronoun reference error:

- When Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker were battling with their light sabers, Luke became angry.

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8.5: Spelling

Spelling

In the age of spell checkers, it's hard to imagine that spelling errors would top the most common error list, but they do. First, it's important to remember to run the spell checker. Even though you have to remember to check your spell checker, spell checkers are a good place to start when it comes to spelling errors.

Still, there are plenty of spelling errors the spell checker won't catch. In addition to possibly creating wrong-word errors, as discussed earlier, spell checkers also miss misspelled words like names and other proper nouns, as illustrated in the following example:

- On my vacation to France, I went to Pares and visited the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre museum, and Jim Morrison's grave.

The spell checker missed these errors. Here is the corrected version of the sentence:

- On my vacation to France, I went to Paris and visited the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre museum, and Jim Morrison's grave.

So, be sure to run your spell checker, but, then, don't forget to double and triple check your writing. Spell checkers do not catch everything.

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8.6: Quotation Error

Quotation Error

Using quotation marks correctly can be a little tricky, especially when you need to use other types of punctuation with them. Mechanical errors related to quotation marks make the most-common error list because beginning writers often forget that commas and periods go inside the quotation marks. Here is an example:

- “When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That’s relativity,” said Einstein.

In this case, the comma placed outside the quotation marks is incorrect. The comma should be placed inside the quotation marks like this:

- “When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That’s relativity,” said Einstein.

It’s important to note, however, that not all punctuation automatically goes inside the quotation marks. Question marks are a little trickier. If the only part in quotations is a question, then the question mark should go inside the quotation marks; otherwise, the question mark actually goes outside of the quotation marks. Tricky for sure!

Also, beginning writers often forget that titles of shorter works, like essays and short stories, should be placed inside quotation marks. Longer works, like books and magazines, should be placed in italics.

- I read the essay “The Marginal World” by Rachel Carson in the book *Best American Essays of the Century*.

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8.7: Unnecessary Comma

Unnecessary Comma

When beginning writers are first learning comma rules, they have a tendency to forget that the rules all depend upon the situation. So, when you learn to place a comma before a coordinating conjunction like "and, but," or "so" when you join two independent clauses, you might have an urge to place a comma before "and, but," or "so" every time you use these words. You should avoid this urge!

Just because you need to use commas with coordinating conjunctions sometimes doesn't mean you'll use them all the time.

- I have a wide variety of supernatural powers, but wish I had the power to go out in the daylight.

In this example, you don't need a comma before the "but" because you aren't combining two independent clauses. Here is a corrected version of the sentence:

- I have a wide variety of supernatural powers but wish I had the power to go out in the daylight.

You should also be careful that you aren't using commas unnecessarily around information that is essential to the sentence. The comma rule is that non-essential information should be set off with commas, but essential information should not.

- I find that a little fear is the best seasoning, for my food, so I often sneak up on my husband while he cooks and frighten him.

In this example, "for my food" is not extra information that should be set off with commas. But, you do need a comma before the "so" to separate the two independent clauses. Here is a corrected version of the sentence:

- I find that a little fear is the best seasoning for my food, so I often sneak up on my husband while he cooks and frighten him.

For more information on these comma rules, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

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8.8: Capitalization

Capitalization

Some teachers blame text messaging. After all, how many times have you written out a quick text message, not worrying about where you need to capitalize? You, like many others, have probably done this quite often.

Interestingly, capitalization errors appeared on the most-common error list even before everyone was walking around with their heads over their cell phones text messaging every other minute.

Of course, the reality is that teachers now often complain that students don't even capitalize "I" in a sentence. That could likely be related to text messaging. Still, other capitalization errors may not be.

Whatever the reasons behind the errors, it's important to be aware of capitalization rules. Be careful to capitalize words that should be capitalized, such as proper nouns, and not capitalize words that should not be capitalized.

But, how can you know what should and shouldn't be capitalized? If you are unsure, review the differences between proper nouns and common nouns in the Parts of Speech chapter.

