READING AND COMPOSITION



Monica Urban
College of the Sequoias



Reading and Composition

Monica Urban

College of the Sequoias

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The LibreTexts name, logo, and book covers are trademarked by LibreTexts, Inc. (a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization) and protected against unauthorized use.

This text was compiled on 09/12/2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Readers, Writers, and Rule Breakers

1.1: You Are A Writer.

1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises\(^{14}\)

1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches

1.3: The "White People" Language

1.4: Your Voice

1.5: Audience

1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises

1.6: There Are No Rules

1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules

1.8: You Are Also A Reader

1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises

2: Writing and College Success

2.1: Writing and College Success

2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.1.4: Time Management

2.1.5: Key Takeaways

2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.5: Time Management

2.6: Key Takeaways

3: Writing and the Art of Rhetoric

3.1: Writing as Conversation

3.2: What is Academic Writing?

3.3: Critical Thinking

3.4: The Art of Rhetoric

3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

3.6: Rhetorical Analysis

3.7: Key Takeaways

4: The Reading-Writing Connection

4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection

4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context

4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing
4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics
4.4: Questioning Strategies
4.5: Inferences
4.6: Vocabulary
4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes
4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details
4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing
4.10: How to Read Like a Writer
4.11: Key Takeaways

5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting
5.1: The Reading-Writing Process
5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process
5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking
5.4: Argument
5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment
5.6: Prewriting Strategies
5.7: Outlining
5.8: Key Takeaways

6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft
6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement
6.2: Topic Sentences
6.3: Writing the Essay Draft
6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs
6.5: Key Takeaways

7: Body Paragraphs
7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs
7.2: Types of Support
7.3: Working with Sources- Part I
7.4: Working with Sources- Part II
7.5: Creating Coherence
7.6: Key Takeaways

8: Revising and Editing
8.1: Revising and Editing
8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture
8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas
8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format
8.5: Proofreading
8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words

8.7: Key Takeaways

9: Critical Thinking + Information Literacy

Licensing

Licensing

9.1: Research Process and Scope

9.2: Research Questions and Strategy

9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details

9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques

9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details

9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description

9.4: Evaluating Sources

9.5: Critical Reading

9.6: Persuasive Appeals

9.7: Using and Organizing Information

9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details

9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description

9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style

9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details

9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation

9.9: Information Power and Privilege

9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details

9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description

9.10: Information Value and Privilege

9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details

9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege

9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic

9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic

9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles

9.12: Misinformation and Fake News

9.13: Professional Conversations

9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors

Detailed Licensing

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

10: Popular Culture + Literacy
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
11.10: MLA Essay Format
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
12: Evaluating Sources
12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources
12.2: Researching
13: Integrating Sources
13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing
13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations
13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper
13.4: Using Multiple Sources
13.5: Defining Plagiarism
13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information
14.3: “Yes, if...”- Suggest a way to limit the argument
14.4: “Yes, and...”- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
15: Style
15.1: Style Chapter Overview
15.2: Simplicity
15.3: Point of View

15.4: Word Choice
15.5: Sentence Crafting
15.6: Sentence Combining
15.7: Parallelism
15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

16: Creating Presentations and Sharing Your Ideas

16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation
16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation
16.3: Giving a Presentation
16.4: Key Takeaways

17: Grammar

17.1: Grammar chapter overview
17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs
17.3: Appositives
17.4: Articles
17.5: Commas
17.6: Contractions
17.7: Coordinators
17.8: Dangling Modifiers
17.9: Fragments
17.10: Possessives
17.11: Run-Together Sentences
17.12: Subject and Verb Identification
17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement
17.14: Subordinators
17.15: Verb Tenses

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

This page titled Reading and Composition (Urban) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in ***Back Matter/Detailed Licensing***.

This page titled Licensing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in ***Back Matter/Detailed Licensing***.

This page titled Licensing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

Consumes River College

Critical Thinking and Information Literacy

Andi Pogue

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The LibreTexts name, logo, and book covers are trademarked by LibreTexts, Inc. (a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization) and protected against unauthorized use.

This text was compiled on 09/12/2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Readers, Writers, and Rule Breakers

1.1: You Are A Writer.

1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises\(^{14}\)

1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches

1.3: The "White People" Language

1.4: Your Voice

1.5: Audience

1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises

1.6: There Are No Rules

1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules

1.8: You Are Also A Reader

1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises

2: Writing and College Success

2.1: Writing and College Success

2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.1.4: Time Management

2.1.5: Key Takeaways

2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.5: Time Management

2.6: Key Takeaways

3: Writing and the Art of Rhetoric

3.1: Writing as Conversation

3.2: What is Academic Writing?

3.3: Critical Thinking

3.4: The Art of Rhetoric

3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

3.6: Rhetorical Analysis

3.7: Key Takeaways

4: The Reading-Writing Connection

4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection

4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context

4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing
4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics
4.4: Questioning Strategies
4.5: Inferences
4.6: Vocabulary
4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes
4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details
4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing
4.10: How to Read Like a Writer
4.11: Key Takeaways

5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting
5.1: The Reading-Writing Process
5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process
5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking
5.4: Argument
5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment
5.6: Prewriting Strategies
5.7: Outlining
5.8: Key Takeaways

6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft
6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement
6.2: Topic Sentences
6.3: Writing the Essay Draft
6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs
6.5: Key Takeaways

7: Body Paragraphs
7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs
7.2: Types of Support
7.3: Working with Sources- Part I
7.4: Working with Sources- Part II
7.5: Creating Coherence
7.6: Key Takeaways

8: Revising and Editing
8.1: Revising and Editing
8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture
8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas
8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format
8.5: Proofreading
8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words

8.7: Key Takeaways

9: Critical Thinking + Information Literacy

Licensing

Licensing

9.1: Research Process and Scope

9.2: Research Questions and Strategy

9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details

9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques

9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details

9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description

9.4: Evaluating Sources

9.5: Critical Reading

9.6: Persuasive Appeals

9.7: Using and Organizing Information

9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details

9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description

9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style

9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details

9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation

9.9: Information Power and Privilege

9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details

9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description

9.10: Information Value and Privilege

9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details

9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege

9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic

9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic

9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles

9.12: Misinformation and Fake News

9.13: Professional Conversations

9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors

Detailed Licensing

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

10: Popular Culture + Literacy
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
11.10: MLA Essay Format
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
12: Evaluating Sources
12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources
12.2: Researching
13: Integrating Sources
13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing
13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations
13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper
13.4: Using Multiple Sources
13.5: Defining Plagiarism
13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information
14.3: “Yes, if...”- Suggest a way to limit the argument
14.4: “Yes, and...”- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
15: Style
15.1: Style Chapter Overview
15.2: Simplicity
15.3: Point of View

15.4: Word Choice
15.5: Sentence Crafting
15.6: Sentence Combining
15.7: Parallelism
15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

16: Creating Presentations and Sharing Your Ideas

16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation
16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation
16.3: Giving a Presentation
16.4: Key Takeaways

17: Grammar

17.1: Grammar chapter overview
17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs
17.3: Appositives
17.4: Articles
17.5: Commas
17.6: Contractions
17.7: Coordinators
17.8: Dangling Modifiers
17.9: Fragments
17.10: Possessives
17.11: Run-Together Sentences
17.12: Subject and Verb Identification
17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement
17.14: Subordinators
17.15: Verb Tenses

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

This page titled Reading and Composition (Urban) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in ***Back Matter/Detailed Licensing***.

This page titled Licensing is shared under a license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

1.1: You Are A Writer.

Obviously[11] you can write[12]. And in the age of Facebook and smartphones, you might be writing all the time, perhaps more often than speaking. Many students today are awash in text like no other generation before. You may have even performed so well in high school that you're deemed fully competent in college level writing and are now excused from taking a composition course.

So why spend yet more time and attention on writing skills? Research shows that deliberate practice—that is, close focus on improving one's skills—makes all the difference in how one performs. Revisiting the craft of writing—especially on the early end of college—will improve your writing much more than simply producing page after page in the same old way. Becoming an excellent communicator will save you a lot of time and hassle in your studies, advance your career, and promote better relationships and a higher quality of life off the job. Honing your writing is a good use of your scarce time.

Also consider this: a recent survey of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 89 percent of employers say that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing." It was the single-most favored skill in this survey.

The most important belief[13] that a writing teacher can have about writing is, as Peter Elbow (a well-known teacher of writing) put it, that everyone can write. And at the heart of that belief is the assumption that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon they arrive in the classroom. To expand that belief beyond the classroom, we should generally believe that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon as they arrive at the page or screen. If this belief is essential for teachers of writing, it is even more so for the writers themselves.

Questions:

- Do you agree with Peter Elbow that "everyone can write"? Why or why not?
- Do you believe you are a writer? Why or why not?

---

[11]Oooh once again, Microsoft Word wants me to put a comma here, but I'm not going to!

[12]*Writing in College* by Amy Guptill is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

[13]Snippet from = Brooks, Ronald Clark. "You Need My Credentials to be a Writer." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

This page titled 1.1: You Are A Writer. is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.1: You Are A Writer. by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises[14]

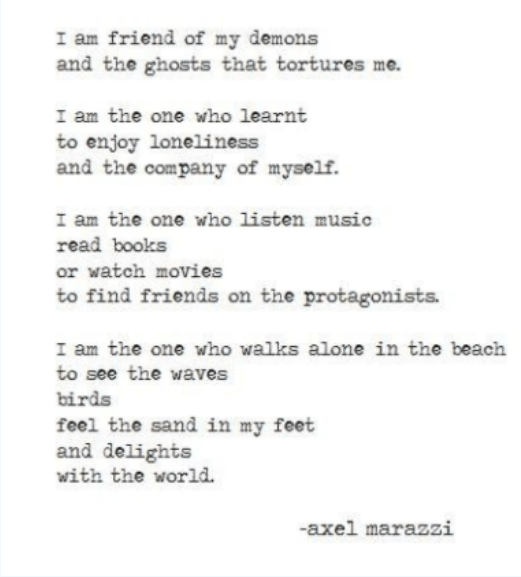
Exercise: Writing Tally

Think of all the writing you do. Try to tally it all up – texting, email, to-do lists, homework. Estimate how many words you write weekly. Report that to your class/classmates. What are their estimates?

Now, ask yourself: How does taking in ALL those words affect who you are as a writer?

Exercise Who?

Create your own poem that has lines that start with "I am the one who..."
See example below:



I am friend of my demons
and the ghosts that tortures me.

I am the one who learnt
to enjoy loneliness
and the company of myself.

I am the one who listen music
read books
or watch movies
to find friends on the protagonists.

I am the one who walks alone in the beach
to see the waves
birds
feel the sand in my feet
and delights
with the world.

-axel marazzi

Exercise: Questions

1. What is your favorite word? What is your least favorite word? What is your favorite swear word?
2. What movie/TV show/book character do you most identify with? Why?
3. If the world suddenly turned into cartoon characters, who would you turn into? Why?

Exercise: Attributes

What are five (5) attributes that you inherited from your parents? If you aren't familiar with the word "attribute" look it up; it's common to refresh one's vocabulary from time to time and everyone – even teachers – look up words and their meanings!

Exercise: Boring Intro

Attempt to write a "boring" introduction of yourself.

Exercise: Olympics

Invent a new Olympic sport. There are many unusual Olympic sports, like skeleton (running and then sledding), biathlon (skiing plus shooting), and curling (using brooms to propel an object over ice). Make up a new sport that would be fun to watch and play.

Exercise: Invention

Think about an invention that you'd like to have or make. Write about what this new device would do and why you'd like to use it.

Exercise: Parents

Out of all the celebrities/famous people in the world, which two would you choose as your parents if you could? Why did you choose them?

Exercise: Animal

Invent a new animal – describe what it looks like, what it sounds like, how it moves, and what it eats. Is it scary or cuddly or something else altogether? Would it be a pet or live in the wild (or in a zoo)?

Exercise: Holiday

Invent a new holiday. What would this holiday celebrate? How would you celebrate it? Would there be any special food or symbols for your holiday?

---

[14]These activities may or may not be used in class to jumpstart our thoughts about writing and to get us writing in general. Maybe one activity will be assigned or none or all of them.

This page titled 1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises\(^{14}\) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.1.1: First Batch of Exercises\(^{14}\) by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches

I have a memory[15] that really sticks out in my mind when I think of all the bad ideas about writing. I was at the dentist making small talk, and my dentist asked, “So what is it you teach at the university?” Squinting at the bright light above me, I responded, “I teach mostly first-year writing.” “Uh oh!” he chuckled, looking back at the dental assistants behind him. “Better watch my grammar around you, huh?” He paused and said, thoughtfully, “You know, I should send my son to you. He can’t spell to save his life!”

To be fair, these sorts of comments are made innocently enough and, anecdotally, they tend to happen a lot. The reason for this, I think, is because of a particularly bad idea about writing and writing instruction, one that surprisingly hasn’t let up in the past 40 years: that first-year writing is a basic course in language, grammar, and syntax that prepares students for something called academic writing

in the more “legitimate” courses in the university; and that its teachers consist primarily of error-correctors and behavior-modifiers armed with red pens and elbow patches. However, such an antiquated view of what first-year writing is and can be only scratches the surface of the kinds of learning possible in a writing classroom.

Questions:

- Is spelling “everything correctly” a sign of intelligence?
- What do students mean when they say: “I can’t write well”?
- What do you think you should learn in a first year (of college) writing course

[...]

However, people in the field of composition have come to learn a lot about how writing works and how it is best taught in courses like first-year writing. Scholars have found that teaching grammar and mechanics does not improve student writing. There was a famous study of errors in Freshman Composition essays and found that “the rate of student error is not increasing precipitously but, in fact, has stayed stable for nearly 100 years.” What they mean is that errors in writing are a fact of life. As writing teachers, the idea that errors are a fact of life has been quite helpful because it has allowed them to prioritize higher order issues in writing like argument, analysis, audience, purpose, and context. By having students focus more on argument and audience in their writing, the five-paragraph essay template becomes increasingly irrelevant because it doesn’t resemble anything about how writing looks in the real world or what different audiences expect in different reading contexts. Writing isn’t a set of formulas that you plug in to get different kinds of texts. Writing is a process of brainstorming, composing, revising, having your work read by others, and then revising again. This is a complex, in-depth process that goes way beyond correctness.

Questions:

- What do you think when you read this statement = “Scholars have found that teaching grammar and mechanics does not improve student writing”?
- What do students mean when they say they “don’t know grammar”?
- Is writing “well” more than spelling and punctuation and grammar? How do you know?
- What do you know about the five-paragraph essay? Why do some think it’s so darn important?
- What do you think of the statement: “What they mean is that errors in writing are a fact of life”?

---

[15]Snippet from = Branson, Tyler. “First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

This page titled 1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.3: The "White People" Language

> *I've*[19] *been fumbling around w/this idea for a while, & I dunno if I'll say it correctly, yet I also know I'm not the first to say it: when we tell Ss to write "professionally" or use "appropriate language/grammar/spelling," we're saying, "You should sound like a white person." T/F?*

People[20] consistently lament that kids today can't speak properly or that people coming to this country need to learn to write correctly. These lamentations are based on the notion that there is a single correct way of speaking and writing. Currently, the general sentiment is that people should just learn to speak and write proper English. This understanding of writing is rooted called current traditional rhetoric, which focuses on a prescriptive and formulaic way of teaching writing that assumes there is only one way to write (or speak) something for it to be correct. However, over the past several decades, scholars in writing studies have examined the ways in which writing has a close dialectical relationship with identity, style genre, and culture. In other words, the rules for writing shift with the people and the community involved as well as the purpose and type of writing.

This means that while minority students and lower-class students are ostensibly being given greater access to education, careers, and other facets of society they had been previously barred from, they are still facing serious barriers that their upper-class white counterparts do not, particularly in terms of culture, language, and literacy.[21]

The way that we conceptualize language is not just detrimental to minorities; it also devalues the identities that working- and lower-class people bring to communicative situations, including the classroom. Lynn Z. Bloom writes that "Freshman Composition is an unabashedly middle-class enterprise." She argues that one of the reasons composition is required for all students is because it promulgates middle-class values and ways of thinking. These values in the writing classroom are embodied in everything from the notion of property, which undergirds the way that plagiarism and intellectual property are treated, to formality of language and rhetorical choices that are encouraged in papers. Indeed, the way many instructors teach writing, plagiarism, citation, and word choice in papers is not in and of itself good but rather is the socially accepted way of interacting with text as defined by the middle class. Mike Rose and Irvin Peckham write about the tension of middleclass values on working-class students and the cognitive dissonance and struggles with identity that come with imposing such values in writing under the guise of correctness. The idea that there is one correct way of writing devalues the writing, thoughts, intelligence, and identities of people from lower-class backgrounds.

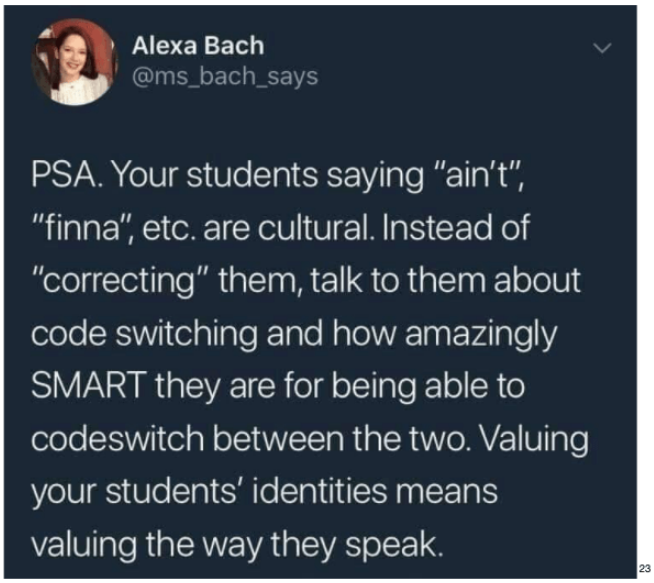
In order to value the diversity of communication and identities that exist in the U.S., we need to start teaching and envisioning writing as a cultural and social activity. We need a more nuanced view of writing in society that encourages everyone to adapt to their audiences and contexts rather than placing an undue burden on those who do not fit the mold of standard English. One strategy for teaching academic English without devaluing a writer's identity is code-switching, a concept already taught in schools with significant minority populations as a way of empowering young people. While instruction in code-switching is valuable because it teaches students that they can adopt different linguistic choices to appeal to different audiences, it is deeply problematic that the impetus is still placed on minority students with non-standard dialects to adapt. While code-switching is meant to empower people, it is still rooted in the mentality that there is one correct way of writing, because even as code-switching teaches an incredibly nuanced way of thinking about writing, it is still being taught in the context of preparing writers to deal with a society that will use errors in speaking as evidence that they are lesser. As a result, it is a less-than ideal solution because it plays into—rather than undermines—the racism of academic English.

When we focus on the ways that African American Language and Standard American English are different[22], communicators are able to better understand, acquire, and switch between both, and society is more capable of recognizing the validity of the language and its users. Conflating the two into one linguistic variety is confusing at best and damaging at worst. We need to understand and explain African American Language and Standard American English as different languages, each with its own set of grammatical, phonological, and morphological rules (even though they share

a lexicon or vocabulary).

In the writing classroom, teachers can help students navigate Standard American English expectations while not suggesting a linguistic hierarchy. By speaking about language choices in terms of difference rather than deficiency and in relation to academic and nonacademic conventions, we can value both (or any) languages. Delpit suggests validating students by welcoming their home languages—and, therefore, their cultures and identities—into the classroom so they feel respected and might be more willing to add Standard American English to their linguistic repertoires. If students understand that different audiences and contexts expect

different language choices and that African American Language is different from Standard American English but that neither is better or worse than the other, then they are better able to accept and use both proficiently.



[23]

Questions:

- Have you ever thought of the connection between racism and language? Why or why not?
- How many authors have you read who are not white?
- Have you ever thought of the connection between classism and language? Why or why not?
- How many authors have you read who come from lower income backgrounds?
- Have you ever thought of the connection between sexism and language? Why or why not?
- How many authors have you read who identify as women?
- What is code-switching?

---

[19]Sybil's Tweet from February 3, 2021.

[20]Snippet from = Pattanayak, Anjali. "There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[21]This is why the theory of ungrading is so important in a writing classroom; teachers are not able to understand the efforts of all students, no matter their backgrounds. This is why students should assess their learning.

[22]Cunningham, Jennifer M. "African American Language is Not Good English." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. This resource is licensed CC-BY.

[23]Tweeted July 25, 2018.

This page titled 1.3: The "White People" Language is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.4: The "White People" Language by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.4: Your Voice

Sandra Cisneros[24] explains, “As a writer, I continue to analyze and reflect on the power words have over me.” Cisneros’s statement may resonate with emerging writers in classrooms, outside of classrooms, and spaces of their own making to write and create with language. Writers affirm their lives and empower the lives of others who connect with their words and concepts. The first-person point of view is an essential marker in the making of meaning for both the writer and reader and need not be abandoned nor silenced. Even if the self is briefly mentioned and noted in one’s written deliberations, its use will suffice in making oneself known and present in the discussion of ideas, concepts, and perspectives. One learns about oneself as one writes and by asserting the self. Indeed, words and literacies carve the identities of writers who are influenced by the societies they inhabit and the subjects they study. In essence, words empower and define us as Cisneros observes.

Some writers across the disciplines, which include the arts, education, engineering, mathematics, technology, and sciences, attempt in various cloaked forms to remove their sense of self as they write under the assumption that writing must be as universal as possible. Unfortunately, this means less personality and presence. This is done in detrimental forms if the writer fails to acknowledge purpose, actions, and influences to an audience. Furthermore, writers and thinkers are connected to their subjects and arguments, which they deem worthy of explanation or description. As such, writers learn about themselves through their writing and the interconnectedness to thought and argument. In fact, writers give authority and credibility to experience through their expertise and in structure and argument. The reader entrusts the writer’s self not only by the levels of expertise for having done the labor and research, but also by the valuable experiences drawn from analysis. In short, it is a false idea to eliminate one’s first-person point of view in writing, rather than supporting the writer’s personal and communicative voice on the print and digital page.

It’s worth considering[25] how writers first get chastised and come to believe they must leave themselves out of their writing in the first place. When they are just beginning to experiment with language, most of the writing they are asked to produce draws from personal experience: They write about their friends, families, and pets. Personal narrative abounds and overflows within their lines of writing on the page or on the monitor screen of their computer or device. Their writing revolves around who they are and what matters and happens to them.

Guidelines for Creating Your Own Voice[26]

It’s one thing to have a voice that isn’t used in your “professional life,” it’s quite another thing to figure out what you will sound like in communicating in the workplace and how that translates to paper/screen.

I mean… the real question is: How does one mesh their unique style of language with professionalism when they write for or in the workplace? Most teachers of writing would appreciate any number of combinations of individuality and technicality. And in the workplace, HOPEFULLY[27], you will be able to observe the stylistic convention of your profession and your employer’s organization, while simultaneously expressing your individuality, make reading easy for your audience and impacting them while they are reading.

Consider the following guidelines in light of the way they will affect your readers’ view of your communication’s individuality, usability/technicality, and persuasiveness. Based on what readers see, they draw conclusions about you and your attitudes that can enhance or distract from the persuasiveness of your communications.

Guideline A: how much distance?

How much “distance” do your readers expect you to establish? In personal style, you appear close to your readers because you use personal pronouns and address readers directly. How conversational the piece is may also convey this message. In your “workplace style” you might distance yourself from your readers by avoiding personal pronouns. The style you choose depends on the purpose of the writing and the audience.

Guideline B: Cultural Background

In the United States and Europe, employees often use an informal voice and address their readers by their first names. In Japan, writers commonly use a formal style and address their readers by their titles and last names. If a U.S. writer used a familiar,

informal voice in a letter, memo, or e-mail, Japanese readers might feel that the writer has not properly respected them. On the other hand, Japanese writers may seem distant and difficult to relate to if they use the formality that is common in their own cultures when writing to U.S. readers. In either case, if the readers judge that the writer hasn't taken the trouble to learn about or doesn't care about their culture they may be offended. Directness is another aspect of voice. When writing to people in other cultures, try to learn and use the voice that is customary there. If possible, ask for advice from people who are from your reader's culture or who are knowledgeable about it.