Capitalization errors can really have a negative impact on the impressions your readers have of your writing. Take a look at the following sentence:

- i took a walk in central park and saw a Mime, who was pretending to be a Policeman, get sprayed with mace by an elderly woman because she thought he was trying to steal her purse.

Now, take a look at the sentence with correct capitalization:

- I took a walk in Central Park and saw a mime, who was pretending to be a policeman, get sprayed with mace by an elderly woman because she thought he was trying to steal her purse.

It's important to edit carefully and review the rules if necessary!

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8.9: Missing Word

Missing Word

Missing word errors make this list because we are too often in a hurry when we edit. Our brains are great. We can read right through sentences and put in the words that need to be there even if words are missing. Of course, others might quickly notice the error, so we have to find ways to slow ourselves down and edit carefully. You don't want to write a sentence like the following example that is missing a small word with big meaning:

- I enjoy walking alone in the woods at night because I never what I will meet while I am out there in the dark.

Did you see the error? Look at the revised sentence below:

- I enjoy walking alone in the woods at night because I never know what I will meet while I am out there in the dark.
-

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8.10: Faulty Sentence Structure

Faulty Sentence Structure

Have you ever had a teacher say, “That sentence starts one way and ends another”? If you have, don’t feel badly. Others make this same mistake all the time. Sometimes, we simply lose our train of thought when we write, and we literally start a sentence one way and end it another, as illustrated in the following example:

- I occasionally get the urge to study late at night for instance my exams are going to take me longer than usual to study for because this works.

It’s tough to make sense of this sentence, right?

Of course, this is not the only faulty sentence structure error you might make. It’s important to pay close attention to your sentence structure to make sure you have both a subject and a verb. And, if you are listing items or phrases in a sentence, make sure you keep the items in your list in the same form. Doing so keeps your sentences “parallel,” which is a good thing.

Here is an example of a sentence without parallel structure:

- I start my day with breakfast, exercising, and checking out the latest blogs.

In the sentence above, "breakfast" is a noun, and "exercising" and "checking" begin verb phrases. The items on the list are not in the same form. Here is a correction where the items listed are in the same form:

- I start my day by eating breakfast, exercising, and checking out the latest blogs.

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8.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element

Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element

Just as you should not put commas around essential or restrictive information in a sentence, you must remember to put commas around information that is non-essential or nonrestrictive.

If the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, you need to be sure to set it off with commas. Here is an example of a sentence without proper commas around the nonrestrictive element:

- Moving into a cave especially one that is already occupied is not a decision one should make without considerable forethought.

Here is the corrected version:

- Moving into a cave, especially one that is already occupied, is not a decision one should make without considerable forethought.

If you have trouble deciding whether or not you need commas around “extra” information in your sentences, be sure to review the comma rules in the Punctuation chapter.

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8.12: Verb Tense Shift

Verb Tense Shift

You want to be sure that you are always consistent with your verb tense. When you shift verb tenses for no reason, and this is an easy mistake to make, you can really confuse your readers.

If you're writing in the present tense, be sure you stay in the present tense. If you're writing in the past tense, be sure you stay in the past tense. The exception would be if you need to shift tenses to tell a story, but that would be purposeful shifting. It's the random, accidental shifting that causes the problems, as illustrated in this example:

She grabs my hand then flipped me like I weighed nothing. This showed what a good self-defense course has done.

Here is what a corrected version of the sentence looks like:

She grabbed my hand then flipped me like I weighed nothing. This showed what a good self-defense course has done.

You should also be aware that certain types of writing require either past or present tense. For example, research in APA format often needs to be presented in the past tense, but a literary analysis written in MLA format needs to be presented using present tense verbs. It's called the literary present tense. Below is a table of APA 7th edition verb tense recommendations for literature reviews and research papers.

If you're ever unsure about tense requirements, be sure to ask your professor.

Paper Section	Recommended tense	Example
Literature review (or whenever discussing other researchers' work)	Past	Quinn (2020) presented
	Present Perfect	Since then, many investigators have used
Method Description of procedure	Past	Participants completed a survey
	Present Perfect	Others have used similar approaches
Reporting of results	Past	Results were nonsignificant
		Scores increased
		Hypotheses were supported
Discussion of implications of results	Present	The results indicate
Presentation of conclusions, limitations, future directions, and so forth	Present	We conclude
		Limitations of the study are

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8.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence

Missing Comma in Compound Sentence

When you join two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet—also known as the FANBOYS), you must place a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

The rule is very clear, here. The comma before the coordinating conjunction works *with* the coordinating conjunction to help make a proper boundary between the two independent clauses.

- I understand that vampires and ghouls need love but I don't think they really understand just how attached I am to my vital, bodily fluids.

In this example, the sentence is missing the comma before the but because the but joins two complete thoughts. Leaving out this necessary comma creates an error because you have two sentences connected without a proper boundary between those sentences.

Here is a correction for the sentence:

- I understand that vampires and ghouls need love, but I don't think they really understand just how attached I am to my vital, bodily fluids.

For more information on this comma rule, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

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8.14: Apostrophe Errors

Apostrophe Errors

Apostrophes give many writers a lot of trouble. Sometimes, you might be tempted to put an apostrophe where it does not belong, such as when you are simply making a word plural. Other times, you need to make a word possessive, but you might forget to use the apostrophe.

Then, of course, there is that whole "its" / "it's" thing that confuses most everyone.

Remember, the rule is to use an apostrophe when you need to show possession or ownership. The exception is with its.

"Its" shows ownership because "it's" means "it is". So, it's like "it's" is already taken, so "its" gets to be an ownership exception. To make sure you are using "it's" correctly, just say "it is" when you read it. If it makes sense, you're fine. However, if you're trying to show ownership, and it is would not work in the sentence, you need to make the change to "its".

For more information on the apostrophe, be sure to check out the Apostrophe section in the Punctuation chapter (or if you just need to brush up your skills, visit the Apostrophe Refresher). Otherwise, you might end up with a sentence like this:

- Its abundantly clear, to me, that creature's of the night are just misunderstood and misguided beings who sometimes err in judgment and eat their neighbors' as well as their neighbors families.

And, you would want a sentence like this:

- It's abundantly clear, to me, that creatures of the night are just misunderstood and misguided beings who sometimes err in judgment and eat their neighbors as well as their neighbors' families.

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8.15: Run-On Sentences

Run-On Sentences

Fused or Run-On Sentence

A fused sentence is sometimes called a run-on sentence. The concept is simple. If your teacher marks fused sentence or run-on on your paper, it's because you have put two complete thoughts or independent clauses together without the proper punctuation or any kind of sentence boundary. Here is an example:

- There were a thousand zombies cheering for the home team when I walked onto the field I don't think even one of them noticed me.

And, here is the corrected sentence:

- There were a thousand zombies cheering for the home team when I walked onto the field; I don't think even one of them noticed me.

The key is to remember that you must have some kind of boundary between your independent clauses. You can use punctuation, such as the period or the semicolon, or you can use a comma *with* a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet).

NOTE: A comma alone cannot separate independent clauses. Using a comma to separate independent clauses actually creates a comma splice.

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8.16: Comma Splice

Comma Splice

Many students think a comma splice is just any kind of comma error, but a comma splice is a very specific type of comma error.

A comma splice occurs when you use a comma to separate two independent clauses. A comma is not strong enough to perform this function, which causes the problem. It's important to remember to use proper punctuation to separate your independent clauses; otherwise, you end up with a sentence like this:

He promised me, if I didn't report him, he would never do it again, however, the next night, he was back, playing his bagpipes under my balcony.

Here, you should notice the only comma error is the one between "again" and "however". The reason this is a comma splice is because "the" actually begins a new sentence or independent clause, but there is not a proper boundary between these two sentences. Here is how the sentence could be corrected:

He promised me, if I didn't report him, he would never do it again; however, the next night, he was back, playing his bagpipes under my balcony.