Guideline C: Ethics Guideline – Avoid Stereotypes!

Stereotypes are very deeply embedded in many cultures. Most of us are prone to use them occasionally especially when conversing informally. As a result, when we use more colloquial and conversational language to develop our distinctive voice for our workplace writing, we may inadvertently employ stereotypes. Unfortunately, even inadvertent uses of stereotypes have serious consequences for individuals and groups. People who are viewed in terms of stereotypes lose their ability to be treated as individual human beings. If they belong to a group that is unfavorably stereotyped, they may find it nearly impossible to get others to take their talents, ideas, and feelings seriously. The range of groups disadvantaged by stereotyping is quite extensive. People can be stereotyped because of their race, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, weight, physical handicap, occupation, and ethnicity. In some workplaces, manual laborers, union members, clerical workers, and others are the victims of stereotyping by people in white-collar positions.

There is absolutely no tolerance for stereotypes in professional writing**.** Anything you write will be worthless to most audiences if you include any type of stereotypes. Using stereotypes, even accidentally, will seriously damage your reputation with your readers and may even cause your professional relationship to end. So, be very aware of any stereotypes that may exist especially when writing cross-culturally.

Questions:

- Are you writing cross-culturally in this classroom?
- What kinds of writing do you think you'll do in your future workplace?

Holes in Diversity

Once one figures out their voice – in an academic setting or not – they can start to understand the necessity of employing that voice to tell their story. This book wants to encourage ALL humans to write, whether the writing is published or unpublished. One should note, however, that some stories are not as prominent in the "literature industry" and that makes them all the more valued to be told. Here are some examples:

- People of color, especially women of color
  - Examples: Roxane Gay, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker
- First Nations / First Peoples / Indigenous Peoples
  - Example: Louise Erdrich[28]
- Immigrants
  - Examples: Junot Díaz, Bharati Mukherjee, Jamaica Kincaid
- Humans who are LGBTQIA or pansexual or asexual or aromantic
  - Examples: David Sedaris, Augusten Burroughs, James Baldwin
- Humans with disabilities
  - Example: Octavia E. Butler
- Humans of size, a.k.a humans who are fat
  - Examples: Aubrey Gordan, Jess Baker

In particular, these types of stories seem to be missing from literature:

- Stories where one's skin color isn't the guiding factor of the plot
- Stories where the fact that characters are lesbians, or gay, or bisexual, or transgender or queer or intersex or asexual isn't the main topic of discussion
  - Example: the TV show, *Schitt's Creek*
- Stories about people with disabilities where the disability isn't the character's main "problem"
- Stories about fat people where intentional weight loss (IWL) isn't in the plot at all

Questions:

[24]Snippet from = Rodriquez, Rodrigo Joseph. “Leave Yourself Out of Your Writing.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[25]Snippet from = Parker, Kimberly. “Response: Never Use ‘I’.” Response to: Rodriquez, Rodrigo Joseph. “Leave Yourself Out of Your Writing.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[26]"Professional and Technical Writing/Rhetoric/Author/Style." *Wikibooks, The Free Textbook Project*. 8 May 2017, 01:04 UTC. 10 Oct 2019, 17:39 <https://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php...&oldid=3215241>. Licensed CC-BY-SA.

[27]Truly, I hope you are all going to be able to be yourselves in the workplace, but that might not happen (bummer), so let’s prepare for if that doesn’t happen easily...

[28]She has ties to the Wahpeton, ND area!

This page titled 1.4: Your Voice is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.5: Your Voice by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.5: Audience

No writing happens in a vacuum.[29] Writing, as a communicative activity, is made for an audience of readers. In practice, how readers interpret writing has far less to do with passive decoding or reception of a message developed by someone else. Reading is itself a constructive act—quite literally, reading is meaning making. From the perspective of the reader, then, being a part of an audience has power. Much of that power lies in the ways readers infer an author's voice into a text.

Suppose, for example, that you receive a love letter. You would likely interpret this letter differently depending on what you know about its author. If the love letter comes from your partner, you might cobble together memories of the author's familiar expressions, knowledge of the author's manners of language use, and even particular moments in the history of your relationship that imbue your reading of the letter with what you think the author's motives are. On the other hand, if your love letter is written by a secret admirer, you might find the whole notion of this letter awkward, flattering, intriguing, or intrusive. With this unknown author, you have less to go on to determine what the letter means, and with the knowledge you're lacking, the author's voice is distant, even inappropriate.

FAQ When Thinking About Audience[30]

- Who is the actual audience for this piece of writing and how do you know?
- Who is the invoked audience for this piece of writing and where do you see evidence for this in the text?
- What knowledge, beliefs, and positions does the audience bring to the subject?
- What does the audience know or not know about the subject?
- What does the audience need or expect from the writer and the writing?
- When, where, and how will the audience encounter the piece of writing and how has the text—and its content—responded to this?
- What roles or personas (e.g., insider/outsider or expert/novice) does the writer create for the audience? Where are these personas presented in the piece of writing and why?
- How should/has the audience influenced the development of the piece of writing?

Questions:

- Will your voice – when writing – change with different audiences? How so?
- What is the difference between writing in and for the workplace and writing for audiences outside of your workplace?

"A Lesson in Audience"

DESCRIPTION OF WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO AS A CAREER.

AUDIENCE: 20-SOMETHINGS.

While I do love teaching and will have my master's degree this May in English Composition, I think I may want to try out Journalism as a part-time endeavor. Right now, I am: teaching three classes of English Composition 120 at NDSU, teaching two night classes at Aaker's College, and working as the Opinion Editor of NDSU's school newspaper, *The Spectrum*. Working and writing at The Spectrum has sparked a different type of writing in me. I would like to continue to teach, but I would also love to work for a magazine or newspaper as an Opinion Columnist, Fashion Columnist, or Features Columnist. Either one of these positions, I think, would really open up the side of my head that isn't use in academic writing. Journalist writing can be more playful, and I have many more readers of this type of writing than I will, say, for my sixty-page thesis paper.

DESCRIPTION OF WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO AS A CAREER.

AUDIENCE: KIDS AROUND THE AGE OF 10.

Right now, I am a teacher. I think I will always be a teacher, but I would like to write for a magazine or newspaper. Have you read a newspaper or magazine before? I would like to write words for something like that. I could write about where to go shopping for pink pants. I could write about movies like *The Incredibles* or *Shrek*. They are both almost the same because they deal with

words. One kind is on paper, and the other kind is by helping people talk better and write bigger words.

DESCRIPTION OF WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO AS A CAREER.

AUDIENCE: MY GRANDPARENTS.

As you know, teachers don't make too much these days. If I were to teach in Minnesota, I think I could make a decent living, but I do like living in Fargo. If I stay in North Dakota or end up at a lower-paying school in the lakes area of Minnesota, I think I would like to find a part-time job as a journalist for a small newspaper or local magazine. I really enjoy being the Opinion Editor of *The Spectrum* this last year at NDSU, so I have some experience being a journalist. Since I wrote for the Opinion page, I would probably do that again, but I would be open to working on a Features story or being a Fashion Guru as well. Writing for a newspaper or magazine while I teach will expand my writing capabilities while also bringing in extra money too.

Questions:

- What are the differences between the three paragraphs above?

---

[29]Snippet from = Thomas, Patrick. "Writers Must Develop a Strong, Original Voice." ." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[30]Questions taken from a longer piece by: Jory, Justin. "A Word About Audience." *Open English at Salt Lake Community College*. 01 Aug 2016. https://openenglishatslcc.pressbooks...pter/audience/ Open English @ SLCC by SLCC English Department is licensed under CC-BY-NC, except where otherwise noted.

This page titled 1.5: Audience is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.6: Audience by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises

Exercise: Your Voice

Find a piece of writing by someone, anyone. Then translate that paragraph (or dialogue or whatever it is) into YOUR VOICE. This may be tough but ask yourself how YOU would say the things in the piece by this other person. What words would you use instead? What words need to be added or deleted? Is the tone the kind of tone you like? How can that be changed to sound more like YOU?

Exercise: Remake "a Lesson in Audience."

Return to the “Lesson in Audience” piece and recreate those three paragraphs with a different description/theme and different audiences (unless you’d like to use those same ones).

Exercise: Student's Individual Culture

Teachers need to know as much as possible about their students to teach them well, including how they learn and the pace of that learning, multiple intelligences, personal qualities such as personality, temperament and motivation, personal interests, potential disabilities, health, family circumstances, and language preference.

In a paragraph, answer these questions:

- How do you learn best? What is the typical pace of your learning?
- When it comes to multiple intelligences[31], which ones do you gravitate to and why? (Google this term if you have not heard of it.)
- How would you describe your personality, temperament, and motivation?
- What are a few of your personal interests?

In another paragraph, answer these questions:

- What do you have the desire to learn? Why?
- What is a challenge for you when it comes to getting an education? Why?
- What would be a challenge for you in this particular class?
- What would a risk look like for you?
- Are you willing to challenge the status quo?

[31] You may be more than one!

This page titled 1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.6.1: Second Batch of Exercises by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.6: There Are No Rules

Wisdom about writing[34]—as a product and as a process—is often expressed as hard and fast rules. Always begin an essay with a catchy hook. Never use the passive voice. Always make your writing flow. Always make a detailed outline before you start to write. Never edit as you draft.

In his article[35], "The Phenomenology of Error," writing scholar Joseph Williams lists this history of fierce tirades against poor grammar and writing, but he also demonstrates that many "rules of grammar lack practical force." Williams takes a clever approach to make his point. He repeatedly shows that people, including some famous writers who express strong views about specific writing errors, fail to notice such errors in their own writing. Williams states that we often do not see errors unless we look for them, and he makes this assertion directly about the way teachers read and criticize their own students' writing. To further emphasize this point, Williams embeds 100 such errors in his own article and asks readers, mostly English teachers, how many they saw; doubtless, few noticed the vast majority of them. As readers, we tend to see errors where we want to, and we ignore errors where we do not expect to find them (such as a published article about writing!). Williams ultimately asks this: If an error is on the page but no one sees it, is it really an error? Does it matter?

Questions:

- Are there rules to writing?
  - Start with the list in the second paragraph:
    - Can you write a good essay without a catchy hook at the beginning?
    - Can good writing be done in passive voice?
    - Do some good writers have choppy writing, the kind that doesn't flow?
    - Do you have to outline everything you are about to write?
    - Can you edit as you write, and everything will turn out okay?
- What are the rules to writing that you've been taught? Take time to rethink why those rules exist. Are they legit rules? Are they myths? Are they just ways to get people to write "one correct way"[36] that doesn't really exist?

Answers

The Outline Rule[37]

Many undergraduate writers have been taught that they must create a detailed outline for a research paper before they begin writing. And they are often told that a first draft of a research paper must be presented in polished, error-free prose, and that the draft must be complete, from beginning to end. In fact, we know many teachers who refuse outright to read messy or incomplete works-in-progress. So, students put extensive effort into planning just how the essay will proceed and what it will say before they write. Of course, outlining can be a powerful conceptual and organizational tool. However, when writers believe that they must outline first, they often lock themselves into the ideas as expressed on the outline, rather than allowing their ideas to develop and change as they work.

The Catchy Hook Rule[38]

Catchy hooks such as vivid anecdotes can be used to excellent

effect, if they meet the needs of the text and the circumstances. A writer can try it out and see what happens. What effect does it have on the text? Does it meet the audience's and context's needs (i.e., the rhetorical situation[39])? Does it contribute to expressing what the writer is trying to say? How do real readers respond? In this way, writers can experiment with techniques, deliberate about their implications, and make judgments about the best course of action among their options. And, most importantly, writers focus their goals and purposes, rather than on the rote adherence to rules, which is more meaningful, and more fun.

Questions:

- Could an introduction that is "boring" work? Wait, what is a "boring" introduction?

[34]Snippet from = Dufour, Monique and Jennifer Ahern-Dodson. “Good Writers Always Follow My Rules.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[35]Snippet from = Warnock, Scott. “Texting Ruins Students’ Grammar Skills.” Bad Ideas About Writing. This resource is licensed CC-BY.

[36]See the chapter on “White People Language” for more on this.

[37]Snippet from = Dufour, Monique and Jennifer Ahern-Dodson. “Good Writers Always Follow My Rules.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[38]Dufour, Monique and Jennifer Ahern-Dodson. “Good Writers Always Follow My Rules.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[39]More about this in an upcoming chapter.

This page titled 1.6: There Are No Rules is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.8: There Are No Rules by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules

First[40], if writing is simply a matter of following rules and plugging in formulas, it's boring to most people.

Second, in writing, problems are normal. When we think of writing as an opportunity to use and develop our repertoires to make and express meaning, writers can define the problems and needs before them and draw on their resources to solve them with creativity and aplomb. Perhaps we don't have as much uninterrupted time to write as we once did. We cannot create more time where there is none, but we can learn to write in the time we have. Perhaps our longer, more complex ideas cannot be crammed into a five-paragraph theme. We can learn new ways of organizing an essay to express an ambiguous claim. We don't need to stop writing when the rules don't work. And, we don't need to read and judge one another's writing only in terms of our own strictures. When we acknowledge that many of our rules are in fact techniques, and when we understand that writing is the skillful use of evolving repertoires, we can focus on expressing ideas worth sharing and become the kind of readers and writers who are in a position to listen.

Questions:

- When you read that statement, "problems are normal" when it comes to writing, what is your response?
- What do you think of the debunking of the Outline and Catch Hook rules?

---

[40]Snippet from = Dufour, Monique and Jennifer Ahern-Dodson. "Good Writers Always Follow My Rules." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

This page titled 1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.9: Yes, There Are No Rules by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.8: You Are Also A Reader

Saturday January 5, 2008[41]

I'm thinking about making a PPT based on this...

> "You may not think of yourself as a reader and writer.
> But you are doing both in the broadest sense all the time.
> **You're reading your world every day; you compose your life.**
> In the kitchen each A.M., you read the cupboards and refrigerator for breakfast options, cereal to eggs to bagels.
> You read the weather and read your closet, choosing your clothes by a complicated writer's formula: what's clean, what represents who I want to be today, what's appropriate for the weather?
> You read the newspaper, perhaps, choosing quickly which story engages you and which you don't need to read further.
> **You read everyone at school and at work.**
> You read the signs and ads and marquees on your way home and write your evening plan in your head: go to the mall, stop in to listen to the band at X, or stay home and watch Y on TV.
> You steal your daily habits from your family (think about Thanksgiving meals), your friends (there are clothes you borrow, sayings you pick up), your developing age and tastes (as a child you never ate artichokes, but now...)
> You steal the right office or school moves by watching others in the same or similar situations.
> You see what I mean, I think."
> –Wendy Bishop, "Reading, Stealing, and Writing Like a Writer," *Elements of Alternative Style*, 1997.
>
> Posted 1/5/2008 at 4:20 PM

By the time[42] students arrive in college, stories beginning with "once upon a time" are long gone, and in their place are difficult and dense texts—often multimedia texts— from a range of fields each with its own set of conventions. Instead of drawing on models of early literacy education that focus on teaching reading and writing simultaneously, college and universities largely privilege writing over reading. This hierarchy is evidenced by the universal first-year writing requirement in American colleges and universities, as well as by writing across the curriculum programs. The integrated approach to teaching reading and writing falls away to students' peril and causes great frustration in the professors who often attribute students' struggles in their courses to poor writing ability, when these problems are often related to students' reading difficulties. While students' eyes may make their way over every word, that does not mean that students have comprehended a text or that they are prepared to successfully complete the writing tasks associated with the reading, which often involve summary, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

More importantly, if students are not given the opportunity to continue working on their reading throughout their college careers, they may struggle analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating all that surrounds them since comprehension is a crucial step toward these more advanced interpretive practices. Students may lack the ability to read the world around them because they do not have the tools to recognize the values and assumptions that inform the images, advertisements, news stories, political campaigns, and ideas with which they come into contact daily. By not focusing on reading as an equally creative and active enterprise as writing—very much writing's counterpart in the creation of meaning— colleges and universities are potentially producing students, or citizens, who think reading is passive. These students might blindly accept whatever comes their way rather than actively engaging ideas, asking questions, and seeking out multiple perspectives.

Although writing is more often thought of as a creative act, reading is just as creative. When one writes, one is creating meaning by putting words and ideas together. [...] This is why a few people might read the same novel[43] but each take something different from it. That personal transaction with the text has affected how each reader creates meaning. When reading and writing are taught alongside each other in the college-level classroom, students can gain practice experiencing and relishing in opportunities to create meaning not just through writing, but through reading everything from print texts to art to websites to national news events, all of which they will continue to engage beyond school. Focusing on active reading approaches, including everything from comprehension strategies to ways of determining something's inherent values and biases to productive methods of responding, is crucial if students are going to leave postsecondary institutions prepared to be informed, aware, and engaged citizens.

Questions:

- What did you like to read as a child? Why?
- What do you read now (social media counts!)? Why? What do you enjoy about reading what you do read?

Activity

This chapter could be copied and pasted into an editable Google Doc so that students could annotate collaboratively and discuss their reading strategies.

Reading Strategies[44]

Most discussions and writing assignments–from brief responses to in-depth research papers–will depend on your ability to understand what you read. Following are some strategies for getting the most out of assigned readings.

- **PURPOSE.** When you start a reading assignment, identify your purpose and write it down somewhere such as on a sticky that you put on the first page of the book or on your computer screen. Keep that information nearby and refer to it occasionally as you read.
- **GOAL.** Your primary goal is to identify the main point, the idea the writer wants to communicate. Finding the main point helps you understand the details–the facts and explanations that develop and clarify the main point. It also helps you relate the reading to things you learned in class or in other assignments.
- **PAUSE.** Regardless of what you read, stop occasionally and assess how well you understand what you are reading. If you aren't confident, go back and read it again. Don't just push ahead.[45]
- **MARK IT UP.** The best way to remember the information you read is to do something physical with it, something beyond just letting your eyes scan the page. For example, taking notes as you read helps your brain retain the information.
- **TALK ABOUT IT.** A good way to review and reinforce what you've learned is to discuss the reading with classmates. Discussions can help you determine whether your understanding is the same as that of your peers. They can also spark new ideas or insights.

Tuesday February 19, 2008

So, there were these two "experts" on *The Today Show* this morning... talking to [a host] about how Americans are "getting dumber." I had to chuckle to myself a few times. The woman was proclaiming that when students read online material, they don't connect it to the world around them like they would if they read books. Before I even jump into her claims, I had to wonder, "DO THESE TWO EXPERTS TEACH?" Are they trying to resolve this so-called problem? Now, as for the claims about reading, it seems like this woman has never read a blog. I mean, I use my blogs to CONSTANTLY connect to the world around me. And since I read others' blogs, I do the same. Connect to them. Whether I know them or not. AND, lastly, one CAN NOT force students to read read read. It loses all fun that way. One can only simply place a book in front of them that may spark some interest which will cause the domino effect; they'll want to read more. I read lots of Shakespeare when I was younger; what do I read now? Everything but "him" (yea, I'm one of "those people" who thinks he was probably a she or many, many people. Blasphemous, I know.) because I didn't connect to those plays AT ALL. Now, *Catcher in the Rye*, yes! *Fahrenheit 451*. Yes. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Yes. *1984*. *Animal Farm*. *Haroun the Sea of Stories*. *Why Men Love Bitches*. *You Just Don't Understand*. *Rule of the Bone*.

[...]

Are we getting "dumber"? It depends. On definitions... what does it mean to be "intelligent"? What does it mean to be "dumb"? It seemed like they were using the fact that, on average, we don't know who Bill Gates is (but we do recognize Harry Potter) or where Iraq is located to claim we are dumb. That's it? That's how we determine one from another? Based on just those items? Perhaps what they should've said was that those with "book smarts" are shrinking in population, but those with "street smarts" are not. What I worry about is the small thing they covered; it's "cool" to be "dumb."

Posted 2/19/2008 at 10:12 AM

Questions:

- Try to answer the questions in the last paragraph of the blog entry.
- Is it “cool” to be “appear stupid”?
- In what ways are you an “active reader”?
- Go back to the first blog post in this chapter – do you agree with Wendy Bishop about all the things you “read” each day?

---

[41]Blog entry by Sybil Priebe; licensed CC-BY.

[42]Snippet from = Carillo, Ellen C. “Reading and Writing Are Not Connected.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

[43]The original text does not place a comma here, but Microsoft Word wants to! It’s understandable with or without the comma, isn’t it?

[44]1, 2, 3 Write! by Gay Monteverde is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

[45]This tip might as well be called The Power of the Pause. Pause in your reading. Take a minute to understand that last sentence or paragraph.

This page titled 1.8: You Are Also A Reader is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.10: You Are Also A Reader by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises

Exercise: Rules

Make a list of all the rules you've been told about spelling and punctuation and grammar and reading and writing. Yes, we've been given a lot of rules, haven't we? Okay, so, before you rip the list up, look it over and think about where those rules come from. Are any of them helpful? Which ones did you learn easily and which ones still trip you up? Conduct your own analysis of all this in a paragraph... What rules matter? What lessons are you taking away from the content in this chapter about writing and rules and subjectivity?

Exercise: Rules

Think of all the reading you do. Try to tally it all up – texting, email, to-do lists, homework. Estimate how many words you write weekly. Report that to your class/classmates. What are their estimates?

Now, ask yourself: How does taking in ALL those words affect who you are as a reader?

Exercise: Rules

Create an exercise or activity that would assist students in reading more actively. Share that activity with your instructor. It might end up in this spot of the textbook!

This page titled 1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 2.10.1: Third Batch of Exercises by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

2: WRITING AND COLLEGE SUCCESS

2.1: Writing and College Success

2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.1.4: Time Management

2.1.5: Key Takeaways

2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology

2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student

2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

2.5: Time Management

2.6: Key Takeaways

This page titled 2: Writing and College Success is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

2.1: WRITING AND COLLEGE SUCCESS

2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology
2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student
2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner
2.1.4: Time Management
2.1.5: Key Takeaways

This page titled 2.1: Writing and College Success is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology

In an age where technology, finance, and business reigns, you might ask about the relevance of writing and learning how to write essays. Knowing how to write is an essential skill that is as relevant today as ever! A recent survey of employers, conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, found that **89 percent** of employers believe that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on teaching students to "effectively communicate orally and in writing" (Seligo). Writing was the only 'most-favored' skill in this survey. In addition, several of the other valued skills mentioned by employers are grounded in written communication:

- "Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills" (81 percent of employers)
- "The ability to analyze and solve complex problems" (75 percent of employers)
- "The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources" (68 percent of employers).

If you want to be professional, you need to interact frequently with others. You have to be someone who can **anticipate and solve complex problems and coordinate your work with others**. Whether you're in business, an entrepreneur, or in a corporation, all of these skills depend on effective communication.



Figure: from Pixabay

Taking these ideas a step further, CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, has done away with PowerPoint presentations altogether and has reverted back to writing longer essay-style memos. In a famous email sent out to his employees on June 9, 2004, he explains why: "The reason writing a 4-page memo is harder than "writing" a 20-page PowerPoint is because the narrative structure of a good memo forces better thought and better understanding of what's more important than what, and how things are related." At a typical Amazon meeting, employees present a long narrative style memo detailing their ideas. During the first part of the meeting everyone is silent, reading the memo and taking notes, before discussing the memo. The act of writing and annotating, whether it is in business or technology, forces the writer to think through ideas fully.

The process that Amazon employees use to write memos and sharpen their ideas is not much different than that used by students in first year composition classes. In college writing classes, students study specific topics in depth, research ideas, and then, in a process that involves planning, reading, writing, researching, and revising, present their ideas in a well-organized format. This process is used in writing an essay. Most of the writing that we will be doing in a first year Composition class is expository, detailing and explaining a theory. Students will learn how to make a statement and convince their readers about its validity using logic and persuasive writing.

All these skills are what companies are looking for in their future employees, whether these employees are working in technology, finance, the arts, or business. Jeffrey Seligo, author of *College Unbound*, writes about the dearth of college graduates with these skills. He writes, "Hiring managers complain that they often find today's college graduates lacking in interpersonal skills, problem

solving, effective written and oral communication skills, the ability to work together in teams, and critical and analytical thinking" and that employees who have the ability to "come up with novel solutions to problems and [are] better able to sort through information to filter out the most critical pieces are the ones who will be of great value." Writing expository essays in college will help build critical thinking and inter-personal skills as students work in groups to debate their ideas and fine-tune their essays based on helpful feedback from their instructor and, often, peers.

By taking first year college composition, you are on the way to becoming a better thinker and writer -- skills that can make you highly desirable, both as an employee but also for your own self-development as the benefits of learning how to write go beyond getting a job. Writing effectively helps to expand your world by making you think critically about issues in the news. And it enables you to make more informed decisions as a member of a family or a community.

Now that we have established the need for learning how to write effectively, a process that goes hand-in-hand with reading and critical thinking, let's get started with making sure we have all we need to succeed in the course.

Contributors and Attributions

- Revision and adaptation of the page "Why Write" in *College Writing*. **Authored by**: Susan Oaks. **Provided by**: Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **License**: CC BY-NC-SA.

NON CC LICENSED CONTENT:

- Quotes taken from Jeffrey J.Seligo's *College Unbound*, Amazon Publishing, Las Vegas, 2013.

This page most recently updated on May 31, 2020.

This page titled 2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student

A Personal Definition of College Success

How do you define college success? The definition really depends on you. You might think that "success" is earning an associate's degree or attending classes in a four-year college. Maybe success is a bachelor's or master's degree or a PhD. Maybe success means receiving a certificate of completion or finishing skill-based training.

You might be thinking of other measures of college success, too—like grades. For instance, you might be unhappy with anything less than an A in a course although maybe this depends on the difficulty of the subject. As long as you pass with a C, you might be perfectly content. But no matter how you define success personally, you probably wouldn't think it means earning a D or lower grade in a class.

So, if most students believe that passing a class is the minimum requirement for "success," and if most students want to be successful in their courses, why aren't more college students consistently successful in the classroom?

Perhaps some common misconceptions are at play. For example, we often hear students say, "I just can't do it!" or "I'm not good at math," or "I guess college isn't for me . . . ," or "I'm not smart enough." But these explanations for success or failure aren't necessarily accurate. Considerable research into college success reveals that having difficulty in or failing in college courses usually has nothing to do with intellect. More often success depends on how fully a student embraces and masters the seven strategies outlined later in this section.

Exercise 1

Free-write on what success means to you in college and beyond. You might want to consider the following:

- What people do you consider to be successful and why?
- What is your definition of success?
- What will you do to achieve success?
- What is the biggest change you need to make in order to be successful in college?
- How will you know you've achieved success?

Finally, remember that we can't be successful, all the time, at everything. We have to balance our energy and our focus to get what we really want. The following video stresses the external factors that shape what we consider "success" as a society and encourages us to think beyond these factors to determine what it really is that motivates us, personally–what we hope will define us, and our value, to others.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.2.1: Ted Talk video

Strategies to Achieve Success

Considerable research into college success reveals that **intellect usually has nothing to do with having difficulty with, or failing, college courses**. More often, success depends on how fully you embrace and master the following seven strategies:

1. Learn how to take effective notes in class.
2. Review the text and your reading notes prior to class.
3. Participate in class discussion and maybe even join a study group.
4. Go to the office after hours, and ask your instructor questions.
5. Give yourself enough time to research, write, and edit your essays-- in manageable stages.
6. Take advantage of online or on-campus academic support resources.
7. Spend sufficient time studying.

So, don't feel you're not smart enough for college; ask yourself if you can implement some of these skills.

TIP

Professors do care about how you are doing in their class; they genuinely want you to succeed, but they will give you the grade you earn. There are people and resources on campus for you to utilize so you can earn the grade you want. Your professors are among these resources, and are perhaps the most important. Go see them during office hours, ask them questions about the material and get extra help if you need it. ... Another resource to utilize can be found in the campus learning center. ... Kristen Mruk, in *The Student Experience,*" writes "The first time I took a paper there, I recall standing outside the door for about ten minutes thinking of an excuse not to go in. Thankfully I saw a classmate walk in and I followed suit. ... Thanks to that first visit, I received an A- on the paper!"

Study Time

Can you make more time for learning? One approach is to create a regular study schedule and make sure you allow yourself ample time. Most college success experts agree that students should study two hours outside of class for every hour in class. Only break away from your committed schedule if an extreme situation prevents you from sticking to it.

Another strategy to consider implementing is group study. For example, rather than relying just on your own knowledge, notes, and skills, try studying with other students in your difficult classes. Studying in a group gives every group member a chance to ask questions and talk about concepts.



Figure 2.1.2.1: Image from Pixabay

You can also add a tutor to your study group. You will notice a positive difference. Tutoring is generally free in college, and the strategies and knowledge you gain will be invaluable. Usually tutors have previously taken the class you are currently enrolled in, and they are trained to get the best out of you.

Overall, students struggle in college not because of intellect or 'smarts', but because of poor time management, disorganization, and lack of quality study time. You can combat this by creating a regular study schedule, studying in groups, taking advantage of

your school's academic resources such as a tutoring center, instructor office hours, and any available online help.

Exercise 2

- Click here to view the Instructional Support presentation from California Community Colleges. It includes an audio overview of success in college.

Why Go To Class?

Students don't always want to go to class. They may have required classes that they find difficult or don't enjoy, or they may feel overwhelmed by other commitments or feel tired if they have early morning classes. However, even if instructors allow a certain number of unexcused absences, you should aim to attend every class session. Class attendance enhances class performance in the following ways:

- **Class participation**: If you don't attend class, you can't participate in class activities. Class activities are usually part of your final grade, and they can help you apply concepts you learn from lectures and reading assignments.
- **Class interaction**: If you rely on learning on your own (by doing the reading assignments outside of class, for example), you'll miss out on class discussions with fellow students. Your classmates will often have the same questions as you, so going to class enables you to learn from them and ask your instructor about topics you all find difficult.
- **Interaction with the instructor**: There is a reason why classes are taught by instructors. Instructors specialize in the subjects they teach, and they can provide extra insight and perspective on the material you're studying. Going to class gives you the chance to take notes and ask questions about the lectures. Also, the more you participate, the more your instructors will come to know you and be aware of any help or support you might need. This will make you feel more comfortable to approach them outside of class if you need advice or are struggling with the course material.
- **Increased learning**: Even though you will typically spend more time on coursework outside of the classroom, this makes class sessions even more valuable. Typically, in-class time will be devoted to the most challenging or key concepts covered in your textbooks. It's important to know what these are so you can master them—also they're likely to show up on exams.

Exercise 2.1.2.1

Let's compare students with different attitudes toward their classes:

1. Carla wants to get through college, and she knows she needs the degree to get a decent job, but she's just not that into it. She's never thought of herself as a good student, and that hasn't changed much in college. She has trouble paying attention in those big lecture classes, which mostly seem pretty boring. She's pretty sure she can pass all her courses, however, as long as she takes the time to study before tests. It doesn't bother her to skip classes when she's studying for a test in a different class or finishing a reading assignment she didn't get around to earlier. She does make it through her freshman year with a passing grade in every class, even those she didn't go to class very often. Then she fails the midterm exam in her first sophomore class. Depressed, she skips the next couple classes, then feels guilty and goes to the next. It's even harder to stay awake because now she has no idea what they're talking about. It's too late to drop the course, and even a hard night of studying before the final isn't enough to pass the course. In two other classes, she just barely passes. She has no idea what classes to take next term and is starting to think that maybe she'll drop out for now.

2. Karen wants to have a good time in college and still do well enough to get a good job in business afterward. Her sorority keeps a file of class notes for her big lecture classes, and from talking to others and reviewing these notes, she's discovered she can skip almost half of those big classes and still get a B or C on the tests. She stays focused on her grades, and because she has a good memory, she's able to maintain OK grades. She doesn't worry about talking to her instructors outside of class because she can always find out what she needs from another student. In her sophomore year, she has a quick conversation with her academic advisor and chooses her major. Those classes are smaller, and she goes to most of them, but she feels she's pretty much figured out how it works and can usually still get the grade. In her senior year, she starts working on her résumé and asks other students in her major which instructors write the best letters of recommendation. She's sure her college degree will land her a good job.

3. Alicia enjoys her classes, even when she has to get up early after working or studying late the night before. She sometimes gets so excited by something she learns in class that she rushes up to the instructor after class to ask a question. In class discussions, she's not usually the first to speak out, but by the time another student has given an opinion, she's had time to organize her thoughts and enjoys arguing her ideas. Nearing the end of her sophomore year and unsure of what to major in given her many interests, she talks things over with one of her favorite instructors, whom she has gotten to know through office visits. The instructor gives her some insights into careers in that field and helps her explore her interests. She takes two more courses with this instructor over the next year, and she's comfortable in her senior year going to him to ask for a job reference. When she does, she's surprised and thrilled when he urges her to apply for a high-level paid internship with a company in the field—that happens to be run by a friend of his.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Stages of the Listening Process

Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives, from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport. Regardless of how we're engaged with listening, it's important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what's been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they've received.

Effectively engaging with all five stages of the listening process lets us best gather the information we need from the world around us.

Active Listening

Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker, by way of restating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words. The goal of this repetition is to confirm what the listener has heard and to confirm the understanding of both parties. The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

When engaging with a particular speaker, a listener can use several degrees of active listening, each resulting in a different quality of communication with the speaker. Active listening can also involve paying attention to the speaker's behavior and body language. Having the ability to interpret a person's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message.

Stage 1: The Receiving Stage

The first stage of the listening process is the receiving stage, which involves hearing and attending.

Hearing is the physiological process of registering sound waves as they hit the eardrum. As obvious as it may seem, in order to effectively gather information through listening, we must first be able to physically hear what we're listening to. The clearer the sound, the easier the listening process becomes.

Paired with hearing, attending is the other half of the receiving stage in the listening process. Attending is the process of accurately identifying and interpreting particular sounds we hear as words. The sounds we hear have no meaning until we give them their meaning in context. Listening is an active process that constructs meaning from both verbal and nonverbal messages.

The Challenges of Reception

Listeners are often bombarded with a variety of auditory stimuli all at once, so they must differentiate which of those stimuli are speech sounds and which are not. Effective listening involves being able to focus in on speech sounds while disregarding

other noise. For instance, a train passenger that hears the captain's voice over the loudspeaker understands that the captain is speaking, then deciphers what the captain is saying despite other voices in the cabin. Another example is trying to listen to a friend tell a story while walking down a busy street. In order to best listen to what she's saying, the listener needs to ignore the ambient street sounds.

Attending also involves being able to discern human speech, also known as "speech segmentation." Identifying auditory stimuli as speech but not being able to break those speech sounds down into sentences and words would be a failure of the listening process. Discerning speech segmentation can be a more difficult activity when the listener is faced with an unfamiliar language.

Stage 2: The Understanding Stage

The second stage in the listening process is the understanding stage. Understanding or comprehension is "shared meaning between parties in a communication transaction" and constitutes the first step in the listening process. This is the stage during which the listener determines the context and meanings of the words he or she hears. Determining the context and meaning of individual words, as well as assigning meaning in language, is essential to understanding sentences. This, in turn, is essential to understanding a speaker's message.

Once the listeners understands the speaker's main point, they can begin to sort out the rest of the information they are hearing and decide where it belongs in their mental outline. For example, a political candidate listens to her opponent's arguments to understand what policy decisions that opponent supports.

Before getting the big picture of a message, it can be difficult to focus on what the speaker is saying. Think about walking into a lecture class halfway through. You may immediately understand the words and sentences that you are hearing, but not immediately understand what the lecturer is explaining or whether what you're hearing at the moment is the main point, side note, or digression.

Understanding what we hear is a huge part of our everyday lives, particularly in terms of gathering basic information. In the office, people listen to their superiors for instructions about what they are to do. At school, students listen to teachers to learn new ideas. We listen to political candidates give policy speeches in order to determine who will get our vote. But without understanding what we hear, none of this everyday listening would relay any practical information to us.

One tactic for better understanding a speaker's meaning is to ask questions. Asking questions allows the listener to fill in any holes he or she may have in the mental reconstruction of the speaker's message.

Stage 3: The Evaluating Stage

This stage of the listening process is the one during which the listener assesses the information they received, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Evaluating allows the listener to form an opinion of what they heard and, if necessary, to begin developing a response.

During the evaluating stage, the listener determines whether or not the information they heard and understood from the speaker is well constructed or disorganized, biased or unbiased, true or false, significant or insignificant. They also ascertain how and why the speaker has come up with and conveyed the message that they delivered. This may involve considerations of a speaker's personal or professional motivations and goals. For example, a listener may determine that a co-worker's vehement condemnation of another for jamming the copier is factually correct, but may also understand that the co-worker's child is sick and that may be putting them on edge. A voter who listens to and understands the points made in a political candidate's stump speech can decide whether or not those points were convincing enough to earn their vote.

The evaluating stage occurs most effectively once the listener fully understands what the speaker is trying to say. While we can, and sometimes do, form opinions of information and ideas that we don't fully understand—or even that we misunderstand—doing so is not often ideal in the long run. Having a clear understanding of a speaker's message allows a listener to evaluate that message without getting bogged down in ambiguities or spending unnecessary time and energy addressing points that may be tangential or otherwise nonessential.

This stage of critical analysis is important for a listener in terms of how what they heard will affect their own ideas, decisions, actions, and/or beliefs.

Stage 4: The Responding Stage

The responding stage is the stage of the listening process wherein the listener provides verbal and/or nonverbal reactions based on short- or long-term memory. Following the remembering stage, a listener can respond to what they hear either verbally or non-verbally. Nonverbal signals can include gestures such as nodding, making eye contact, tapping a pen, fidgeting, scratching or cocking their head, smiling, rolling their eyes, grimacing, or any other body language. These kinds of responses can be displayed purposefully or involuntarily. Responding verbally might involve asking a question, requesting additional information, redirecting or changing the focus of a conversation, cutting off a speaker, or repeating what a speaker has said back to her in order to verify that the received message matches the intended message.

Nonverbal responses like nodding or eye contact allow the listener to communicate their level of interest without interrupting the speaker, thereby preserving the speaker/listener roles. When a listener responds verbally to what they hear and remember—for example, with a question or a comment—the speaker/listener roles are reversed, at least momentarily.

Responding adds action to the listening process, which would otherwise be an outwardly passive process. Oftentimes, the speaker looks for verbal and nonverbal responses from the listener to determine if and how their message is being understood and/or considered. Based on the listener's responses, the speaker can choose to either adjust or continue with the delivery of her message. For example, if a listener's brow is furrowed and their arms are crossed, the speaker may determine that she needs to lighten her tone to better communicate her point. If a listener is smiling and nodding or asking questions, the speaker may feel that the listener is engaged and her message is being communicated effectively.

Stage 5: The Remembering Stage

In the listening process, the remembering stage occurs as the listener categorizes and retains the information she's gathered from the speaker for future access. The result–memory–allows the person to record information about people, objects, and events for later recall. This happens both during and after the speaker's delivery.

Memory is essential throughout the listening process. We depend on our memory to fill in the blanks when we're listening and to let us place what we're hearing at the moment in the context of what we've heard before. If, for example, you forgot everything that you heard immediately after you heard it, you would not be able to follow along with what a speaker says, and conversations would be impossible. Moreover, a friend who expresses fear about a dog she sees on the sidewalk ahead can help you recall that the friend began the conversation with her childhood memory of being attacked by a dog.

Remembering previous information is critical to moving forward. Similarly, making associations to past remembered information can help a listener understand what she is currently hearing in a wider context. In listening to a lecture about the symptoms of depression, for example, a listener might make a connection to the description of a character in a novel that she read years before.

Using information immediately after receiving it enhances information retention and lessens the forgetting curve or the rate at which we no longer retain information in our memory. Conversely, retention is lessened when we engage in mindless listening, and little effort is made to understand a speaker's message.

Because everyone has different memories, the speaker and the listener may attach different meanings to the same statement. In this sense, establishing common ground in terms of context is extremely important, both for listeners and speakers.

The Learning Cycle

Too many students try to get the grade just by going to class, maybe a little note taking, and then cramming through the text right before an exam they feel unprepared for. Sound familiar? This approach may have worked for you in high school where tests and quizzes were more frequent and teachers prepared study guides for you, but colleges require you to take responsibility for your learning and to be better prepared.

Most students simply have not learned how to study and don't understand how learning works. Learning is actually a cycle of four steps:

- Preparing
- Absorbing
- Capturing

- Reviewing

When you get in the habit of paying attention to this cycle, it becomes relatively easy to study well. But you must use all four steps.

Listening and note taking are closely related. Good listening skills make you a better note taker, and taking good notes can help you listen better. Both are key study skills to help you do better in your classes.

Effective Listening Strategies

Are you a good listener? Most of us like to think we are, but when we really think about it, we recognize that we are often only half listening. We're distracted, thinking about other things, or formulating what we are going to say in reaction to what we are hearing before the speaker has even finished. Effective listening is one of the most important learning tools you can have in college. And it is a skill that will benefit you on the job and help your relationships with others. Listening is nothing more than purposefully focusing on what a speaker is saying with the objective of understanding.

This definition is straightforward, but there are some important concepts that deserve a closer look. "Purposefully focusing" implies that you are actively processing what the speaker is saying, not just letting the sounds of their voice register in your senses. "With the objective of understanding" means that you will learn enough about what the speaker is saying to be able to form your own thoughts about the speaker's message. Listening is an active process, as opposed to hearing, which is passive.

You listen to others in many situations: to interact with friends, to get instructions for a task, or to learn new material. There are two general types of listening situations: where you will be able to interact freely with the speaker (everyday conversations, small discussion classes, business meetings) and where interaction is limited (lectures and Webcasts).

In interactive situations, you should apply the basic principles of active listening. These are not hard to understand, but they are hard to implement and require practice to use them effectively.

Principles of Active Listening

1. **Focus** on what is being said. Give the speaker your undivided attention. Clear your mind of anything else.
2. **Don't prejudge** or assume you already know the material. You want to understand what the person is saying; you don't need to agree with it.
3. **Repeat what you just heard**. Confirm with the speaker that what you heard is what he or she said.
4. **Ask the speaker to expand or clarify.** If you are unsure you understand, ask questions; don't assume.
5. Listen for **verbal cues** and watch for **nonverbal cues**.Verbal cues are things your instructor says that communicates the importance. Examples are, "this is an important point" or "I want to make sure everyone understands this concept." Your instructor is telling you what is most important. Nonverbal cues come from facial expressions, body positioning, arm gestures, and tone of voice. Examples include when the instructor repeats herself, gets louder, or starts using more hand gestures.
6. **Listen for requests.** A speaker will often hide a request as a statement of a problem. If a friend says, "I hate math!" this may mean, "Can you help me figure out a solution to this problem?"

Listening in a classroom or lecture hall to learn can be challenging because you are limited by how, and how much, you can interact with an instructor during the class. The following strategies help make listening at lectures more effective and learning more fun.

1. **Get your mind in the right space.** Prepare yourself mentally to receive the information the speaker is presenting by following the previous prep questions and by doing your assignments (instructors build upon work presented earlier).
2. **Get yourself in the right space.** Sit toward the front of the room where you can make eye contact with the instructor easily. Most instructors read the body language of the students in the front rows to gauge how they are doing and if they are losing the class. Instructors also believe students who sit near the front of the room take their subject more seriously and are more willing to give them help when needed or to give them the benefit of the doubt when making a judgment call while assigning grades.
3. **Eliminate distractions**. There are two types of distractions: **internal and external distractions**.
    - Internal distractions are things like being hungry, tired, or distracted with other thoughts. Try to manage these by being well-rested and having a healthy meal before class.
    - External distractions are things like a ringing cell phone or people talking in the hallway. To manage these distractions, turn your cell phone off and pack it away in your backpack. If you are using your laptop for notes, close all applications except the one that you use to take notes.

4. **Look for signals.** Each instructor has a different way of telling you what is important. Some will repeat or paraphrase an idea; others will raise (or lower) their voices; others will write related words on the board. Learn what signals your instructors tend to use and be on the lookout for them. When they use that tactic, the idea they are presenting needs to go in your notes and in your mind—and don't be surprised if it appears on a test or quiz!
5. **Listen for what is not being said.** If an instructor doesn't cover a subject or covers it only minimally, this signals that that material is not as important as other ideas covered in greater length.
6. **Sort the information.** Decide what is important and what is not, what is clear and what is confusing, and what is new material and what is a review. This mental organizing will help you remember the information, take better notes, and ask better questions.
7. **Take notes.** We cover taking notes in much greater detail later, but for now, think about how taking notes can help recall what your instructor said and how notes can help you organize your thoughts for asking questions.
8. **Ask questions.** Asking questions is one of the most important things you can do in class. Most obviously it allows you to clear up any doubts you may have about the material, but it also helps you take ownership of (and therefore remember) the material. Good questions often help instructors expand upon their ideas and make the material more relevant to students. Thinking through the material critically in order to prepare your questions helps you organize your new knowledge and sort it into mental categories that will help you remember it.

What to Do If...

- **Your instructor speaks too fast.** Crank up your preparation. The more you know about the subject, the more you'll be able to pick up from the instructor. Exchange class notes with other students to fill in gaps in notes. Visit the instructor during office hours to clarify areas you may have missed. You might ask the instructor—very politely, of course—to slow down, but habits like speaking fast are hard to break!
- **Your instructor has a heavy accent.** Sit as close to the instructor as possible. Make connections between what the instructor seems to be saying and what he or she is presenting on the board or screen. Ask questions when you don't understand. Visit the instructor during office hours; the more you speak with the instructor the more likely you will learn to understand the accent.
- **Your instructor speaks softly or mumbles.** Sit as close to the instructor as possible and try to hold eye contact as much as possible. Check with other students if they are having problems listening, too; if so, you may want to bring the issue up with the instructor. It may be that the instructor is not used to the lecture hall your class is held in and can easily make adjustments.

Now That's a Good Question...

Are you shy about asking questions? Do you think that others in the class will ridicule you for asking a dumb question? Students sometimes feel this way because they have never been taught how to ask questions. Practice these steps, and soon you will be on your way to customizing each course to meet *your* needs and letting the instructor know you value the course.

- **Be prepared.** Doing your assignments for a class or lecture will give you a good idea about the areas you are having trouble with and will help you frame some questions ahead of time.
- **Position yourself for success.** Sit near the front of the class. It will be easier for you to make eye contact with the instructor as you ask the question. Also, you won't be intimidated by a class full of heads turning to stare at you as you ask your question.
- **Don't wait.** Ask your questions as soon as the instructor has finished a thought. Being one of the first students to ask a question also will ensure that your question is given the time it deserves and won't be cut short by the end of class.
- **In a lecture class, write your questions down.** Make sure you jot your questions down as they occur to you. Some may be answered in the course of the lecture, but if the instructor asks you to hold your questions until the end of class, you'll be glad you have a list of the items you need the instructor to clarify or expand on.
- **Ask specific questions.** "I don't understand" is a statement, not a question. Give the instructor guidance about what you are having trouble with. "Can you clarify the use of the formula for determining velocity?" is a better way of asking for help. If you ask your question at the end of class, give the instructor some context for your question by referring to the part of the lecture that triggered the question. For example, "Professor, you said the Union troops were emboldened by Lincoln's leadership. Was this throughout the Civil War or only after Gettysburg?"
- **Don't ask questions for the sake of asking questions.** If your question is not thought out, or if it appears that you are asking the question to try to look smart, instructors will see right through you!