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8.17: Pronoun Agreement

Pronoun Agreement

Pronoun agreement can be trickier than it might seem on the surface. The rule is that we must make sure our pronouns agree in number and gender with the nouns they are replacing. For example, when we write a sentence about a girl named Sophia, we would use "she" as the pronoun to refer to her.

But things get a little more confusing when we are talking about a kind of abstract person, and the “rule” on this subject has recently changed in most circles. In the recent past, to avoid sexist language, we couldn’t write "he" or "she". Instead, we had to write "he or she".

But, because most people would just end up writing "they", which technically does not agree in number, the “rule” began to change. This is a great example of how living languages, like English, change, and the change happens when people make a change happen. It’s really pretty exciting!

It used to be incorrect to use what we now call “the singular they.” Here is an example:

- If you want a child to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

Now, many style guides accept the use of "they" or "them" to refer to a singular noun.

So, now, this would be considered correct:

- If you want a child to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

When in doubt, using a plural noun is safest:

- If you want children to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

This way, you avoid any awkwardness of the singular "them", and your pronoun is now also in agreement with "children".

NOTE: Because the use of the singular "they" is new, you may find some people who disagree, but most academics now agree that the singular "they" is correct. Please always refer to your style guide, as some style guides still recommend not using the singular "they".

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8.18: Poorly Integrated Quote

Poorly Integrated Quote

Any teacher who has ever assigned and graded writing has probably complained about this error. Too often, beginning writers will simply “plop” a quote into a paragraph without any setup or context. This is incredibly confusing for your readers, so it’s important to make sure you smoothly integrate your quotes into the sentences around the quote.

Although there are no “rules” for such things, it’s always a good idea to provide a phrase of some kind to set up your quote and some commentary after your quote to make sure your readers understand the relevance of the quote. Otherwise, you may end up with a quote like this:

Albert Einstein was a great man and a great scientist. He was one of the most advanced thinkers of our age. “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing” (Einstein Quotes, 2012).

Here, it feels like the quote is just dropped in without a clear context. If you struggle with quote integration, you’ll want to check out lessons on effective source integration.

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8.19: Hyphens

Hyphens

Hyphens can be a little tricky, but they are important. For example, there is a world of difference between a dirty-movie theater and a dirty movie theater. You probably wouldn't want to go to either one, but there is a big difference between the two.

Hyphens are tricky because location is also very important in determining whether or not you need to hyphenate words.

The rule is pretty clear, however. Most of us just need a reminder. When you have two or more words that modify or describe a noun that follows, you should hyphenate those words. You should not hyphenate the same words if they come after the noun.

Take a look at the following example where hyphenation errors exist in several places:

- It was clear that, after his two dollar hair-cut, Bertram began suffering from low self esteem.

Here is what the correction should look like:

- It was clear that, after his two-dollar haircut, Bertram began suffering from low self-esteem.

If you need help figuring out where hyphens should and should not be, be sure to check out the Hyphen section in Punctuation chapter.

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8.20: Sentence Fragment

Sentence Fragment

Sentence fragments always make the list of the most common errors, and they are among the most seriously stigmatizing errors we can make. To put it simply, a sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence that you have punctuated as if it is a complete sentence.

Sometimes, fragments are missing a verb. Sometimes, fragments are missing a subject. Sometimes, a fragment is simply a dependent clause punctuated like a complete sentence. Here are some examples:

- The haunting of the house on the craggy hill just outside of town.
- Because they are hairy and frightening with large, pointed fangs and shiny, yellow eyes.

You'll notice that each of these so-called sentences is not a complete sentence. They are both missing parts that would make them complete.