Effective Participation Strategies

Like listening, participating in class will help you get more out of class. It may also help you stand out as a student. Instructors notice the students who participate in class (and those who don't), and participation is often a component of the final grade. "Participation" may include contributing to discussions, class activities, or projects. It means being actively involved. The following are some strategies for effective participation:

- **Be a team player**: Although most students have classmates they prefer to work with, they should be willing to collaborate in different types of groups. Teamwork demonstrates that a student can adapt to and learn in different situations.
- **Share meaningful questions and comments**: Some students speak up in class repeatedly if they know that participation is part of their grade. Although there isn't necessarily anything wrong with this, it's a good practice to focus on quality vs. quantity. For instance, a quieter student who raises her hand only twice during a discussion but provides thoughtful comments might be more noticeable to an instructor than a student who chimes in with everything that's said.
- **Be prepared**: As with listening, effective participation relies on coming to class prepared. Students should complete all reading assignments beforehand and also review any notes from the previous meeting. This way they can come to class ready to discuss and engage. Be sure to write down any questions or comments you have—this is an especially good strategy for quieter students or those who need practice thinking on their feet.



Figure 2.1.2.1: Image from Pixabay

Guidelines for Participating in Classes

Smaller classes generally favor discussion, but often instructors in large lecture classes also make some room for participation.

A concern or fear about speaking in public is one of the most common fears. If you feel afraid to speak out in class, take comfort from the fact that many others do as well—and that anyone can learn how to speak in class without much difficulty. Class participation is actually an impromptu, informal type of public speaking, and the same principles will get you through both: preparing and communicating.

- Set yourself up for success by coming to class fully prepared.
  - Complete reading assignments.
  - Review your notes on the reading and the previous class to get yourself in the right mindset.
  - If there is something you don't understand well, start formulating your question now.
- Sit in the front with a good view of the instructor, board, or screen, as well as other visual aids. In a lecture hall, this will help you hear better, pay better attention, and make a good impression on the instructor. Don't sit with friends—socializing isn't what you're there for.
- Remember that your body language communicates as much as anything you say. Sit up and look alert with a pleasant expression on your face, and make good eye contact with the instructor. Show some enthusiasm.
- Pay attention to the instructor's body language, which can communicate much more than just their words. How instructors

move and gesture, and the looks on their faces, will add meaning to the words—and will also cue you when it's a good time to ask a question or stay silent.
- Take good notes, but don't write obsessively—and never page through your textbook (or browse on a laptop).
- Don't eat or play with your cell phone.
- Except when writing brief notes, keep your eyes on the instructor.
- Follow class protocol for making comments and asking questions.
    - In a small class, the instructor may encourage students to ask questions at any time, while in some large lecture classes the instructor may ask for questions at the end of the lecture. In this case, jot your questions in your notes so that you don't forget them later.
- Don't say or ask anything just to try to impress your instructor. Most instructors have been teaching long enough to immediately recognize insincere flattery—and the impression this makes is just the opposite of what you want.
- Pay attention to the instructor's thinking style. Does this instructor emphasize theory more than facts, wide perspectives over specific ideas, abstractions more than concrete experience? Take a cue from your instructor's approach and try to think in similar terms when participating in class.
- It's fine to disagree with your instructor when you ask or answer a question. Many instructors invite challenges. Before speaking up, however, be sure you can explain why you disagree and give supporting evidence or reasons. Be respectful.
- Pay attention to your communication style. Use standard English when you ask or answer a question, not slang. Avoid sarcasm and joking around. Be assertive when you participate in class, showing confidence in your ideas while being respectful of the ideas of others. But avoid an aggressive style that attacks the ideas of others or is strongly emotional.

When your instructor asks a question to the class:

- Raise your hand and make eye contact, but don't call out or wave your hand all around trying to catch the instructor's
- attention.
- Before speaking, take a moment to gather your thoughts and take a deep breath. Don't just blurt it out—speak calmly and clearly.

When your instructor asks you a question directly:

- Be honest and admit it if you don't know the answer or are not sure. Don't try to fake it or make excuses. With a question that involves a reasoned opinion more than a fact, it's fine to explain why you haven't decided yet, such as when weighing two opposing ideas or actions; your comment may stimulate further discussion.
- Organize your thoughts to give a sufficient answer. Instructors seldom want a yes or no answer. Give your answer and provide reasons or evidence in support.

When you want to ask the instructor a question:

- Don't ever feel a question is "stupid." If you have been paying attention in class and have done the reading and you still don't understand something, you have every right to ask.
- Ask at the appropriate time. Don't interrupt the instructor or jump ahead and ask a question about something the instructor may be starting to explain. Wait for a natural pause and a good moment to ask. On the other hand, unless the instructor asks students to hold all question until the end of class, don't let too much time go by, or you may forget the question or its relevance to the topic.
- Don't ask just because you weren't paying attention. If you drift off during the first half of class and then realize in the second half that you don't really understand what the instructor is talking about now, don't ask a question about something that was already covered.
- Don't ask a question that is really a complaint. You may be thinking, "Why would so-and-so believe that? That's just crazy!" Take a moment to think about what you might gain from asking the question. It's better to say, "I'm having some difficulty understanding what so-and-so is saying here. What evidence did he use to argue for that position?"
- Avoid dominating a discussion. It may be appropriate in some cases to make a follow-up comment after the instructor answers your question, but don't try to turn the class into a one-on-one conversation between you and the instructor.

If You Must Miss a Class...

- **Plan in advance**: Although nobody can plan to be sick, students should give their instructors advanced notice if they know they will need to miss class for something like a doctor's appointment. This is not only respectful to the instructor, but he or

she may be able to give you any handouts or assignments that you might otherwise miss. If you anticipate that class will be canceled on account of bad weather, etc., make sure you have all the materials, notes, etc. that you need to work at home. In college, “snow days” are rarely “free days”—i.e., expect that you will be responsible for all the work due on those days when school reopens.

- **Talk to fellow students**: Ask to borrow class notes from one or two classmates who are reliable note takers. Be sure to also ask them about any announcements or assignments the instructor made during the class you missed.
- **Talk to your instructor:** Even if you have already emailed or called your instructor, check in with him or her before or after the next class period to collect any missed handouts and ask if anything was assigned. Most college classes use a learning management system (such as Canvas in California community colleges). Check your class on the learning management system to see if any handouts or notes are posted there. While you can’t expect the instructor to repeat the lecture, you can ask what you should do to stay caught up. But remember the worst thing you can say to an instructor: “I missed class—did you talk about anything important?”
- **Do the reading assignment(s) and any other homework.** Take notes on any readings to be discussed in the class you missed. If you have questions on the reading or homework, seek help from your classmates. Completing the homework and coming prepared for the next session will demonstrate to your instructor that you are still dedicated to the class.

Active Learning



Figure 2.1.2.1: Image from Pixabay

Megan is currently taking two classes: geology and American literature. In her geology class, the instructor lectures for the full class time and gives reading assignments. In Megan’s literature class, however, the instructor relies on class discussions, small group discussions, and occasionally even review games. Megan enjoys her literature class, but she struggles to feel engaged and interested in geology. What strategies can Megan use to stay motivated and involved in both of her courses?

Think about the college classes you’ve taken so far. Like Megan, you may feel like it’s a mixed bag: you probably enjoyed the courses with a variety of teaching styles and learning activities the most. Even if you’re a quieter, more reserved student who dislikes lots of group discussions, you probably prefer to have *some* class projects or writing assignments rather than lectures alone. Group projects, discussions, and writing are examples of active learning because they involve *doing* something. Active learning happens when students participate in their education through activities that enhance learning. Those activities may involve just thinking about what you’re learning. Active learning can take place both in and out of the classroom. The following are examples of activities that can facilitate active engagement in the classroom.

- **Class discussions**: Class discussions can help students stay focused because they feature different voices besides that of the instructor. Students can also hear one another’s questions and comments and learn from one another. Such discussions may involve the entire class, or the instructor may organize smaller groups, giving quieter students a greater chance to talk. Another method is to create online discussion boards so that students have more time to develop their ideas and comments and keep the conversation going.
- **Writing assignments**: Instructors may ask students to write short reaction papers or journal entries about lessons or reading

assignments. Such assignments can help you review or reflect on what you just learned to aid you in understanding and remembering the material. It also provides a means of communicating questions and concerns to your instructors.

- **Student-led teaching**: Many instructors believe that a true test of whether students understand concepts is being able to teach the material to others. For that reason, instructors will sometimes have students work in groups and research a topic or review assigned readings, and then prepare a mini presentation and teach it to the rest of the class. This activity can help students feel more accountable for their learning and work harder since classmates will be relying on them.



Figure 2.1.2.1: Image from Pixabay

Group discussions are examples of active learning that encourage students to participate in their education.

Success in Being a Responsible College Student

Being a responsible college student is another mark of success. College life differs in many ways from high school and knowing what is expected from you is important to succeed in college. Some key differences to keep in mind:

- There are more rules in high school than in college so you have to make decisions responsibly.
- In college, it's up to you to make sure you understand the material being covered in class. It's your responsibility to keep up with the readings and assignments.
- In high school, your teachers made sure you understand facts and skills, and now that you're in college, it's up to you to apply what you have learned. Always consider how what you are learning can apply to your other classes or your future career.
- In college, the professors expect you to participate more actively in reviews for exams and quizzes. Come to class with questions.

The following video clip is a brief, informal student discussion about the challenges you may face as a student and provides examples of issues students face in transitioning from high school to college. The two main problems identified in the video are time management and working in groups. Multiple strategies and solutions are shared by the students. Click on the "cc" box underneath the video to activate the closed captioning.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.2.2: Problems Students Might Face in College

Exercise 3

- What are some recommendations that you've heard from your high school teachers that helped you prepare for college? Make a short list of the advice you got from your previous teachers.

Overall in college, you demonstrate that you are a responsible student when you do the following:

- Uphold the values of honesty and academic integrity.
- Arrive on time and prepared for all classes, meetings, academic activities, and special events.
- Give attention to quality and excellence in completing assignments.
- Allot sufficient time to fulfill responsibilities outside of class.
- Observe etiquette in all communications, giving respect to instructors, fellow students, staff and the larger college community.
- Take full advantage of college resources available to you.
- Respect diversity in people, ideas, and opinions.
- Achieve educational goals in an organized, committed, and proactive manner.
- Take full responsibility for personal behavior.
- Comply with all college policies.

By allowing these overarching principles to be your guide, you are embracing responsibility and making choices that lead to college success.

Major College Resources and How To Use Them

College resources to help you reach your educational and career goals are plentiful on most campuses. Here are several campus resources to know about and find early in your college career. You may not need them right away; some you may not need at all. But you will find several to be vital. So, be familiar with your options, and know where to find the services. Store contact information and visit any center for help.

Advising



Figure 2.1.2.1: Image from Pixabay

Most colleges and universities assign an academic adviser to each student. The adviser may be associated with your major. There may also be an office or department that provides advising. Meet your adviser or visit the advising office if you have an issue

regarding academics or need any other help.

Tutoring and Writing Centers

Tutoring and writing centers are established for all students, and seeking help from them is expected and to your advantage. Such services are covered by your tuition dollars, and they can richly enhance performance in any area of your studies. Know where to find these centers and how to schedule appointments.

Other Academic Support Facilities

Your college may also offer academic support in various other forms: for example, computer labs with trained assistants, tutors, mentors, peer advisers, and more. You can research what kinds of special support are available and be ready to take advantage of them.

Library Reference Desk

College libraries are staffed with professionals whose main function is to assist you and the college community in finding needed resources. Don't hesitate to find the reference desk and get to know the reference librarians. Invariably you will learn about valuable resources—many of them online—that you didn't know existed. Reference librarians are also educators, and they're there to help you.

Campus Health Center

If you need any health services whatsoever, the campus health center should be your first destination. Step into the center and learn about the services offered, the hours of operation, emergency provisions, and routine health services available.

Campus Counseling

Counseling is an essential service that colleges and universities invariably provide. Services can ranges from life-saving care to assistance with minor concerns. Life stressors, such as deaths and divorces in the family, issues with friends, substance abuse, and suicide are just a few of the many issues that college students may experience or witness others struggling with. Don't take matters into your own hands. Get help! The counseling center can help you and support you in gaining solid footing during difficult times. Don't hesitate to take full advantage of the services and help they offer.

Career Services

One of the most important purposes of college is to prepare students for a career. All colleges and universities have a career office that can assist you with many critical aspects of finding a suitable career. It may also help you find a campus job or review options for your major, help you get an internship, draft your résumé, and practice interview skills. Visiting the career office is a must for every student, and it's worth doing early and often (rather than waiting until you're about to graduate).

Spiritual Life

Most college campuses have interfaith facilities to meet the spiritual-life needs of the entire college community. You may find these facilities to be a refuge in special moments of need or resources for your ongoing involvement. A healthy spiritual life could bring greater balance to your student life.

And Others

Additional support centers that students may wish to visit include offices for financial aid, students with disabilities or learning differences, housing, diversity, student organizations, athletics, continuing education, international students, child care, and many others. Refer to your college website or the college directory for information about the many, many services that can be part of your college experience.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Why It Matters: College Success," taken from English Composition I. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License**: CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from "Habits for Success," taken from Basic Reading and Writing. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from College Success. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Active Listening in the Classroom. **Authored by:** Heather Syrett. **Provided by:** Austin Community College. **License:** *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

Answers

Exercise 2.1.2.1

Think about the differences in the attitudes of these three students and how they approach their classes. One's attitude toward learning, toward going to class, and toward the whole college experience is a huge factor in how successful a student will be. Make it your goal to attend every class; don't even think about not going. Going to class is the first step in engaging in your education by interacting with the instructor and other students. Here are some reasons why it's important to attend every class:

Miss a class and you'll miss *something*, even if you never know it. Even if a friend gives you notes for the class, they cannot contain *everything* said or shown by the instructor or written on the board for emphasis or questioned or commented on by other students. What you miss might affect your grade or your enthusiasm for the course. Why go to college at all if you're not going to *go* to college? While some students may say that you don't have to go to every class to do well on a test, that is very often a myth. Do you want to take that risk? Your final grade often reflects how you think about course concepts, and you will think more often and more clearly when engaged in class discussions and hearing the comments of other students. You can't get this by borrowing class notes from a friend. Research shows there is a correlation between absences from class and lower grades. It may be that missing classes causes lower grades or that students with lower grades miss more classes. Either way, missing classes and lower grades can be intertwined in a downward spiral of achievement. Your instructor will note your absences, even in a large class. In addition to making a poor impression, you reduce your opportunities for future interactions. You might not ask a question the next class because of the potential embarrassment of the instructor saying that was covered in the last class, which you apparently missed. Nothing is more insulting to an instructor than when you skip a class and then show up to ask, "Did I miss anything important?" You might be tempted to skip a class because the instructor is "boring," but it's more likely that you found the class boring because you weren't very attentive or didn't appreciate how the instructor was teaching. You paid a lot of money for your tuition. Get your money's worth!

This page titled 2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

Understanding Yourself as a Learner

To succeed in college—or any situation where you must master new concepts and skills—it helps to know what makes you tick. For decades, educational researchers and organizational psychologists have examined how people take in and assimilate new information, how some people learn differently than others, and what conditions make students and workers most productive. Here are some questions that will help you understand yourself as a learner:

- **What is your learning style?** For the purposes of this chapter, learning style refers to the way you prefer to take in new information: by seeing, by listening, or through some other channel. (For more information, see the section on learning styles).
- **What times of day are you most productive?** If your energy peaks early, you might benefit from blocking out early morning time for studying or writing. If you are a night owl, set aside a few evenings a week for schoolwork.
- **How much clutter can you handle in your work space?** Some people work fine at a messy desk and know exactly where to find what they need in their stack of papers; however, most people benefit from maintaining a neat, organized space.
- **How well do you juggle potential distractions in your environment?** If you can study at home without being tempted to turn on the television, check your social media, fix yourself a snack, and so on, you could make home your work space. However, if you need a less distracting environment to stay focused, you may be able to find a nook on your college campus or in your community.
- **Does a little background noise help or hinder your productivity?** Some people work better when listening to background music or the low hum of conversation in a coffee shop. Others need total silence.
- **When you work with a partner or group, do you stay on task?** A study partner or group can sometimes be invaluable. However, working this way takes extra planning and effort, so be sure to use the time productively. If you find that group study sessions turn into social occasions, you may study better on your own.
- **How do you manage stress?** Accept that at certain points in the semester, you will feel stressed out. In your day-to-day routine, make time for activities that help you reduce stress, such as exercising, playing a musical instrument, playing a sport, hanging out with friends, or just scheduling downtime to relax.

Learning Styles

Most people have one channel that works best for them when it comes to taking in new information. Knowing yours can help you develop strategies for studying, time management, and note-taking that work especially well for you.

To begin identifying your learning style, think about how you would go about the process of assembling a piece of furniture. Which of these options sounds most like you?

1. You would carefully look over the diagrams in the assembly manual first so you could picture each step in the process.
2. You would silently read the directions through, step by step, and then look at the diagrams afterward.
3. You would read the directions aloud and/or have someone explain the steps to you.
4. You would start putting the pieces together and figure out the process through trial and error, consulting the directions as you worked.

Now read the following explanations. Again, think about whether each description sounds like you.

- If you chose (a), you may be a visual learner. You understand ideas best when they are presented in a visual format, such as a flowchart, a diagram, or text with clear headings and many photos or illustrations.
- If you chose (b), you may be a verbal learner. You understand ideas best through reading and writing about them and taking detailed notes.
- If you chose (c), you may be an auditory learner. You understand ideas best through listening. You learn well from spoken lectures or books on tape.
- If you chose (d), you may be a kinesthetic learner. You learn best through doing, and prefer hands-on activities. In long lectures, fidgeting may help you focus.

Note

> If you want to get more in-depth into figuring out your dominant learning style, try this questionnaire.

Your learning style does not completely define you as a student. Auditory learners can comprehend a flow chart, and kinesthetic learners can sit still long enough to read a book. However, if you do have one dominant learning style, you can work with it to get the most out of your classes and study time. Table 1.3 “Learning Style Strategies” lists some tips for maximizing your learning style.

Table 1.3 - Learning Style Strategies

Learning Style	Strategies
Visual	• When possible, represent concepts visually—in charts, diagrams, or sketches. • Use a visual format for taking notes on reading assignments or lectures. • Use different-colored highlighters or pens to color-code information as you read. • Use visual organizers, such as maps, flowcharts, etc., to help you plan writing assignments. • Use colored pens, highlighters, or the review feature of your word-processing program to revise and edit writing.
Verbal	• Use the instructional features in course texts—summaries, chapter review questions, glossaries, and so on—to aid your studying. • Take notes on your reading assignments. • Rewrite or condense reading notes and lecture notes to study. • Summarize important ideas in your own words. • Use informal writing techniques, such as brainstorming, free writing, blogging, or posting on a class discussion forum to generate ideas for writing assignments. • Re-read and take notes on your writing to help you revise and edit.
Auditory	• Ask your instructor’s permission to tape-record lectures to supplement your notes. • Read parts of your textbook or notes aloud when you study. • If possible, obtain an audio book version of important course texts. Make use of supplemental audio materials, such as CDs or DVDs. • Talk through your ideas with other students when studying or when preparing for a writing assignment. • Read your writing aloud to help you draft, revise, and edit.
Kinesthetic	• When you read or study, use techniques that will keep your hands in motion, such as highlighting or taking notes. • Use tactile study aids, such as flash cards or study guides you design yourself. • Use self-stick notes to record ideas for writing. These notes can be physically reorganized easily to help you determine how to shape your paper. • Walk around while reading; walk and talk into a tape recorder when drafting. • Use a physical activity, such as running or swimming, to help you break through writing blocks. • Take breaks during studying to stand, stretch, or move around.

Defining Multimodal Learning

In the college setting, you’ll probably discover that instructors teach their course materials according to the method they think will be most effective for students overall. Thus, regardless of your individual learning preference, you will probably be asked to engage in all types of learning. For instance, even though you consider yourself to be a “visual learner,” you will still probably have to write papers in some of your classes. Research suggests that it’s good for the brain to learn in new ways and that learning in

different modalities can help learners become more well-rounded. Consider the following statistics on how much content students absorb through different learning methods:

- 10 percent of content they *read*
- 20 percent of content they *hear*
- 30 percent of content they *visualize*
- 50 percent of what they both *visualize and hear*
- 70 percent of what they *say*
- 90 percent of what they *say and do*

The range of these results underscores the importance of mixing up the ways in which you study and engage with learning materials.

You might also discover that you prefer more than one learning style. Applying more than one learning style is known as multimodal learning. This strategy is useful not only for students who prefer to combine learning styles, but also for those who may not know which learning style works best for them. It's also a good way to mix things up and keep learning fun.

For example, consider how you might combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles for a biology class. For visual learning, you could create flash cards containing images of individual animals and the species name. For auditory learning, you could have a friend quiz you on the flash cards. For kinesthetic learning, you could move the flash cards around on a board to show a food web (food chain).

> **Tip:**
>
> The material presented here about learning styles is just the tip of the iceberg. There are numerous other variations in how people learn. Some people like to act on information right away while others reflect on it first. Some people excel at mastering details and understanding concrete, tried and true ideas while others enjoy exploring abstract theories and innovative, even impractical ideas. For more information about how you learn, visit your school's academic resource center.

The following video will help you review the types of learning styles and see how they might relate to your study habits:

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.3.1

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Authored and Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0 (Attribution)
- Adapted from College Success **Authored and Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

This page last updated June 3, 2020.

This page titled 2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.1.4: Time Management

Case Study

Kai feels like he is struggling through his first semester of college. He works long hours at a job every night, lives at home, and helps care for his younger sister. When he gets home from work, he is ready for bed and is often too tired for homework or studying. He has trouble focusing in class and occasionally drifts off during lectures. Kai knows he needs to change some of his habits, but he feels too overwhelmed to know where to start.

Lots of students like Kai have to balance a lot of responsibilities, such as work, school, and family. Such competing demands can make it hard to get the most out of class time and assignments. The effort you put in to succeed in college will pay off, though, and there are ways that you can physically and mentally prepare to excel in class. Work-life balance is key and time-management allows you to succeed with maintaining this balance.

For work-life balance, we need to

- Eat healthy meals and snacks
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep
- Manage stress
- Talk to guidance counselors and instructors
- Have good time-management practices
- Know when we are trying to do too much and make decisions about our time.

Time management allows us to achieve our goals and at the same time remain healthy. In college you have increased freedom to structure your time as you please. With that freedom comes increased responsibility. High school teachers often take it upon themselves to track down students who miss class or forget assignments. College instructors, however, expect you to take full responsibility for managing yourself and getting your work done on time. There are three important steps in learning to effectively manage your time:

1. Identify your time management style
2. Create a schedule
3. Get better at prioritizing

After Kai decides to talk to his guidance counselor about his stress and difficulty balancing his activities, his guidance counselor recommends that Kai identify his time-management style and create a schedule. This will help him set time for homework, studying, work, and leisure activities so that he avoids procrastinating about his schoolwork. His counselor explains that if Kai sets aside a specific time to study every day—rather than simply studying when he feels like he has the time—his study habits will become more regular, which will improve Kai's learning.

At the end of their session, Kai and the counselor have put together a rough schedule for Kai to further refine as he goes through the next couple of weeks. What follows is a list of what they did and came up with.

Identify Your Time Management Style



Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Exercise 1

The following self-assessment survey can help you determine your time-management personality type. Read each question in the Questions column. Then read the possible responses. Select one response for each question. Each response should reflect what you probably would do in a given situation, not what you think is the "right" answer. Put a checkmark in the My Time Management Type column next to your likely response.

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
1	Your instructor just gave your class the prompts for your first essay, which is due in two weeks. How do you proceed from here?	a. Choose a prompt and begin working on a thesis immediately. Better to get it out of the way!	O Early bird
		b. Read over the prompts and let them sink in for a week or so. You'll still have one more week to finish the assignment, right?	O Balancing act
		c. Read the prompts and maybe start playing around with ideas, but wait to really start writing until the day before. You swear it's all in your head somewhere!	O Pressure cooker
		d. Depends on how much work you have for your other classes. But you might forget about it until a few hours before the assignment is due, and ask for an extension.	O Improviser
2	You are working on a group assignment that requires you to split up responsibilities with three other classmates. When would you typically finish your part?	a. First. Then you're done and don't have to worry about it. Plus it could give you time in case you want to tweak anything later.	O Early bird
		b. After one or two of the others have submitted their materials to the group, but definitely not last. You wanted to see how they approached it first.	O Balancing act

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
		c. Maybe last, but definitely before the assignment due date and hopefully before any of the other group members ask about it.	O Pressure cooker
		d. Definitely last. You'll wait until everyone else has done their work, so you can make sure you are not duplicating efforts. Whatever. This is why you hate group work.	O Improviser
3	Your instructor just shared the instructions for your next assignment and you read them but don't quite understand what he's asking for in a certain part. What would you probably do?	a. Send the instructor an email that afternoon. When he doesn't respond that night, email him again. This is your worst nightmare—you just want to know what he wants!!	O Early bird
		b. Send him an email asking for clarification, giving yourself enough time to wait for his response and then complete the assignment. Better to be safe than sorry.	O Balancing act
		c. Try to figure it out for yourself. You're pretty sure what he's trying to say, and you'll give it your best shot.	O Pressure cooker
		d. Don't say anything until after the assignment is due. Other people in the class felt the same way too, probably!	O Improviser
4	The course you are taking requires you to post in a weekly discussion forum by Sunday night each week so the class can talk about everyone's posts on Monday. When do you submit your posts?	a. Tuesday night, after the first day of class that week. Then it's out of the way.	O Early bird
		b. Thursday or Friday night. You want to let the week's discussion sink in a little so you can collect your thoughts.	O Balancing act
		c. Sunday night. You always forget during the weekend!	O Pressure cooker
		d. Monday at 3 AM. That still counts as Sunday night, right?	O Improviser
5	You have an important assignment due Monday morning, and you have a social/work/family obligation that will keep you busy for most of the weekend. It is now the Wednesday before the assignment is due. How would you approach this dilemma?	a. You already finished it yesterday, the day it was assigned. Done!	O Early bird
		b. You tell yourself that you'll finish it by Friday night, and you manage this by chipping away at it over those 3 days. ...Little. By. Little.	O Balancing act
		c. You tell yourself that you'll finish it by Friday night, so you can have your weekend free, but you still have a little left to do on Sunday—no big deal.	O Pressure cooker
		d. You tell yourself that you'll take the weekend off, then stay up late on Sunday or wake up early on Monday to finish it. It's not a final or anything, and you have a life.	O Improviser

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
6	You have to read 150 pages before your next class meeting. You have 4 days to do so. What would you most likely do?	a. 150 pages divided by 4 days means... a little less than 40 pages a day. You like to chunk it this way because then you'll also have time to go over your notes and highlights, and come up with questions for the instructor.	O Early bird
		b. 150 pages divided by...well ... 2 days (because it's been a long week), means 75 pages a day. Totally doable.	O Balancing act
		c. 150 pages, the day before it is due. You did this to yourself; it's fine.	O Pressure cooker
		d. How much time does it take to skim the text for keywords and/or find a summary online?	O Improviser

Assessing Your Responses

Which of the four basic time-management personality types did you select the most? Which did you select the least? Do you feel like these selections match the student you have been in the past? Has your previous way of doing things worked for you, or do you think it's time for a change? Remember, we can all always improve!

Learn more below about your tendencies. Review traits, strengths, challenges, and tips for success for each of the four time-management personality types.

The Early Bird

- **Traits**: You like to make checklists and feel great satisfaction when you can cross something off of your to-do list. When it comes to assignments, *you want to get started as soon as possible* (and maybe start brainstorming before that), because it lets you stay in control.
- **Strengths**: You know what you want and are driven to figure out how to achieve it. Motivation is never really a problem for you.
- **Challenges**: Sometimes you can get more caught up in getting things done as quickly as possible and don't give yourself enough time to really mull over issues in all of their complexity.
- **Tips for Success**: You're extremely organized and on top of your schoolwork, so make sure you take time to really enjoy learning in your classes. Remember, school isn't all deadlines and checkboxes—you also have the opportunity to think about big-picture intellectual problems that don't necessarily have clear answers.

The Balancing Act

- **Traits**: You're naturally gifted with keeping things balanced. Maybe it's a skill that you have developed over time; in any case, you should have the basic organizational skills to succeed in any class, as long as you keep your balance.
- **Strengths**: Your strength really lies in your ability to be well-rounded. You may not always complete assignments perfectly every time, but you are remarkably consistent and usually manage to do very well in classes.
- **Challenges**: Because you're so consistent, sometimes you can get in a bit of a rut and begin to coast in class, rather than really challenging yourself.
- **Tips for Success**: Instead of simply doing what works, use each class as an opportunity for growth by engaging thoughtfully with the material and constantly pushing the boundaries of your own expectations for yourself.

The Pressure Cooker

- **Traits**: You always get things done and almost always at the last minute.
- **Strengths**: You work well under pressure, and when you do finally sit down to accomplish a task, you can sit and work for hours. In these times, you can be extremely focused and shut out the rest of the world in order to complete what's needed.
- **Challenges**: You sometimes use your ability to work under pressure as an excuse to procrastinate. Sure, you can really focus when the deadline is tomorrow, but is it really the best work you could produce if you had a couple of days of cushion?
- **Tips for Success**: Give yourself small, achievable deadlines, and stick to them. Make sure they are goals that you really could (and would) achieve in a day. Then don't allow yourself to make excuses. You'll find that it's actually a lot more enjoyable to not be stressed out when completing schoolwork. Who would have known?

The Improviser

- **Traits**: You frequently wait until the last minute to do assignments, but it's because you've been able to get away with this habit in many classes.
- **Strengths**: You think quickly on your feet, and while this is a true strength, it also can be a crutch that prevents you from being really successful in a class.
- **Challenges**: As the saying goes, old habits die hard. If you find that you lack a foundation of discipline and personal accountability, it can be difficult to change, especially when the course material becomes challenging or you find yourself struggling to keep up with the pace of the class.
- **Tips for Success**: The good news is you can turn this around! Make a plan to organize your time and materials in a reasonable way, and really stick with it. Also, don't be afraid to ask your instructor for help, but be sure to do it before, rather than after, you fall behind

Create a Schedule

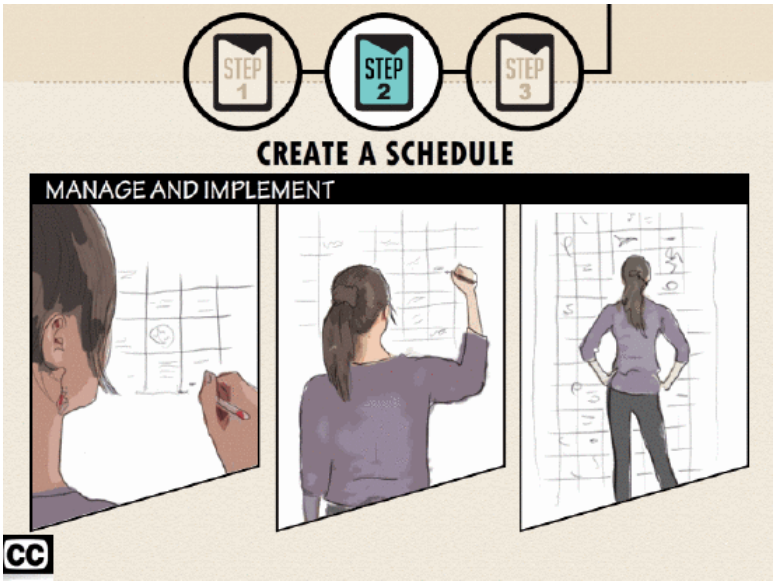


Figure: Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Although Kai knows that studying is important and he is trying to keep up with homework, he really needs to work on time management. This is challenging for many college students, especially ones with lots of responsibilities outside of school. Unlike high school classes, college classes meet less often, and college students are expected to do more independent learning, homework, and studying. The amount of time students spend on coursework outside of the physical classroom will vary, depending on the course (how rigorous it is and how many credits it's worth) and on the institution's expectations. However, a general rule is that the ratio of classroom time to study time is 1:2 or 1:3. That means that for every hour you spend in class, you should plan to spend two to three hours out of class working independently on course assignments. For example, if your composition class meets for one hour, three times a week, you're expected to devote from six to nine hours each week on reading assignments, writing assignments, etc.

If you account for all the classes you're taking in a given semester, the study time really adds up—and if it sounds like a lot of

work, it is! The only way to stay on top of the workload is by creating a schedule to help you manage your time. You might decide to use a weekly or monthly schedule—or both. Whatever you choose, the following tips can help you design a smart schedule that's easy to follow and stick with.

TIP

The two- to three-hour rule may sound intimidating. However, keep in mind that this is only a rule of thumb. Realistically, some courses will be more challenging than others, and the demands will ebb and flow throughout the semester. You may have trouble-free weeks and stressful weeks. When you schedule your classes, try to balance introductory-level classes with more advanced classes so that your work load stays manageable.

Start with Fixed Time Commitments

First off, mark down the commitments that don't allow any flexibility. These include class meetings, work hours, appointments, etc. Capturing the "fixed" parts of your schedule can help you see where there are blocks of time that can be used for other activities.

Kai's Schedule

Kai is taking four classes: Spanish 101, US History, College Algebra, and Introduction to Psychology. He also has a fixed work schedule of 27 hours a week.

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Sunday</th><th>Monday</th><th>Tuesday</th><th>Wednesday</th><th>Thursday</th><th>Friday</th><th>Saturday</th></tr>
<tr><td>8:00 AM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>9:00 AM</td><td></td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>10:00 AM</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td rowspan="3">Work</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:00 AM</td><td></td><td>College Algebra</td><td rowspan="2">Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)</td><td>College Algebra</td><td rowspan="2">Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)</td><td>College Algebra</td></tr>
<tr><td>12:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1:00 PM</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2:00 PM</td><td></td><td rowspan="6">Work</td><td rowspan="6">Work</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>3:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>7:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>8:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Consider Your Studying and Homework Habits

When are you most productive? Are you a morning person or a night owl? Block out your study times accordingly. You'll also want to factor in any resources you might need. For instance, if you prefer to study very early or late in the day, and you're working on a research paper, you might want to check the library hours to make sure it's open when you need it.

Kai's Schedule

Since Kai's Spanish class starts his schedule at 9:00 every day, he decides to use that as the base for his schedule. He doesn't usually have trouble waking up in the mornings (except for on the weekends), so he decides to do a bit of studying before class. His Spanish practice is often something he can do while eating or traveling, so this gives him a bit of leniency with his schedule.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7:00 AM							
8:00 AM		HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	
9:00 AM		Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	
10:00 AM		US History I	HW: Spanish 101	US History I	HW: Spanish 101	US History I	Work
11:00 AM		College Algebra	Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)	College Algebra	Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)	College Algebra	
12:00 PM		HW: Spanish 101		HW: Spanish 101		HW: Spanish 101	
1:00 PM	HW: Spanish 101	Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)		Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)		Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)	HW: Spanish 101
2:00 PM	HW: US History I		Work		Work		HW: Intro to Psych
3:00 PM							
4:00 PM							
5:00 PM		HW: College Algebra		HW: College Algebra		HW: College Algebra	
6:00 PM							
7:00 PM							
8:00 PM		HW: Intro to Psych		HW: Intro to Psych			
9:00 PM			HW: US History I		HW: US History I		
10:00 PM							

Plan Ahead

Even if you prefer weekly over monthly schedules, write reminders for yourself and keep track of any upcoming projects, papers, or exams. You will also want to prepare for these assignments in advance. Most students eventually discover (the hard way) that cramming for exams the night before and waiting until the last minute to start on a term paper is a poor strategy. Procrastination creates a lot of unnecessary stress, and the resulting final product—whether an exam, lab report, or paper—is rarely your best work. Try simple things to break down large tasks, such as setting aside an hour or so each day to work on them during the weeks leading up to the deadline. If you get stuck, get help from your instructor early, rather than waiting until the day before an assignment is due.

Consider Leisure Time

TIP

When you look at Kai's schedule, you can see that he's left open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings. While he plans on using Sundays to complete larger assignments when he needs to, he's left Friday and Saturday evenings open for leisure.

It might seem impossible to leave room in your schedule for fun activities, but every student needs and deserves to socialize and relax on a regular basis. Try to make this time something you look forward to and count on, and use it as a reward for getting things done. You might reserve every Friday or Saturday evening for going out with friends, for example. Or, if a club you're interested in meets on Thursdays during a time you've reserved for studying, try to reschedule your study time so you can do both.

Exercise 2

Now that you have considered ways to create a schedule, you can practice making one that will help you succeed academically. **The California Community College's Online Education site** has a free source for populating a study schedule based on your individual course load. For this exercise, you will develop a weekly schedule and a semester calendar.

1. Working with your class schedule, map out a week-long schedule of study time. Try to apply the "two- to three-hour" rule. Be sure to include any other nonnegotiable responsibilities, such as a job or child care duties.
2. Use your course syllabi to record exam dates and due dates for major assignments in a calendar (paper or electronic). Use a star, highlighting, or other special marking to set off any days or weeks that look especially demanding.
3. If you have a tendency to forget, put your schedule into the appointment calendar on your phone if you have one. Then set alerts for each of those study "appointments."

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.4.1

The video above talks about the importance of balancing school and work, and suggests 5 strategies to help you.

Get Better at Prioritizing

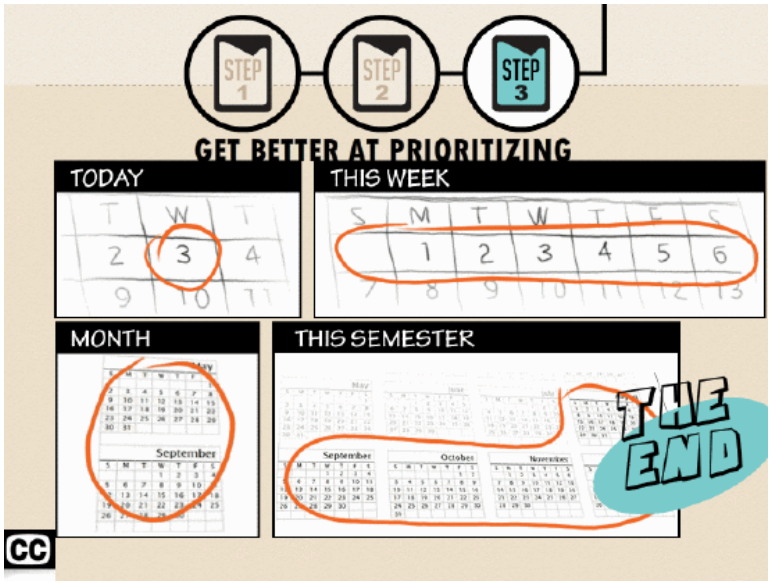


Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Due dates are important. Set your short and long-term goals accordingly. Ask yourself the following:

- What needs to get done today?
- What needs to get done this week?
- What needs to get done by the end of the first month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the second month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the semester?

Your time is valuable. Treat it accordingly by getting the most you can out of it.

Above all, avoid procrastination. Procrastination is the kiss of death because it's difficult to catch up once you've fallen behind. Do you have a problem with procrastination? Be on your guard so that it doesn't become an issue for you.

Procrastination Checklist

Do any of the following descriptions apply to you?

- My paper is due in two days and I haven't really started writing it yet.
- I've had to pull an all-nighter to get an assignment done on time.
- I've turned in an assignment late or asked for an extension when I really didn't have a good excuse not to get it done on time.
- I've worked right up to the minute an assignment was due.
- I've underestimated how long a reading assignment would take and didn't finish it in time for class.
- I've relied on the Internet for information (like a summary of a concept or a book) because I didn't finish the reading on time.

If these sound like issues you've struggled with in the past, consider whether you have the tendency to procrastinate and how you want to deal with it in your future classes. You're already spending a lot of time, energy, and money on the classes you're taking—don't let all of that go to waste!

Strategies to Combat Procrastination

Below are some effective strategies for overcoming procrastination:

1. **Keep your studying "bite-sized."** When confronted with 150 pages of reading or 50 problems to solve, it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Try breaking it down: What if you decide that you will read for 45 minutes or that you will solve 10 problems? That sounds much more manageable.
2. **Turn off your phone, close your chat windows, and block distracting Web sites.** The best advice we've ever heard is to treat your studying as if you're in a movie theater—just turn it off.
3. **Set up a reward system.** If you read for 40 minutes, you can check your phone for 5 minutes. But keep in mind that reward-based systems only work if you stick to an honor system.
4. **Study in a place reserved for studying ONLY.** Your bedroom may have too many distractions (or temptations, such as taking a nap), so it may be best to avoid it when you're working on school assignments.
5. **Use checklists.** Make your incremental accomplishments visible. Some people take great satisfaction and motivation from checking items off a to-do list. Be very specific when creating this list, and clearly describe each task one step at a time.

In the following video, Joseph Clough shares key strategies for conquering procrastination once and for all.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.4.1

Staying Consistent: Time Management Dos and Don’ts

Setting up a schedule is easy. Sticking with it, however, may create challenges. A schedule that looked great on paper may prove to be unrealistic. Sometimes, despite students’ best intentions, they end up procrastinating or pulling all-nighters to finish a paper or study for an exam.

Keep in mind, however, that your weekly schedule and semester calendar are time-management tools. Like any tools, their effectiveness depends on the user: you. If you leave a tool sitting in the box unused (e.g., if you set up your schedule and then forget about it), it will not help you complete the task. And if, for some reason, a particular tool or strategy is not getting the job done, you need to figure out why and maybe try using something else.

With that in mind, read the list of time-management dos and don’ts. Keep this list handy as a reference you can use throughout the semester to “troubleshoot” if you feel like your schoolwork is getting off track.

Dos

1. Set aside time to review your schedule or calendar regularly and update or adjust them as needed.
2. Be realistic when you schedule study time. Do not plan to write your paper on Friday night when everyone else is out socializing. When Friday comes, you might end up abandoning your plans and hanging out with your friends instead.
3. Be honest with yourself about where your time goes. Do not fritter away your study time on distractions like e-mail and social networking sites.
4. Accept that occasionally your work may get a little off track. No one is perfect.
5. Accept that sometimes you may not have time for all the fun things you would like to do.
6. Recognize times when you feel overextended. Sometimes you may just need to get through an especially demanding week. However, if you feel exhausted and overworked all the time, you may need to scale back on some of your commitments.
7. Have a plan for handling high-stress periods, such as final exam week. Try to reduce your other commitments during those periods—for instance, by scheduling time off from your job. Build in some time for relaxing activities, too.

Don’ts

1. Do not procrastinate on challenging assignments. Instead, break them into smaller, manageable tasks that can be accomplished one at a time.
2. Do not fall into the trap of “all-or-nothing” thinking: “There is no way I can fit in a three-hour study session today, so I will just wait until the weekend.” Extended periods of free time are hard to come by, so find ways to use small blocks of time productively. For instance, if you have a free half hour between classes, use it to preview a chapter or brainstorm ideas for an essay.
3. Do not fall into the trap of letting things slide and promising yourself, “I will do better next week.” When next week comes, the accumulated undone tasks will seem even more intimidating, and you will find it harder to get them done.
4. Do not rely on caffeine and sugar to compensate for lack of sleep. These stimulants may temporarily perk you up, but your brain functions best when you are rested.

TIP

The key to managing your time effectively is consistency. Completing the following tasks will help you stay on track throughout the semester.

1. Establish regular times to “check in” with yourself to identify and prioritize tasks and plan how to accomplish them. Many people find it is best to set aside a few minutes for this each day and to take some time to plan at the beginning of each week.
2. For the next two weeks, focus on consistently using whatever time-management system you have set up. Check in with yourself daily and weekly, stick to your schedule, and take note of anything that interferes. At the end of the two weeks, review your schedule and determine whether you need to adjust it.
3. Review the preceding list of dos and don’ts.
    1. Identify at least two habits from the “Dos” list that you could use to improve your time-management skills.

2. Identify the habit from the “Don’ts” list that you are most likely to slip into as the semester gets busier. What could you do to combat this habit?

Writing at Work

If you are part of the workforce, you have probably established strategies for accomplishing job-related tasks efficiently. How could you adapt these strategies to help you be a successful student? For instance, you might sync up your school and work schedules on an electronic calendar. Instead of checking in with your boss about upcoming work deadlines, establish a buddy system where you check in with a friend about school projects. Give school the same priority you give to work.

In the following Alleyoop Advice video, Alleyoop (Angel Aquino) discusses what many students discover about college: there is a lot of free time—and just as many challenges to balance free time with study time.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.1.4.1

Additional Resources:

- Here are **ways to plan time (semester, week, days)** from Ohio University’s Academic Advancement Center. Ohio University uses a quarterly system (11 weeks); you may need adapt their schedule to reflect your academic needs.
- Access **The 168-Hour Exercise—How Do I Use My Time Now?** from Ohio University’s Academic Advancement Center. It can help you understand how you use your time now and decide if you need to make changes.
- Here is a **time management calculator** for first-year students at the University of Texas El Paso.

Contributors and Attributions

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY:

- Adapted from Your Use of Time from *College Success*. **Authored and provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Class Preparation from *College Success*. **Authored and provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Writing for Success **Authored and provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page last updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 2.1.4: Time Management is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.4: Time Management by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.1.5: Key Takeaways

- College success depends on consistently studying, attending class, listening actively, and participating, as well as connecting yourself to relevant resources on campus.
- Reading and writing help you become a better thinker, and these are some of the skills most in demand by employers.
- Knowing your learning style and working with that can help you study and learn more effectively.
- Managing your time well is a major key for college success, as is avoiding procrastination.

This page titled 2.1.5: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.5: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology

In an age where technology, finance, and business reigns, you might ask about the relevance of writing and learning how to write essays. Knowing how to write is an essential skill that is as relevant today as ever! A recent survey of employers, conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, found that **89 percent** of employers believe that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on teaching students to "effectively communicate orally and in writing" (Seligo). Writing was the only 'most-favored' skill in this survey. In addition, several of the other valued skills mentioned by employers are grounded in written communication:

- "Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills" (81 percent of employers)
- "The ability to analyze and solve complex problems" (75 percent of employers)
- "The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources" (68 percent of employers).

If you want to be professional, you need to interact frequently with others. You have to be someone who can **anticipate and solve complex problems and coordinate your work with others**. Whether you're in business, an entrepreneur, or in a corporation, all of these skills depend on effective communication.



Figure: from Pixabay

Taking these ideas a step further, CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, has done away with PowerPoint presentations altogether and has reverted back to writing longer essay-style memos. In a famous email sent out to his employees on June 9, 2004, he explains why: "The reason writing a 4-page memo is harder than "writing" a 20-page PowerPoint is because the narrative structure of a good memo forces better thought and better understanding of what's more important than what, and how things are related." At a typical Amazon meeting, employees present a long narrative style memo detailing their ideas. During the first part of the meeting everyone is silent, reading the memo and taking notes, before discussing the memo. The act of writing and annotating, whether it is in business or technology, forces the writer to think through ideas fully.

The process that Amazon employees use to write memos and sharpen their ideas is not much different than that used by students in first year composition classes. In college writing classes, students study specific topics in depth, research ideas, and then, in a process that involves planning, reading, writing, researching, and revising, present their ideas in a well-organized format. This process is used in writing an essay. Most of the writing that we will be doing in a first year Composition class is expository, detailing and explaining a theory. Students will learn how to make a statement and convince their readers about its validity using logic and persuasive writing.

All these skills are what companies are looking for in their future employees, whether these employees are working in technology, finance, the arts, or business. Jeffrey Seligo, author of *College Unbound*, writes about the dearth of college graduates with these skills. He writes, "Hiring managers complain that they often find today's college graduates lacking in interpersonal skills, problem

solving, effective written and oral communication skills, the ability to work together in teams, and critical and analytical thinking" and that employees who have the ability to "come up with novel solutions to problems and [are] better able to sort through information to filter out the most critical pieces are the ones who will be of great value." Writing expository essays in college will help build critical thinking and inter-personal skills as students work in groups to debate their ideas and fine-tune their essays based on helpful feedback from their instructor and, often, peers.

By taking first year college composition, you are on the way to becoming a better thinker and writer -- skills that can make you highly desirable, both as an employee but also for your own self-development as the benefits of learning how to write go beyond getting a job. Writing effectively helps to expand your world by making you think critically about issues in the news. And it enables you to make more informed decisions as a member of a family or a community.