You always have options about how you correct a sentence fragment, but here are some possible corrections for our two sample sentence fragments:

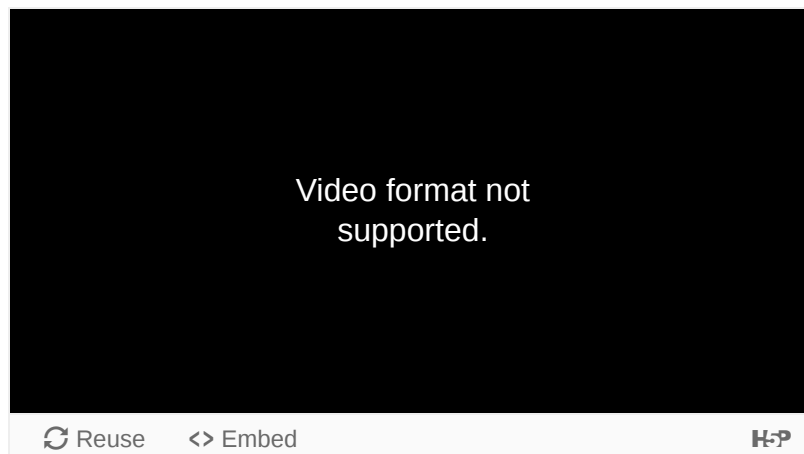
- The haunting of the house on the craggy hill just outside of town was the subject of a recent documentary.
- I am afraid of those spiders because they are hairy and frightening with large, pointed fangs and shiny, yellow eyes.

Tips from the Professor

Fragments are among the most serious errors in academic writing. While you may read fiction and informal prose that contain sentence fragments, in academic writing, fragments are generally frowned upon. In fact, research on how errors are perceived by people indicates that fragments are what we call “status marking” errors, which means people will make negative assumptions about the intelligence of the writer when they see fragments in writing.

Of course, making a sentence fragment error has nothing to do with your intelligence. Usually, for native speakers of English, making a sentence fragment error is more about not editing carefully or just not being practiced in the rules.

In this video, the Grammar Professor will review what a fragment is and how you can avoid fragments in your academic writing.



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8.21: Try It Out



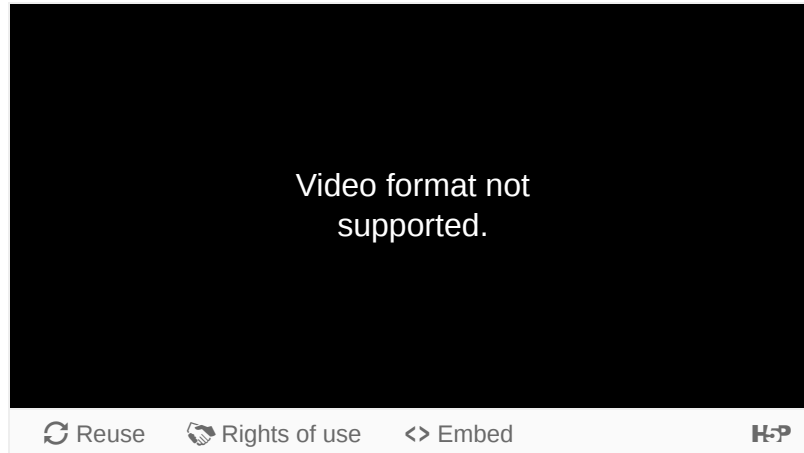
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8.22: Putting It All Together

Putting It All Together

In this section of Grammar Essentials, you have learned about the 20 most common errors students make and how you can avoid them. Hopefully, you have also learned that, if you have had these errors marked on your papers, you aren't alone. The key is having awareness, as this can help you when you edit.

To help you review, check out the video below, which provides a basic overview of what you have learned about the 20 most common errors students in the United States make.



NOTE: Because the use of the singular "they" is new, you may find some people who disagree, but most academics now agree that the singular "they" is correct. Please always refer to your style guide, as some style guides still recommend not using the singular "they".

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8.23: Time to Write

Time to Write

Now that you have the knowledge about the most common errors students in the U.S. make, think about your own writing. Which of these errors have you struggled with?

The next step is to be considerate of these errors as you edit. Review the most common errors list, paying close attention to issues you have had marked by teachers. Which ones stand out to you?

It's your turn now. Understanding these common errors can lead to better editing strategies, which helps you have cleaner, clearer writing.

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