Now that we have established the need for learning how to write effectively, a process that goes hand-in-hand with reading and critical thinking, let's get started with making sure we have all we need to succeed in the course.

Contributors and Attributions

- Revision and adaptation of the page "Why Write" in *College Writing*. **Authored by**: Susan Oaks. **Provided by**: Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **License**: CC BY-NC-SA.

NON CC LICENSED CONTENT:

- Quotes taken from Jeffrey J.Seligo's *College Unbound*, Amazon Publishing, Las Vegas, 2013.

This page most recently updated on May 31, 2020.

This page titled 2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student

A Personal Definition of College Success

How do you define college success? The definition really depends on you. You might think that "success" is earning an associate's degree or attending classes in a four-year college. Maybe success is a bachelor's or master's degree or a PhD. Maybe success means receiving a certificate of completion or finishing skill-based training.

You might be thinking of other measures of college success, too—like grades. For instance, you might be unhappy with anything less than an A in a course although maybe this depends on the difficulty of the subject. As long as you pass with a C, you might be perfectly content. But no matter how you define success personally, you probably wouldn't think it means earning a D or lower grade in a class.

So, if most students believe that passing a class is the minimum requirement for "success," and if most students want to be successful in their courses, why aren't more college students consistently successful in the classroom?

Perhaps some common misconceptions are at play. For example, we often hear students say, "I just can't do it!" or "I'm not good at math," or "I guess college isn't for me . . . ," or "I'm not smart enough." But these explanations for success or failure aren't necessarily accurate. Considerable research into college success reveals that having difficulty in or failing in college courses usually has nothing to do with intellect. More often success depends on how fully a student embraces and masters the seven strategies outlined later in this section.

Exercise 1

Free-write on what success means to you in college and beyond. You might want to consider the following:

- What people do you consider to be successful and why?
- What is your definition of success?
- What will you do to achieve success?
- What is the biggest change you need to make in order to be successful in college?
- How will you know you've achieved success?

Finally, remember that we can't be successful, all the time, at everything. We have to balance our energy and our focus to get what we really want. The following video stresses the external factors that shape what we consider "success" as a society and encourages us to think beyond these factors to determine what it really is that motivates us, personally–what we hope will define us, and our value, to others.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.3.1: Ted Talk video

Strategies to Achieve Success

Considerable research into college success reveals that **intellect usually has nothing to do with having difficulty with, or failing, college courses**. More often, success depends on how fully you embrace and master the following seven strategies:

1. Learn how to take effective notes in class.
2. Review the text and your reading notes prior to class.
3. Participate in class discussion and maybe even join a study group.
4. Go to the office after hours, and ask your instructor questions.
5. Give yourself enough time to research, write, and edit your essays-- in manageable stages.
6. Take advantage of online or on-campus academic support resources.
7. Spend sufficient time studying.

So, don't feel you're not smart enough for college; ask yourself if you can implement some of these skills.

TIP

Professors do care about how you are doing in their class; they genuinely want you to succeed, but they will give you the grade you earn. There are people and resources on campus for you to utilize so you can earn the grade you want. Your professors are among these resources, and are perhaps the most important. Go see them during office hours, ask them questions about the material and get extra help if you need it. ... Another resource to utilize can be found in the campus learning center. ... Kristen Mruk, in *The Student Experience,*" writes "The first time I took a paper there, I recall standing outside the door for about ten minutes thinking of an excuse not to go in. Thankfully I saw a classmate walk in and I followed suit. ... Thanks to that first visit, I received an A- on the paper!"

Study Time

Can you make more time for learning? One approach is to create a regular study schedule and make sure you allow yourself ample time. Most college success experts agree that students should study two hours outside of class for every hour in class. Only break away from your committed schedule if an extreme situation prevents you from sticking to it.

Another strategy to consider implementing is group study. For example, rather than relying just on your own knowledge, notes, and skills, try studying with other students in your difficult classes. Studying in a group gives every group member a chance to ask questions and talk about concepts.



Figure 2.3.1: Image from Pixabay

You can also add a tutor to your study group. You will notice a positive difference. Tutoring is generally free in college, and the strategies and knowledge you gain will be invaluable. Usually tutors have previously taken the class you are currently enrolled in, and they are trained to get the best out of you.

Overall, students struggle in college not because of intellect or 'smarts', but because of poor time management, disorganization, and lack of quality study time. You can combat this by creating a regular study schedule, studying in groups, taking advantage of

your school's academic resources such as a tutoring center, instructor office hours, and any available online help.

Exercise 2

- Click here to view the Instructional Support presentation from California Community Colleges. It includes an audio overview of success in college.

Why Go To Class?

Students don't always want to go to class. They may have required classes that they find difficult or don't enjoy, or they may feel overwhelmed by other commitments or feel tired if they have early morning classes. However, even if instructors allow a certain number of unexcused absences, you should aim to attend every class session. Class attendance enhances class performance in the following ways:

- **Class participation**: If you don't attend class, you can't participate in class activities. Class activities are usually part of your final grade, and they can help you apply concepts you learn from lectures and reading assignments.
- **Class interaction**: If you rely on learning on your own (by doing the reading assignments outside of class, for example), you'll miss out on class discussions with fellow students. Your classmates will often have the same questions as you, so going to class enables you to learn from them and ask your instructor about topics you all find difficult.
- **Interaction with the instructor**: There is a reason why classes are taught by instructors. Instructors specialize in the subjects they teach, and they can provide extra insight and perspective on the material you're studying. Going to class gives you the chance to take notes and ask questions about the lectures. Also, the more you participate, the more your instructors will come to know you and be aware of any help or support you might need. This will make you feel more comfortable to approach them outside of class if you need advice or are struggling with the course material.
- **Increased learning**: Even though you will typically spend more time on coursework outside of the classroom, this makes class sessions even more valuable. Typically, in-class time will be devoted to the most challenging or key concepts covered in your textbooks. It's important to know what these are so you can master them—also they're likely to show up on exams.

Exercise 2.3.1

Let's compare students with different attitudes toward their classes:

1. Carla wants to get through college, and she knows she needs the degree to get a decent job, but she's just not that into it. She's never thought of herself as a good student, and that hasn't changed much in college. She has trouble paying attention in those big lecture classes, which mostly seem pretty boring. She's pretty sure she can pass all her courses, however, as long as she takes the time to study before tests. It doesn't bother her to skip classes when she's studying for a test in a different class or finishing a reading assignment she didn't get around to earlier. She does make it through her freshman year with a passing grade in every class, even those she didn't go to class very often. Then she fails the midterm exam in her first sophomore class. Depressed, she skips the next couple classes, then feels guilty and goes to the next. It's even harder to stay awake because now she has no idea what they're talking about. It's too late to drop the course, and even a hard night of studying before the final isn't enough to pass the course. In two other classes, she just barely passes. She has no idea what classes to take next term and is starting to think that maybe she'll drop out for now.

2. Karen wants to have a good time in college and still do well enough to get a good job in business afterward. Her sorority keeps a file of class notes for her big lecture classes, and from talking to others and reviewing these notes, she's discovered she can skip almost half of those big classes and still get a B or C on the tests. She stays focused on her grades, and because she has a good memory, she's able to maintain OK grades. She doesn't worry about talking to her instructors outside of class because she can always find out what she needs from another student. In her sophomore year, she has a quick conversation with her academic advisor and chooses her major. Those classes are smaller, and she goes to most of them, but she feels she's pretty much figured out how it works and can usually still get the grade. In her senior year, she starts working on her résumé and asks other students in her major which instructors write the best letters of recommendation. She's sure her college degree will land her a good job.

3. Alicia enjoys her classes, even when she has to get up early after working or studying late the night before. She sometimes gets so excited by something she learns in class that she rushes up to the instructor after class to ask a question. In class discussions, she's not usually the first to speak out, but by the time another student has given an opinion, she's had time to organize her thoughts and enjoys arguing her ideas. Nearing the end of her sophomore year and unsure of what to major in given her many interests, she talks things over with one of her favorite instructors, whom she has gotten to know through office visits. The instructor gives her some insights into careers in that field and helps her explore her interests. She takes two more courses with this instructor over the next year, and she's comfortable in her senior year going to him to ask for a job reference. When she does, she's surprised and thrilled when he urges her to apply for a high-level paid internship with a company in the field—that happens to be run by a friend of his.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Stages of the Listening Process

Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives, from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport. Regardless of how we're engaged with listening, it's important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what's been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they've received.

Effectively engaging with all five stages of the listening process lets us best gather the information we need from the world around us.

Active Listening

Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker, by way of restating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words. The goal of this repetition is to confirm what the listener has heard and to confirm the understanding of both parties. The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

When engaging with a particular speaker, a listener can use several degrees of active listening, each resulting in a different quality of communication with the speaker. Active listening can also involve paying attention to the speaker's behavior and body language. Having the ability to interpret a person's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message.

Stage 1: The Receiving Stage

The first stage of the listening process is the receiving stage, which involves hearing and attending.

Hearing is the physiological process of registering sound waves as they hit the eardrum. As obvious as it may seem, in order to effectively gather information through listening, we must first be able to physically hear what we're listening to. The clearer the sound, the easier the listening process becomes.

Paired with hearing, attending is the other half of the receiving stage in the listening process. Attending is the process of accurately identifying and interpreting particular sounds we hear as words. The sounds we hear have no meaning until we give them their meaning in context. Listening is an active process that constructs meaning from both verbal and nonverbal messages.

The Challenges of Reception

Listeners are often bombarded with a variety of auditory stimuli all at once, so they must differentiate which of those stimuli are speech sounds and which are not. Effective listening involves being able to focus in on speech sounds while disregarding

other noise. For instance, a train passenger that hears the captain's voice over the loudspeaker understands that the captain is speaking, then deciphers what the captain is saying despite other voices in the cabin. Another example is trying to listen to a friend tell a story while walking down a busy street. In order to best listen to what she's saying, the listener needs to ignore the ambient street sounds.

Attending also involves being able to discern human speech, also known as "speech segmentation." Identifying auditory stimuli as speech but not being able to break those speech sounds down into sentences and words would be a failure of the listening process. Discerning speech segmentation can be a more difficult activity when the listener is faced with an unfamiliar language.

Stage 2: The Understanding Stage

The second stage in the listening process is the understanding stage. Understanding or comprehension is "shared meaning between parties in a communication transaction" and constitutes the first step in the listening process. This is the stage during which the listener determines the context and meanings of the words he or she hears. Determining the context and meaning of individual words, as well as assigning meaning in language, is essential to understanding sentences. This, in turn, is essential to understanding a speaker's message.

Once the listeners understands the speaker's main point, they can begin to sort out the rest of the information they are hearing and decide where it belongs in their mental outline. For example, a political candidate listens to her opponent's arguments to understand what policy decisions that opponent supports.

Before getting the big picture of a message, it can be difficult to focus on what the speaker is saying. Think about walking into a lecture class halfway through. You may immediately understand the words and sentences that you are hearing, but not immediately understand what the lecturer is explaining or whether what you're hearing at the moment is the main point, side note, or digression.

Understanding what we hear is a huge part of our everyday lives, particularly in terms of gathering basic information. In the office, people listen to their superiors for instructions about what they are to do. At school, students listen to teachers to learn new ideas. We listen to political candidates give policy speeches in order to determine who will get our vote. But without understanding what we hear, none of this everyday listening would relay any practical information to us.

One tactic for better understanding a speaker's meaning is to ask questions. Asking questions allows the listener to fill in any holes he or she may have in the mental reconstruction of the speaker's message.

Stage 3: The Evaluating Stage

This stage of the listening process is the one during which the listener assesses the information they received, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Evaluating allows the listener to form an opinion of what they heard and, if necessary, to begin developing a response.

During the evaluating stage, the listener determines whether or not the information they heard and understood from the speaker is well constructed or disorganized, biased or unbiased, true or false, significant or insignificant. They also ascertain how and why the speaker has come up with and conveyed the message that they delivered. This may involve considerations of a speaker's personal or professional motivations and goals. For example, a listener may determine that a co-worker's vehement condemnation of another for jamming the copier is factually correct, but may also understand that the co-worker's child is sick and that may be putting them on edge. A voter who listens to and understands the points made in a political candidate's stump speech can decide whether or not those points were convincing enough to earn their vote.

The evaluating stage occurs most effectively once the listener fully understands what the speaker is trying to say. While we can, and sometimes do, form opinions of information and ideas that we don't fully understand—or even that we misunderstand—doing so is not often ideal in the long run. Having a clear understanding of a speaker's message allows a listener to evaluate that message without getting bogged down in ambiguities or spending unnecessary time and energy addressing points that may be tangential or otherwise nonessential.

This stage of critical analysis is important for a listener in terms of how what they heard will affect their own ideas, decisions, actions, and/or beliefs.

Stage 4: The Responding Stage

The responding stage is the stage of the listening process wherein the listener provides verbal and/or nonverbal reactions based on short- or long-term memory. Following the remembering stage, a listener can respond to what they hear either verbally or non-verbally. Nonverbal signals can include gestures such as nodding, making eye contact, tapping a pen, fidgeting, scratching or cocking their head, smiling, rolling their eyes, grimacing, or any other body language. These kinds of responses can be displayed purposefully or involuntarily. Responding verbally might involve asking a question, requesting additional information, redirecting or changing the focus of a conversation, cutting off a speaker, or repeating what a speaker has said back to her in order to verify that the received message matches the intended message.

Nonverbal responses like nodding or eye contact allow the listener to communicate their level of interest without interrupting the speaker, thereby preserving the speaker/listener roles. When a listener responds verbally to what they hear and remember—for example, with a question or a comment—the speaker/listener roles are reversed, at least momentarily.

Responding adds action to the listening process, which would otherwise be an outwardly passive process. Oftentimes, the speaker looks for verbal and nonverbal responses from the listener to determine if and how their message is being understood and/or considered. Based on the listener's responses, the speaker can choose to either adjust or continue with the delivery of her message. For example, if a listener's brow is furrowed and their arms are crossed, the speaker may determine that she needs to lighten her tone to better communicate her point. If a listener is smiling and nodding or asking questions, the speaker may feel that the listener is engaged and her message is being communicated effectively.

Stage 5: The Remembering Stage

In the listening process, the remembering stage occurs as the listener categorizes and retains the information she's gathered from the speaker for future access. The result–memory–allows the person to record information about people, objects, and events for later recall. This happens both during and after the speaker's delivery.

Memory is essential throughout the listening process. We depend on our memory to fill in the blanks when we're listening and to let us place what we're hearing at the moment in the context of what we've heard before. If, for example, you forgot everything that you heard immediately after you heard it, you would not be able to follow along with what a speaker says, and conversations would be impossible. Moreover, a friend who expresses fear about a dog she sees on the sidewalk ahead can help you recall that the friend began the conversation with her childhood memory of being attacked by a dog.

Remembering previous information is critical to moving forward. Similarly, making associations to past remembered information can help a listener understand what she is currently hearing in a wider context. In listening to a lecture about the symptoms of depression, for example, a listener might make a connection to the description of a character in a novel that she read years before.

Using information immediately after receiving it enhances information retention and lessens the forgetting curve or the rate at which we no longer retain information in our memory. Conversely, retention is lessened when we engage in mindless listening, and little effort is made to understand a speaker's message.

Because everyone has different memories, the speaker and the listener may attach different meanings to the same statement. In this sense, establishing common ground in terms of context is extremely important, both for listeners and speakers.

The Learning Cycle

Too many students try to get the grade just by going to class, maybe a little note taking, and then cramming through the text right before an exam they feel unprepared for. Sound familiar? This approach may have worked for you in high school where tests and quizzes were more frequent and teachers prepared study guides for you, but colleges require you to take responsibility for your learning and to be better prepared.

Most students simply have not learned how to study and don't understand how learning works. Learning is actually a cycle of four steps:

- Preparing
- Absorbing
- Capturing

- Reviewing

When you get in the habit of paying attention to this cycle, it becomes relatively easy to study well. But you must use all four steps.

Listening and note taking are closely related. Good listening skills make you a better note taker, and taking good notes can help you listen better. Both are key study skills to help you do better in your classes.

Effective Listening Strategies

Are you a good listener? Most of us like to think we are, but when we really think about it, we recognize that we are often only half listening. We're distracted, thinking about other things, or formulating what we are going to say in reaction to what we are hearing before the speaker has even finished. Effective listening is one of the most important learning tools you can have in college. And it is a skill that will benefit you on the job and help your relationships with others. Listening is nothing more than purposefully focusing on what a speaker is saying with the objective of understanding.

This definition is straightforward, but there are some important concepts that deserve a closer look. "Purposefully focusing" implies that you are actively processing what the speaker is saying, not just letting the sounds of their voice register in your senses. "With the objective of understanding" means that you will learn enough about what the speaker is saying to be able to form your own thoughts about the speaker's message. Listening is an active process, as opposed to hearing, which is passive.

You listen to others in many situations: to interact with friends, to get instructions for a task, or to learn new material. There are two general types of listening situations: where you will be able to interact freely with the speaker (everyday conversations, small discussion classes, business meetings) and where interaction is limited (lectures and Webcasts).

In interactive situations, you should apply the basic principles of active listening. These are not hard to understand, but they are hard to implement and require practice to use them effectively.

Principles of Active Listening

1. **Focus** on what is being said. Give the speaker your undivided attention. Clear your mind of anything else.
2. **Don't prejudge** or assume you already know the material. You want to understand what the person is saying; you don't need to agree with it.
3. **Repeat what you just heard**. Confirm with the speaker that what you heard is what he or she said.
4. **Ask the speaker to expand or clarify.** If you are unsure you understand, ask questions; don't assume.
5. Listen for **verbal cues** and watch for **nonverbal cues**.Verbal cues are things your instructor says that communicates the importance. Examples are, "this is an important point" or "I want to make sure everyone understands this concept." Your instructor is telling you what is most important. Nonverbal cues come from facial expressions, body positioning, arm gestures, and tone of voice. Examples include when the instructor repeats herself, gets louder, or starts using more hand gestures.
6. **Listen for requests.** A speaker will often hide a request as a statement of a problem. If a friend says, "I hate math!" this may mean, "Can you help me figure out a solution to this problem?"

Listening in a classroom or lecture hall to learn can be challenging because you are limited by how, and how much, you can interact with an instructor during the class. The following strategies help make listening at lectures more effective and learning more fun.

1. **Get your mind in the right space.** Prepare yourself mentally to receive the information the speaker is presenting by following the previous prep questions and by doing your assignments (instructors build upon work presented earlier).
2. **Get yourself in the right space.** Sit toward the front of the room where you can make eye contact with the instructor easily. Most instructors read the body language of the students in the front rows to gauge how they are doing and if they are losing the class. Instructors also believe students who sit near the front of the room take their subject more seriously and are more willing to give them help when needed or to give them the benefit of the doubt when making a judgment call while assigning grades.
3. **Eliminate distractions**. There are two types of distractions: **internal and external distractions**.
    - Internal distractions are things like being hungry, tired, or distracted with other thoughts. Try to manage these by being well-rested and having a healthy meal before class.
    - External distractions are things like a ringing cell phone or people talking in the hallway. To manage these distractions, turn your cell phone off and pack it away in your backpack. If you are using your laptop for notes, close all applications except the one that you use to take notes.

4. **Look for signals.** Each instructor has a different way of telling you what is important. Some will repeat or paraphrase an idea; others will raise (or lower) their voices; others will write related words on the board. Learn what signals your instructors tend to use and be on the lookout for them. When they use that tactic, the idea they are presenting needs to go in your notes and in your mind—and don't be surprised if it appears on a test or quiz!
5. **Listen for what is not being said.** If an instructor doesn't cover a subject or covers it only minimally, this signals that that material is not as important as other ideas covered in greater length.
6. **Sort the information.** Decide what is important and what is not, what is clear and what is confusing, and what is new material and what is a review. This mental organizing will help you remember the information, take better notes, and ask better questions.
7. **Take notes.** We cover taking notes in much greater detail later, but for now, think about how taking notes can help recall what your instructor said and how notes can help you organize your thoughts for asking questions.
8. **Ask questions.** Asking questions is one of the most important things you can do in class. Most obviously it allows you to clear up any doubts you may have about the material, but it also helps you take ownership of (and therefore remember) the material. Good questions often help instructors expand upon their ideas and make the material more relevant to students. Thinking through the material critically in order to prepare your questions helps you organize your new knowledge and sort it into mental categories that will help you remember it.

What to Do If...

- **Your instructor speaks too fast.** Crank up your preparation. The more you know about the subject, the more you'll be able to pick up from the instructor. Exchange class notes with other students to fill in gaps in notes. Visit the instructor during office hours to clarify areas you may have missed. You might ask the instructor—very politely, of course—to slow down, but habits like speaking fast are hard to break!
- **Your instructor has a heavy accent.** Sit as close to the instructor as possible. Make connections between what the instructor seems to be saying and what he or she is presenting on the board or screen. Ask questions when you don't understand. Visit the instructor during office hours; the more you speak with the instructor the more likely you will learn to understand the accent.
- **Your instructor speaks softly or mumbles.** Sit as close to the instructor as possible and try to hold eye contact as much as possible. Check with other students if they are having problems listening, too; if so, you may want to bring the issue up with the instructor. It may be that the instructor is not used to the lecture hall your class is held in and can easily make adjustments.

Now That's a Good Question...

Are you shy about asking questions? Do you think that others in the class will ridicule you for asking a dumb question? Students sometimes feel this way because they have never been taught how to ask questions. Practice these steps, and soon you will be on your way to customizing each course to meet *your* needs and letting the instructor know you value the course.

- **Be prepared.** Doing your assignments for a class or lecture will give you a good idea about the areas you are having trouble with and will help you frame some questions ahead of time.
- **Position yourself for success.** Sit near the front of the class. It will be easier for you to make eye contact with the instructor as you ask the question. Also, you won't be intimidated by a class full of heads turning to stare at you as you ask your question.
- **Don't wait.** Ask your questions as soon as the instructor has finished a thought. Being one of the first students to ask a question also will ensure that your question is given the time it deserves and won't be cut short by the end of class.
- **In a lecture class, write your questions down.** Make sure you jot your questions down as they occur to you. Some may be answered in the course of the lecture, but if the instructor asks you to hold your questions until the end of class, you'll be glad you have a list of the items you need the instructor to clarify or expand on.
- **Ask specific questions.** "I don't understand" is a statement, not a question. Give the instructor guidance about what you are having trouble with. "Can you clarify the use of the formula for determining velocity?" is a better way of asking for help. If you ask your question at the end of class, give the instructor some context for your question by referring to the part of the lecture that triggered the question. For example, "Professor, you said the Union troops were emboldened by Lincoln's leadership. Was this throughout the Civil War or only after Gettysburg?"
- **Don't ask questions for the sake of asking questions.** If your question is not thought out, or if it appears that you are asking the question to try to look smart, instructors will see right through you!

Effective Participation Strategies

Like listening, participating in class will help you get more out of class. It may also help you stand out as a student. Instructors notice the students who participate in class (and those who don't), and participation is often a component of the final grade. "Participation" may include contributing to discussions, class activities, or projects. It means being actively involved. The following are some strategies for effective participation:

- **Be a team player**: Although most students have classmates they prefer to work with, they should be willing to collaborate in different types of groups. Teamwork demonstrates that a student can adapt to and learn in different situations.
- **Share meaningful questions and comments**: Some students speak up in class repeatedly if they know that participation is part of their grade. Although there isn't necessarily anything wrong with this, it's a good practice to focus on quality vs. quantity. For instance, a quieter student who raises her hand only twice during a discussion but provides thoughtful comments might be more noticeable to an instructor than a student who chimes in with everything that's said.
- **Be prepared**: As with listening, effective participation relies on coming to class prepared. Students should complete all reading assignments beforehand and also review any notes from the previous meeting. This way they can come to class ready to discuss and engage. Be sure to write down any questions or comments you have—this is an especially good strategy for quieter students or those who need practice thinking on their feet.



Figure 2.3.1: Image from Pixabay

Guidelines for Participating in Classes

Smaller classes generally favor discussion, but often instructors in large lecture classes also make some room for participation.

A concern or fear about speaking in public is one of the most common fears. If you feel afraid to speak out in class, take comfort from the fact that many others do as well—and that anyone can learn how to speak in class without much difficulty. Class participation is actually an impromptu, informal type of public speaking, and the same principles will get you through both: preparing and communicating.

- Set yourself up for success by coming to class fully prepared.
  - Complete reading assignments.
  - Review your notes on the reading and the previous class to get yourself in the right mindset.
  - If there is something you don't understand well, start formulating your question now.
- Sit in the front with a good view of the instructor, board, or screen, as well as other visual aids. In a lecture hall, this will help you hear better, pay better attention, and make a good impression on the instructor. Don't sit with friends—socializing isn't what you're there for.
- Remember that your body language communicates as much as anything you say. Sit up and look alert with a pleasant expression on your face, and make good eye contact with the instructor. Show some enthusiasm.
- Pay attention to the instructor's body language, which can communicate much more than just their words. How instructors

move and gesture, and the looks on their faces, will add meaning to the words—and will also cue you when it's a good time to ask a question or stay silent.
- Take good notes, but don't write obsessively—and never page through your textbook (or browse on a laptop).
- Don't eat or play with your cell phone.
- Except when writing brief notes, keep your eyes on the instructor.
- Follow class protocol for making comments and asking questions.
    - In a small class, the instructor may encourage students to ask questions at any time, while in some large lecture classes the instructor may ask for questions at the end of the lecture. In this case, jot your questions in your notes so that you don't forget them later.
- Don't say or ask anything just to try to impress your instructor. Most instructors have been teaching long enough to immediately recognize insincere flattery—and the impression this makes is just the opposite of what you want.
- Pay attention to the instructor's thinking style. Does this instructor emphasize theory more than facts, wide perspectives over specific ideas, abstractions more than concrete experience? Take a cue from your instructor's approach and try to think in similar terms when participating in class.
- It's fine to disagree with your instructor when you ask or answer a question. Many instructors invite challenges. Before speaking up, however, be sure you can explain why you disagree and give supporting evidence or reasons. Be respectful.
- Pay attention to your communication style. Use standard English when you ask or answer a question, not slang. Avoid sarcasm and joking around. Be assertive when you participate in class, showing confidence in your ideas while being respectful of the ideas of others. But avoid an aggressive style that attacks the ideas of others or is strongly emotional.

When your instructor asks a question to the class:

- Raise your hand and make eye contact, but don't call out or wave your hand all around trying to catch the instructor's
- attention.
- Before speaking, take a moment to gather your thoughts and take a deep breath. Don't just blurt it out—speak calmly and clearly.

When your instructor asks you a question directly:

- Be honest and admit it if you don't know the answer or are not sure. Don't try to fake it or make excuses. With a question that involves a reasoned opinion more than a fact, it's fine to explain why you haven't decided yet, such as when weighing two opposing ideas or actions; your comment may stimulate further discussion.
- Organize your thoughts to give a sufficient answer. Instructors seldom want a yes or no answer. Give your answer and provide reasons or evidence in support.

When you want to ask the instructor a question:

- Don't ever feel a question is "stupid." If you have been paying attention in class and have done the reading and you still don't understand something, you have every right to ask.
- Ask at the appropriate time. Don't interrupt the instructor or jump ahead and ask a question about something the instructor may be starting to explain. Wait for a natural pause and a good moment to ask. On the other hand, unless the instructor asks students to hold all question until the end of class, don't let too much time go by, or you may forget the question or its relevance to the topic.
- Don't ask just because you weren't paying attention. If you drift off during the first half of class and then realize in the second half that you don't really understand what the instructor is talking about now, don't ask a question about something that was already covered.
- Don't ask a question that is really a complaint. You may be thinking, "Why would so-and-so believe that? That's just crazy!" Take a moment to think about what you might gain from asking the question. It's better to say, "I'm having some difficulty understanding what so-and-so is saying here. What evidence did he use to argue for that position?"
- Avoid dominating a discussion. It may be appropriate in some cases to make a follow-up comment after the instructor answers your question, but don't try to turn the class into a one-on-one conversation between you and the instructor.

If You Must Miss a Class...

- **Plan in advance**: Although nobody can plan to be sick, students should give their instructors advanced notice if they know they will need to miss class for something like a doctor's appointment. This is not only respectful to the instructor, but he or

she may be able to give you any handouts or assignments that you might otherwise miss. If you anticipate that class will be canceled on account of bad weather, etc., make sure you have all the materials, notes, etc. that you need to work at home. In college, “snow days” are rarely “free days”—i.e., expect that you will be responsible for all the work due on those days when school reopens.

- **Talk to fellow students**: Ask to borrow class notes from one or two classmates who are reliable note takers. Be sure to also ask them about any announcements or assignments the instructor made during the class you missed.
- **Talk to your instructor:** Even if you have already emailed or called your instructor, check in with him or her before or after the next class period to collect any missed handouts and ask if anything was assigned. Most college classes use a learning management system (such as Canvas in California community colleges). Check your class on the learning management system to see if any handouts or notes are posted there. While you can’t expect the instructor to repeat the lecture, you can ask what you should do to stay caught up. But remember the worst thing you can say to an instructor: “I missed class—did you talk about anything important?”
- **Do the reading assignment(s) and any other homework.** Take notes on any readings to be discussed in the class you missed. If you have questions on the reading or homework, seek help from your classmates. Completing the homework and coming prepared for the next session will demonstrate to your instructor that you are still dedicated to the class.

Active Learning



Figure 2.3.1: Image from Pixabay

Megan is currently taking two classes: geology and American literature. In her geology class, the instructor lectures for the full class time and gives reading assignments. In Megan’s literature class, however, the instructor relies on class discussions, small group discussions, and occasionally even review games. Megan enjoys her literature class, but she struggles to feel engaged and interested in geology. What strategies can Megan use to stay motivated and involved in both of her courses?

Think about the college classes you’ve taken so far. Like Megan, you may feel like it’s a mixed bag: you probably enjoyed the courses with a variety of teaching styles and learning activities the most. Even if you’re a quieter, more reserved student who dislikes lots of group discussions, you probably prefer to have *some* class projects or writing assignments rather than lectures alone. Group projects, discussions, and writing are examples of active learning because they involve *doing* something. Active learning happens when students participate in their education through activities that enhance learning. Those activities may involve just thinking about what you’re learning. Active learning can take place both in and out of the classroom. The following are examples of activities that can facilitate active engagement in the classroom.

- **Class discussions**: Class discussions can help students stay focused because they feature different voices besides that of the instructor. Students can also hear one another’s questions and comments and learn from one another. Such discussions may involve the entire class, or the instructor may organize smaller groups, giving quieter students a greater chance to talk. Another method is to create online discussion boards so that students have more time to develop their ideas and comments and keep the conversation going.
- **Writing assignments**: Instructors may ask students to write short reaction papers or journal entries about lessons or reading

assignments. Such assignments can help you review or reflect on what you just learned to aid you in understanding and remembering the material. It also provides a means of communicating questions and concerns to your instructors.

- **Student-led teaching**: Many instructors believe that a true test of whether students understand concepts is being able to teach the material to others. For that reason, instructors will sometimes have students work in groups and research a topic or review assigned readings, and then prepare a mini presentation and teach it to the rest of the class. This activity can help students feel more accountable for their learning and work harder since classmates will be relying on them.



Figure 2.3.1: Image from Pixabay

Group discussions are examples of active learning that encourage students to participate in their education.

Success in Being a Responsible College Student

Being a responsible college student is another mark of success. College life differs in many ways from high school and knowing what is expected from you is important to succeed in college. Some key differences to keep in mind:

- There are more rules in high school than in college so you have to make decisions responsibly.
- In college, it's up to you to make sure you understand the material being covered in class. It's your responsibility to keep up with the readings and assignments.
- In high school, your teachers made sure you understand facts and skills, and now that you're in college, it's up to you to apply what you have learned. Always consider how what you are learning can apply to your other classes or your future career.
- In college, the professors expect you to participate more actively in reviews for exams and quizzes. Come to class with questions.

The following video clip is a brief, informal student discussion about the challenges you may face as a student and provides examples of issues students face in transitioning from high school to college. The two main problems identified in the video are time management and working in groups. Multiple strategies and solutions are shared by the students. Click on the "cc" box underneath the video to activate the closed captioning.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.3.2: Problems Students Might Face in College

Exercise 3

- What are some recommendations that you've heard from your high school teachers that helped you prepare for college? Make a short list of the advice you got from your previous teachers.

Overall in college, you demonstrate that you are a responsible student when you do the following:

- Uphold the values of honesty and academic integrity.
- Arrive on time and prepared for all classes, meetings, academic activities, and special events.
- Give attention to quality and excellence in completing assignments.
- Allot sufficient time to fulfill responsibilities outside of class.
- Observe etiquette in all communications, giving respect to instructors, fellow students, staff and the larger college community.
- Take full advantage of college resources available to you.
- Respect diversity in people, ideas, and opinions.
- Achieve educational goals in an organized, committed, and proactive manner.
- Take full responsibility for personal behavior.
- Comply with all college policies.

By allowing these overarching principles to be your guide, you are embracing responsibility and making choices that lead to college success.

Major College Resources and How To Use Them

College resources to help you reach your educational and career goals are plentiful on most campuses. Here are several campus resources to know about and find early in your college career. You may not need them right away; some you may not need at all. But you will find several to be vital. So, be familiar with your options, and know where to find the services. Store contact information and visit any center for help.

Advising



Figure 2.3.1: Image from Pixabay

Most colleges and universities assign an academic adviser to each student. The adviser may be associated with your major. There may also be an office or department that provides advising. Meet your adviser or visit the advising office if you have an issue

regarding academics or need any other help.

Tutoring and Writing Centers

Tutoring and writing centers are established for all students, and seeking help from them is expected and to your advantage. Such services are covered by your tuition dollars, and they can richly enhance performance in any area of your studies. Know where to find these centers and how to schedule appointments.

Other Academic Support Facilities

Your college may also offer academic support in various other forms: for example, computer labs with trained assistants, tutors, mentors, peer advisers, and more. You can research what kinds of special support are available and be ready to take advantage of them.

Library Reference Desk

College libraries are staffed with professionals whose main function is to assist you and the college community in finding needed resources. Don't hesitate to find the reference desk and get to know the reference librarians. Invariably you will learn about valuable resources—many of them online—that you didn't know existed. Reference librarians are also educators, and they're there to help you.

Campus Health Center

If you need any health services whatsoever, the campus health center should be your first destination. Step into the center and learn about the services offered, the hours of operation, emergency provisions, and routine health services available.

Campus Counseling

Counseling is an essential service that colleges and universities invariably provide. Services can ranges from life-saving care to assistance with minor concerns. Life stressors, such as deaths and divorces in the family, issues with friends, substance abuse, and suicide are just a few of the many issues that college students may experience or witness others struggling with. Don't take matters into your own hands. Get help! The counseling center can help you and support you in gaining solid footing during difficult times. Don't hesitate to take full advantage of the services and help they offer.

Career Services

One of the most important purposes of college is to prepare students for a career. All colleges and universities have a career office that can assist you with many critical aspects of finding a suitable career. It may also help you find a campus job or review options for your major, help you get an internship, draft your résumé, and practice interview skills. Visiting the career office is a must for every student, and it's worth doing early and often (rather than waiting until you're about to graduate).

Spiritual Life

Most college campuses have interfaith facilities to meet the spiritual-life needs of the entire college community. You may find these facilities to be a refuge in special moments of need or resources for your ongoing involvement. A healthy spiritual life could bring greater balance to your student life.

And Others

Additional support centers that students may wish to visit include offices for financial aid, students with disabilities or learning differences, housing, diversity, student organizations, athletics, continuing education, international students, child care, and many others. Refer to your college website or the college directory for information about the many, many services that can be part of your college experience.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Why It Matters: College Success," taken from English Composition I. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License**: CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from "Habits for Success," taken from Basic Reading and Writing. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from College Success. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Active Listening in the Classroom. **Authored by:** Heather Syrett. **Provided by:** Austin Community College. **License:** *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

Answers

Exercise 2.3.1

Think about the differences in the attitudes of these three students and how they approach their classes. One's attitude toward learning, toward going to class, and toward the whole college experience is a huge factor in how successful a student will be. Make it your goal to attend every class; don't even think about not going. Going to class is the first step in engaging in your education by interacting with the instructor and other students. Here are some reasons why it's important to attend every class:

Miss a class and you'll miss *something*, even if you never know it. Even if a friend gives you notes for the class, they cannot contain *everything* said or shown by the instructor or written on the board for emphasis or questioned or commented on by other students. What you miss might affect your grade or your enthusiasm for the course. Why go to college at all if you're not going to *go* to college? While some students may say that you don't have to go to every class to do well on a test, that is very often a myth. Do you want to take that risk? Your final grade often reflects how you think about course concepts, and you will think more often and more clearly when engaged in class discussions and hearing the comments of other students. You can't get this by borrowing class notes from a friend. Research shows there is a correlation between absences from class and lower grades. It may be that missing classes causes lower grades or that students with lower grades miss more classes. Either way, missing classes and lower grades can be intertwined in a downward spiral of achievement. Your instructor will note your absences, even in a large class. In addition to making a poor impression, you reduce your opportunities for future interactions. You might not ask a question the next class because of the potential embarrassment of the instructor saying that was covered in the last class, which you apparently missed. Nothing is more insulting to an instructor than when you skip a class and then show up to ask, "Did I miss anything important?" You might be tempted to skip a class because the instructor is "boring," but it's more likely that you found the class boring because you weren't very attentive or didn't appreciate how the instructor was teaching. You paid a lot of money for your tuition. Get your money's worth!

This page titled 2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner

Understanding Yourself as a Learner

To succeed in college—or any situation where you must master new concepts and skills—it helps to know what makes you tick. For decades, educational researchers and organizational psychologists have examined how people take in and assimilate new information, how some people learn differently than others, and what conditions make students and workers most productive. Here are some questions that will help you understand yourself as a learner:

- **What is your learning style?** For the purposes of this chapter, learning style refers to the way you prefer to take in new information: by seeing, by listening, or through some other channel. (For more information, see the section on learning styles).
- **What times of day are you most productive?** If your energy peaks early, you might benefit from blocking out early morning time for studying or writing. If you are a night owl, set aside a few evenings a week for schoolwork.
- **How much clutter can you handle in your work space?** Some people work fine at a messy desk and know exactly where to find what they need in their stack of papers; however, most people benefit from maintaining a neat, organized space.
- **How well do you juggle potential distractions in your environment?** If you can study at home without being tempted to turn on the television, check your social media, fix yourself a snack, and so on, you could make home your work space. However, if you need a less distracting environment to stay focused, you may be able to find a nook on your college campus or in your community.
- **Does a little background noise help or hinder your productivity?** Some people work better when listening to background music or the low hum of conversation in a coffee shop. Others need total silence.
- **When you work with a partner or group, do you stay on task?** A study partner or group can sometimes be invaluable. However, working this way takes extra planning and effort, so be sure to use the time productively. If you find that group study sessions turn into social occasions, you may study better on your own.
- **How do you manage stress?** Accept that at certain points in the semester, you will feel stressed out. In your day-to-day routine, make time for activities that help you reduce stress, such as exercising, playing a musical instrument, playing a sport, hanging out with friends, or just scheduling downtime to relax.

Learning Styles

Most people have one channel that works best for them when it comes to taking in new information. Knowing yours can help you develop strategies for studying, time management, and note-taking that work especially well for you.

To begin identifying your learning style, think about how you would go about the process of assembling a piece of furniture. Which of these options sounds most like you?

1. You would carefully look over the diagrams in the assembly manual first so you could picture each step in the process.
2. You would silently read the directions through, step by step, and then look at the diagrams afterward.
3. You would read the directions aloud and/or have someone explain the steps to you.
4. You would start putting the pieces together and figure out the process through trial and error, consulting the directions as you worked.

Now read the following explanations. Again, think about whether each description sounds like you.

- If you chose (a), you may be a visual learner. You understand ideas best when they are presented in a visual format, such as a flowchart, a diagram, or text with clear headings and many photos or illustrations.
- If you chose (b), you may be a verbal learner. You understand ideas best through reading and writing about them and taking detailed notes.
- If you chose (c), you may be an auditory learner. You understand ideas best through listening. You learn well from spoken lectures or books on tape.
- If you chose (d), you may be a kinesthetic learner. You learn best through doing, and prefer hands-on activities. In long lectures, fidgeting may help you focus.

Note

> If you want to get more in-depth into figuring out your dominant learning style, try this questionnaire.

Your learning style does not completely define you as a student. Auditory learners can comprehend a flow chart, and kinesthetic learners can sit still long enough to read a book. However, if you do have one dominant learning style, you can work with it to get the most out of your classes and study time. Table 1.3 “Learning Style Strategies” lists some tips for maximizing your learning style.

Table 1.3 - Learning Style Strategies

Learning Style	Strategies
Visual	• When possible, represent concepts visually—in charts, diagrams, or sketches. • Use a visual format for taking notes on reading assignments or lectures. • Use different-colored highlighters or pens to color-code information as you read. • Use visual organizers, such as maps, flowcharts, etc., to help you plan writing assignments. • Use colored pens, highlighters, or the review feature of your word-processing program to revise and edit writing.
Verbal	• Use the instructional features in course texts—summaries, chapter review questions, glossaries, and so on—to aid your studying. • Take notes on your reading assignments. • Rewrite or condense reading notes and lecture notes to study. • Summarize important ideas in your own words. • Use informal writing techniques, such as brainstorming, free writing, blogging, or posting on a class discussion forum to generate ideas for writing assignments. • Re-read and take notes on your writing to help you revise and edit.
Auditory	• Ask your instructor’s permission to tape-record lectures to supplement your notes. • Read parts of your textbook or notes aloud when you study. • If possible, obtain an audio book version of important course texts. Make use of supplemental audio materials, such as CDs or DVDs. • Talk through your ideas with other students when studying or when preparing for a writing assignment. • Read your writing aloud to help you draft, revise, and edit.
Kinesthetic	• When you read or study, use techniques that will keep your hands in motion, such as highlighting or taking notes. • Use tactile study aids, such as flash cards or study guides you design yourself. • Use self-stick notes to record ideas for writing. These notes can be physically reorganized easily to help you determine how to shape your paper. • Walk around while reading; walk and talk into a tape recorder when drafting. • Use a physical activity, such as running or swimming, to help you break through writing blocks. • Take breaks during studying to stand, stretch, or move around.

Defining Multimodal Learning

In the college setting, you’ll probably discover that instructors teach their course materials according to the method they think will be most effective for students overall. Thus, regardless of your individual learning preference, you will probably be asked to engage in all types of learning. For instance, even though you consider yourself to be a “visual learner,” you will still probably have to write papers in some of your classes. Research suggests that it’s good for the brain to learn in new ways and that learning in

different modalities can help learners become more well-rounded. Consider the following statistics on how much content students absorb through different learning methods:

- 10 percent of content they *read*
- 20 percent of content they *hear*
- 30 percent of content they *visualize*
- 50 percent of what they both *visualize and hear*
- 70 percent of what they *say*
- 90 percent of what they *say and do*

The range of these results underscores the importance of mixing up the ways in which you study and engage with learning materials.

You might also discover that you prefer more than one learning style. Applying more than one learning style is known as multimodal learning. This strategy is useful not only for students who prefer to combine learning styles, but also for those who may not know which learning style works best for them. It's also a good way to mix things up and keep learning fun.

For example, consider how you might combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles for a biology class. For visual learning, you could create flash cards containing images of individual animals and the species name. For auditory learning, you could have a friend quiz you on the flash cards. For kinesthetic learning, you could move the flash cards around on a board to show a food web (food chain).

> **Tip:**
>
> The material presented here about learning styles is just the tip of the iceberg. There are numerous other variations in how people learn. Some people like to act on information right away while others reflect on it first. Some people excel at mastering details and understanding concrete, tried and true ideas while others enjoy exploring abstract theories and innovative, even impractical ideas. For more information about how you learn, visit your school's academic resource center.

The following video will help you review the types of learning styles and see how they might relate to your study habits:

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.4.1

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Authored and Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0 (Attribution)
- Adapted from College Success **Authored and Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

This page last updated June 3, 2020.

This page titled 2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.5: Time Management

Case Study

Kai feels like he is struggling through his first semester of college. He works long hours at a job every night, lives at home, and helps care for his younger sister. When he gets home from work, he is ready for bed and is often too tired for homework or studying. He has trouble focusing in class and occasionally drifts off during lectures. Kai knows he needs to change some of his habits, but he feels too overwhelmed to know where to start.

Lots of students like Kai have to balance a lot of responsibilities, such as work, school, and family. Such competing demands can make it hard to get the most out of class time and assignments. The effort you put in to succeed in college will pay off, though, and there are ways that you can physically and mentally prepare to excel in class. Work-life balance is key and time-management allows you to succeed with maintaining this balance.

For work-life balance, we need to

- Eat healthy meals and snacks
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep
- Manage stress
- Talk to guidance counselors and instructors
- Have good time-management practices
- Know when we are trying to do too much and make decisions about our time.

Time management allows us to achieve our goals and at the same time remain healthy. In college you have increased freedom to structure your time as you please. With that freedom comes increased responsibility. High school teachers often take it upon themselves to track down students who miss class or forget assignments. College instructors, however, expect you to take full responsibility for managing yourself and getting your work done on time. There are three important steps in learning to effectively manage your time:

1. Identify your time management style
2. Create a schedule
3. Get better at prioritizing

After Kai decides to talk to his guidance counselor about his stress and difficulty balancing his activities, his guidance counselor recommends that Kai identify his time-management style and create a schedule. This will help him set time for homework, studying, work, and leisure activities so that he avoids procrastinating about his schoolwork. His counselor explains that if Kai sets aside a specific time to study every day—rather than simply studying when he feels like he has the time—his study habits will become more regular, which will improve Kai's learning.

At the end of their session, Kai and the counselor have put together a rough schedule for Kai to further refine as he goes through the next couple of weeks. What follows is a list of what they did and came up with.

Identify Your Time Management Style



Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Exercise 1

The following self-assessment survey can help you determine your time-management personality type. Read each question in the Questions column. Then read the possible responses. Select one response for each question. Each response should reflect what you probably would do in a given situation, not what you think is the "right" answer. Put a checkmark in the My Time Management Type column next to your likely response.

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
1	Your instructor just gave your class the prompts for your first essay, which is due in two weeks. How do you proceed from here?	a. Choose a prompt and begin working on a thesis immediately. Better to get it out of the way!	O Early bird
		b. Read over the prompts and let them sink in for a week or so. You'll still have one more week to finish the assignment, right?	O Balancing act
		c. Read the prompts and maybe start playing around with ideas, but wait to really start writing until the day before. You swear it's all in your head somewhere!	O Pressure cooker
		d. Depends on how much work you have for your other classes. But you might forget about it until a few hours before the assignment is due, and ask for an extension.	O Improviser
2	You are working on a group assignment that requires you to split up responsibilities with three other classmates. When would you typically finish your part?	a. First. Then you're done and don't have to worry about it. Plus it could give you time in case you want to tweak anything later.	O Early bird
		b. After one or two of the others have submitted their materials to the group, but definitely not last. You wanted to see how they approached it first.	O Balancing act

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
		c. Maybe last, but definitely before the assignment due date and hopefully before any of the other group members ask about it.	O Pressure cooker
		d. Definitely last. You'll wait until everyone else has done their work, so you can make sure you are not duplicating efforts. Whatever. This is why you hate group work.	O Improviser
3	Your instructor just shared the instructions for your next assignment and you read them but don't quite understand what he's asking for in a certain part. What would you probably do?	a. Send the instructor an email that afternoon. When he doesn't respond that night, email him again. This is your worst nightmare—you just want to know what he wants!!	O Early bird
		b. Send him an email asking for clarification, giving yourself enough time to wait for his response and then complete the assignment. Better to be safe than sorry.	O Balancing act
		c. Try to figure it out for yourself. You're pretty sure what he's trying to say, and you'll give it your best shot.	O Pressure cooker
		d. Don't say anything until after the assignment is due. Other people in the class felt the same way too, probably!	O Improviser
4	The course you are taking requires you to post in a weekly discussion forum by Sunday night each week so the class can talk about everyone's posts on Monday. When do you submit your posts?	a. Tuesday night, after the first day of class that week. Then it's out of the way.	O Early bird
		b. Thursday or Friday night. You want to let the week's discussion sink in a little so you can collect your thoughts.	O Balancing act
		c. Sunday night. You always forget during the weekend!	O Pressure cooker
		d. Monday at 3 AM. That still counts as Sunday night, right?	O Improviser
5	You have an important assignment due Monday morning, and you have a social/work/family obligation that will keep you busy for most of the weekend. It is now the Wednesday before the assignment is due. How would you approach this dilemma?	a. You already finished it yesterday, the day it was assigned. Done!	O Early bird
		b. You tell yourself that you'll finish it by Friday night, and you manage this by chipping away at it over those 3 days. ...Little. By. Little.	O Balancing act
		c. You tell yourself that you'll finish it by Friday night, so you can have your weekend free, but you still have a little left to do on Sunday—no big deal.	O Pressure cooker
		d. You tell yourself that you'll take the weekend off, then stay up late on Sunday or wake up early on Monday to finish it. It's not a final or anything, and you have a life.	O Improviser

	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES: Which response most closely matches what you would do? In the right column, check one response (a, b, c or d) for each question.	MY TIME MANAGEMENT TYPE
6	You have to read 150 pages before your next class meeting. You have 4 days to do so. What would you most likely do?	a. 150 pages divided by 4 days means... a little less than 40 pages a day. You like to chunk it this way because then you'll also have time to go over your notes and highlights, and come up with questions for the instructor.	O Early bird
		b. 150 pages divided by...well ... 2 days (because it's been a long week), means 75 pages a day. Totally doable.	O Balancing act
		c. 150 pages, the day before it is due. You did this to yourself; it's fine.	O Pressure cooker
		d. How much time does it take to skim the text for keywords and/or find a summary online?	O Improviser

Assessing Your Responses

Which of the four basic time-management personality types did you select the most? Which did you select the least? Do you feel like these selections match the student you have been in the past? Has your previous way of doing things worked for you, or do you think it's time for a change? Remember, we can all always improve!

Learn more below about your tendencies. Review traits, strengths, challenges, and tips for success for each of the four time-management personality types.

The Early Bird

- **Traits**: You like to make checklists and feel great satisfaction when you can cross something off of your to-do list. When it comes to assignments, *you want to get started as soon as possible* (and maybe start brainstorming before that), because it lets you stay in control.
- **Strengths**: You know what you want and are driven to figure out how to achieve it. Motivation is never really a problem for you.
- **Challenges**: Sometimes you can get more caught up in getting things done as quickly as possible and don't give yourself enough time to really mull over issues in all of their complexity.
- **Tips for Success**: You're extremely organized and on top of your schoolwork, so make sure you take time to really enjoy learning in your classes. Remember, school isn't all deadlines and checkboxes—you also have the opportunity to think about big-picture intellectual problems that don't necessarily have clear answers.

The Balancing Act

- **Traits**: You're naturally gifted with keeping things balanced. Maybe it's a skill that you have developed over time; in any case, you should have the basic organizational skills to succeed in any class, as long as you keep your balance.
- **Strengths**: Your strength really lies in your ability to be well-rounded. You may not always complete assignments perfectly every time, but you are remarkably consistent and usually manage to do very well in classes.
- **Challenges**: Because you're so consistent, sometimes you can get in a bit of a rut and begin to coast in class, rather than really challenging yourself.
- **Tips for Success**: Instead of simply doing what works, use each class as an opportunity for growth by engaging thoughtfully with the material and constantly pushing the boundaries of your own expectations for yourself.

The Pressure Cooker

- **Traits**: You always get things done and almost always at the last minute.
- **Strengths**: You work well under pressure, and when you do finally sit down to accomplish a task, you can sit and work for hours. In these times, you can be extremely focused and shut out the rest of the world in order to complete what's needed.
- **Challenges**: You sometimes use your ability to work under pressure as an excuse to procrastinate. Sure, you can really focus when the deadline is tomorrow, but is it really the best work you could produce if you had a couple of days of cushion?
- **Tips for Success**: Give yourself small, achievable deadlines, and stick to them. Make sure they are goals that you really could (and would) achieve in a day. Then don't allow yourself to make excuses. You'll find that it's actually a lot more enjoyable to not be stressed out when completing schoolwork. Who would have known?

The Improviser

- **Traits**: You frequently wait until the last minute to do assignments, but it's because you've been able to get away with this habit in many classes.
- **Strengths**: You think quickly on your feet, and while this is a true strength, it also can be a crutch that prevents you from being really successful in a class.
- **Challenges**: As the saying goes, old habits die hard. If you find that you lack a foundation of discipline and personal accountability, it can be difficult to change, especially when the course material becomes challenging or you find yourself struggling to keep up with the pace of the class.
- **Tips for Success**: The good news is you can turn this around! Make a plan to organize your time and materials in a reasonable way, and really stick with it. Also, don't be afraid to ask your instructor for help, but be sure to do it before, rather than after, you fall behind

Create a Schedule

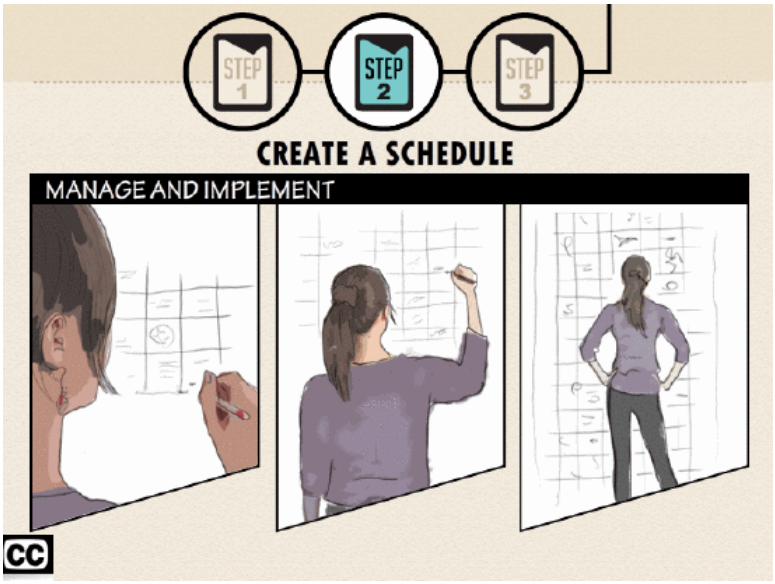


Figure: Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Although Kai knows that studying is important and he is trying to keep up with homework, he really needs to work on time management. This is challenging for many college students, especially ones with lots of responsibilities outside of school. Unlike high school classes, college classes meet less often, and college students are expected to do more independent learning, homework, and studying. The amount of time students spend on coursework outside of the physical classroom will vary, depending on the course (how rigorous it is and how many credits it's worth) and on the institution's expectations. However, a general rule is that the ratio of classroom time to study time is 1:2 or 1:3. That means that for every hour you spend in class, you should plan to spend two to three hours out of class working independently on course assignments. For example, if your composition class meets for one hour, three times a week, you're expected to devote from six to nine hours each week on reading assignments, writing assignments, etc.

If you account for all the classes you're taking in a given semester, the study time really adds up—and if it sounds like a lot of

work, it is! The only way to stay on top of the workload is by creating a schedule to help you manage your time. You might decide to use a weekly or monthly schedule—or both. Whatever you choose, the following tips can help you design a smart schedule that's easy to follow and stick with.

TIP

The two- to three-hour rule may sound intimidating. However, keep in mind that this is only a rule of thumb. Realistically, some courses will be more challenging than others, and the demands will ebb and flow throughout the semester. You may have trouble-free weeks and stressful weeks. When you schedule your classes, try to balance introductory-level classes with more advanced classes so that your work load stays manageable.

Start with Fixed Time Commitments

First off, mark down the commitments that don't allow any flexibility. These include class meetings, work hours, appointments, etc. Capturing the "fixed" parts of your schedule can help you see where there are blocks of time that can be used for other activities.

Kai's Schedule

Kai is taking four classes: Spanish 101, US History, College Algebra, and Introduction to Psychology. He also has a fixed work schedule of 27 hours a week.

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Sunday</th><th>Monday</th><th>Tuesday</th><th>Wednesday</th><th>Thursday</th><th>Friday</th><th>Saturday</th></tr>
<tr><td>8:00 AM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>9:00 AM</td><td></td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td>Spanish 101</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>10:00 AM</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td></td><td>US History I</td><td rowspan="3">Work</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:00 AM</td><td></td><td>College Algebra</td><td rowspan="2">Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)</td><td>College Algebra</td><td rowspan="2">Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)</td><td>College Algebra</td></tr>
<tr><td>12:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1:00 PM</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td><td rowspan="4">Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2:00 PM</td><td></td><td rowspan="6">Work</td><td rowspan="6">Work</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>3:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>7:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>8:00 PM</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Consider Your Studying and Homework Habits

When are you most productive? Are you a morning person or a night owl? Block out your study times accordingly. You'll also want to factor in any resources you might need. For instance, if you prefer to study very early or late in the day, and you're working on a research paper, you might want to check the library hours to make sure it's open when you need it.

Kai's Schedule

Since Kai's Spanish class starts his schedule at 9:00 every day, he decides to use that as the base for his schedule. He doesn't usually have trouble waking up in the mornings (except for on the weekends), so he decides to do a bit of studying before class. His Spanish practice is often something he can do while eating or traveling, so this gives him a bit of leniency with his schedule.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7:00 AM							
8:00 AM		HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	HW: Spanish 101	
9:00 AM		Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	Spanish 101	
10:00 AM		US History I	HW: Spanish 101	US History I	HW: Spanish 101	US History I	Work
11:00 AM		College Algebra	Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)	College Algebra	Intro to Psychology (ends at 12:30)	College Algebra	
12:00 PM		HW: Spanish 101		HW: Spanish 101		HW: Spanish 101	
1:00 PM	HW: Spanish 101	Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)		Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)		Work (start 12:30 end 4:30)	HW: Spanish 101
2:00 PM	HW: US History I		Work		Work		HW: Intro to Psych
3:00 PM							
4:00 PM							
5:00 PM		HW: College Algebra		HW: College Algebra		HW: College Algebra	
6:00 PM							
7:00 PM							
8:00 PM		HW: Intro to Psych		HW: Intro to Psych			
9:00 PM			HW: US History I		HW: US History I		
10:00 PM							

Plan Ahead

Even if you prefer weekly over monthly schedules, write reminders for yourself and keep track of any upcoming projects, papers, or exams. You will also want to prepare for these assignments in advance. Most students eventually discover (the hard way) that cramming for exams the night before and waiting until the last minute to start on a term paper is a poor strategy. Procrastination creates a lot of unnecessary stress, and the resulting final product—whether an exam, lab report, or paper—is rarely your best work. Try simple things to break down large tasks, such as setting aside an hour or so each day to work on them during the weeks leading up to the deadline. If you get stuck, get help from your instructor early, rather than waiting until the day before an assignment is due.

Consider Leisure Time

TIP

When you look at Kai's schedule, you can see that he's left open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings. While he plans on using Sundays to complete larger assignments when he needs to, he's left Friday and Saturday evenings open for leisure.

It might seem impossible to leave room in your schedule for fun activities, but every student needs and deserves to socialize and relax on a regular basis. Try to make this time something you look forward to and count on, and use it as a reward for getting things done. You might reserve every Friday or Saturday evening for going out with friends, for example. Or, if a club you're interested in meets on Thursdays during a time you've reserved for studying, try to reschedule your study time so you can do both.

Exercise 2

Now that you have considered ways to create a schedule, you can practice making one that will help you succeed academically. **The California Community College's Online Education site** has a free source for populating a study schedule based on your individual course load. For this exercise, you will develop a weekly schedule and a semester calendar.

1. Working with your class schedule, map out a week-long schedule of study time. Try to apply the "two- to three-hour" rule. Be sure to include any other nonnegotiable responsibilities, such as a job or child care duties.
2. Use your course syllabi to record exam dates and due dates for major assignments in a calendar (paper or electronic). Use a star, highlighting, or other special marking to set off any days or weeks that look especially demanding.
3. If you have a tendency to forget, put your schedule into the appointment calendar on your phone if you have one. Then set alerts for each of those study "appointments."

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.5.1

The video above talks about the importance of balancing school and work, and suggests 5 strategies to help you.

Get Better at Prioritizing

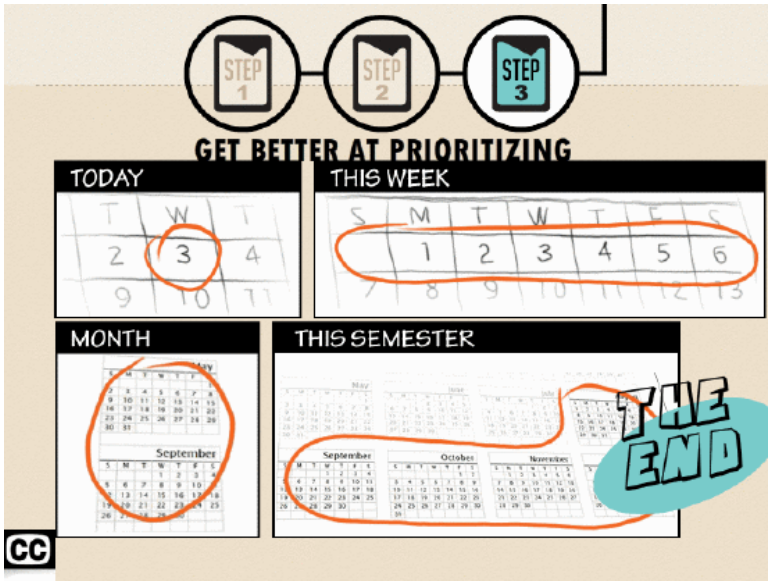


Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Due dates are important. Set your short and long-term goals accordingly. Ask yourself the following:

- What needs to get done today?
- What needs to get done this week?
- What needs to get done by the end of the first month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the second month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the semester?

Your time is valuable. Treat it accordingly by getting the most you can out of it.

Above all, avoid procrastination. Procrastination is the kiss of death because it's difficult to catch up once you've fallen behind. Do you have a problem with procrastination? Be on your guard so that it doesn't become an issue for you.

Procrastination Checklist

Do any of the following descriptions apply to you?

- My paper is due in two days and I haven't really started writing it yet.
- I've had to pull an all-nighter to get an assignment done on time.
- I've turned in an assignment late or asked for an extension when I really didn't have a good excuse not to get it done on time.
- I've worked right up to the minute an assignment was due.
- I've underestimated how long a reading assignment would take and didn't finish it in time for class.
- I've relied on the Internet for information (like a summary of a concept or a book) because I didn't finish the reading on time.

If these sound like issues you've struggled with in the past, consider whether you have the tendency to procrastinate and how you want to deal with it in your future classes. You're already spending a lot of time, energy, and money on the classes you're taking—don't let all of that go to waste!

Strategies to Combat Procrastination

Below are some effective strategies for overcoming procrastination:

1. **Keep your studying "bite-sized."** When confronted with 150 pages of reading or 50 problems to solve, it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Try breaking it down: What if you decide that you will read for 45 minutes or that you will solve 10 problems? That sounds much more manageable.
2. **Turn off your phone, close your chat windows, and block distracting Web sites.** The best advice we've ever heard is to treat your studying as if you're in a movie theater—just turn it off.
3. **Set up a reward system.** If you read for 40 minutes, you can check your phone for 5 minutes. But keep in mind that reward-based systems only work if you stick to an honor system.
4. **Study in a place reserved for studying ONLY.** Your bedroom may have too many distractions (or temptations, such as taking a nap), so it may be best to avoid it when you're working on school assignments.
5. **Use checklists.** Make your incremental accomplishments visible. Some people take great satisfaction and motivation from checking items off a to-do list. Be very specific when creating this list, and clearly describe each task one step at a time.

In the following video, Joseph Clough shares key strategies for conquering procrastination once and for all.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.5.1

Staying Consistent: Time Management Dos and Don’ts

Setting up a schedule is easy. Sticking with it, however, may create challenges. A schedule that looked great on paper may prove to be unrealistic. Sometimes, despite students’ best intentions, they end up procrastinating or pulling all-nighters to finish a paper or study for an exam.

Keep in mind, however, that your weekly schedule and semester calendar are time-management tools. Like any tools, their effectiveness depends on the user: you. If you leave a tool sitting in the box unused (e.g., if you set up your schedule and then forget about it), it will not help you complete the task. And if, for some reason, a particular tool or strategy is not getting the job done, you need to figure out why and maybe try using something else.

With that in mind, read the list of time-management dos and don’ts. Keep this list handy as a reference you can use throughout the semester to “troubleshoot” if you feel like your schoolwork is getting off track.

Dos

1. Set aside time to review your schedule or calendar regularly and update or adjust them as needed.
2. Be realistic when you schedule study time. Do not plan to write your paper on Friday night when everyone else is out socializing. When Friday comes, you might end up abandoning your plans and hanging out with your friends instead.
3. Be honest with yourself about where your time goes. Do not fritter away your study time on distractions like e-mail and social networking sites.
4. Accept that occasionally your work may get a little off track. No one is perfect.
5. Accept that sometimes you may not have time for all the fun things you would like to do.
6. Recognize times when you feel overextended. Sometimes you may just need to get through an especially demanding week. However, if you feel exhausted and overworked all the time, you may need to scale back on some of your commitments.
7. Have a plan for handling high-stress periods, such as final exam week. Try to reduce your other commitments during those periods—for instance, by scheduling time off from your job. Build in some time for relaxing activities, too.

Don’ts

1. Do not procrastinate on challenging assignments. Instead, break them into smaller, manageable tasks that can be accomplished one at a time.
2. Do not fall into the trap of “all-or-nothing” thinking: “There is no way I can fit in a three-hour study session today, so I will just wait until the weekend.” Extended periods of free time are hard to come by, so find ways to use small blocks of time productively. For instance, if you have a free half hour between classes, use it to preview a chapter or brainstorm ideas for an essay.
3. Do not fall into the trap of letting things slide and promising yourself, “I will do better next week.” When next week comes, the accumulated undone tasks will seem even more intimidating, and you will find it harder to get them done.
4. Do not rely on caffeine and sugar to compensate for lack of sleep. These stimulants may temporarily perk you up, but your brain functions best when you are rested.

TIP

The key to managing your time effectively is consistency. Completing the following tasks will help you stay on track throughout the semester.

1. Establish regular times to “check in” with yourself to identify and prioritize tasks and plan how to accomplish them. Many people find it is best to set aside a few minutes for this each day and to take some time to plan at the beginning of each week.
2. For the next two weeks, focus on consistently using whatever time-management system you have set up. Check in with yourself daily and weekly, stick to your schedule, and take note of anything that interferes. At the end of the two weeks, review your schedule and determine whether you need to adjust it.
3. Review the preceding list of dos and don’ts.
    1. Identify at least two habits from the “Dos” list that you could use to improve your time-management skills.

2. Identify the habit from the “Don’ts” list that you are most likely to slip into as the semester gets busier. What could you do to combat this habit?

Writing at Work

If you are part of the workforce, you have probably established strategies for accomplishing job-related tasks efficiently. How could you adapt these strategies to help you be a successful student? For instance, you might sync up your school and work schedules on an electronic calendar. Instead of checking in with your boss about upcoming work deadlines, establish a buddy system where you check in with a friend about school projects. Give school the same priority you give to work.

In the following Alleyoop Advice video, Alleyoop (Angel Aquino) discusses what many students discover about college: there is a lot of free time—and just as many challenges to balance free time with study time.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 2.5.1

Additional Resources:

- Here are **ways to plan time (semester, week, days)** from Ohio University’s Academic Advancement Center. Ohio University uses a quarterly system (11 weeks); you may need adapt their schedule to reflect your academic needs.
- Access **The 168-Hour Exercise—How Do I Use My Time Now?** from Ohio University’s Academic Advancement Center. It can help you understand how you use your time now and decide if you need to make changes.
- Here is a **time management calculator** for first-year students at the University of Texas El Paso.

Contributors and Attributions

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY:

- Adapted from Your Use of Time from *College Success*. **Authored and provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Class Preparation from *College Success*. **Authored and provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Writing for Success **Authored and provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page last updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 2.5: Time Management is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.4: Time Management by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

2.6: Key Takeaways

- College success depends on consistently studying, attending class, listening actively, and participating, as well as connecting yourself to relevant resources on campus.
- Reading and writing help you become a better thinker, and these are some of the skills most in demand by employers.
- Knowing your learning style and working with that can help you study and learn more effectively.
- Managing your time well is a major key for college success, as is avoiding procrastination.

This page titled 2.6: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 1.5: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3: WRITING AND THE ART OF RHETORIC

3.1: Writing as Conversation

3.2: What is Academic Writing?

3.3: Critical Thinking

3.4: The Art of Rhetoric

3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

3.6: Rhetorical Analysis

3.7: Key Takeaways

This page titled 3: Writing and the Art of Rhetoric is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

3.1: Writing as Conversation

Writing as Conversation

Writing does not happen in a vacuum but within a specific context and time. The process of writing can be better understood if it is viewed as a conversation between writer and reader within a specific context and time, rather than a static text. As a college student, you are expected to engage with, and join, the conversations about myriad topics --not only with classmates, but also writers who are experts in their fields. Imagine you are entering a room buzzing with different conversations...you choose to enter one of the conversations. Most of you have learned the required etiquette needed to not only join the conversation politely, but also to add something of value. Joining the world of written conversations is not much different and has its own set of etiquette and rules.

In this course, you will learn all about engaging with written texts. As someone who has graduated from high school, you have already learned how to write cohesive paragraphs and short essays. This course will teach you to engage critically with texts written by experts, by adding your written opinions. You will need to hone your research skills to actively seek out the latest conversations in specific subjects, and fine-tune your methods of presentation to join in the discussion.



Figure: by Pixabay

Writing as a Conversation That Changes Over Time

Michael Charlton, Professor at Missouri Western State University, writes in his essay, "Understanding How Conversations Change Over Time" that we are surrounded by conversations with which we engage meaningfully. The following excerpt is adapted from his essay:

Writers make their claims in the real world where people with other opinions, values, beliefs, and experiences live. To make a claim is to enter into a conversation with these people. The rhetorician, Kenneth Burke, once famously described this as a parlor or party to which you have come late to find out that people are already in heated discussions about a topic. After you see who is part of the conversation and hear what they are saying, you begin to feel comfortable enough to offer your own take on the subject.

For example, you arrive somewhere to meet two friends and discover that they are discussing where to go to dinner or which movie to see. Each friend presents his or her argument, setting out evidence for why this restaurant or movie is a good choice, and each friend pokes holes in the other person's argument, pointing out why he or she would not enjoy that restaurant or movie. You are expected to take a role in this discussion. Maybe you take a stand with one friend over the other, or maybe you try to reach a compromise and propose a third restaurant or movie that everyone could accept. This can lead to even further discussion.

This discussion between three friends is somewhat like Burke's idea of the parlor, but there are differences. Eventually the conversation between the three friends will reach an end: they will go to dinner or a movie, perhaps, or they will all go home. Everyone entered into the conversation, made his or her claims, responded to other people, and went on with their lives. Burke, however, was talking about the conversations and arguments that take place in the larger culture and the world as a whole. In his

metaphor, the conversation never truly ends. A writer enters into it at a particular place and time and tries to react to everything that has come before. He or she may even be influential in changing the direction or tone of the conversation by looking at it from a new angle or focusing on a different aspect of it; for example, maybe the three friends need to consider whether there is a certain type of food or movie one of them dislikes or maybe the three friends need to consider a different activity.

For most complex social issues, the conversation never truly ends.

It may, however, change over time.

For most complex social issues, the conversation never truly ends. It may, however, change over time. This can happen for many reasons. Social values may change in the larger culture, such as the growing focus on children's welfare that led to an increase in child labor laws and child protective services in the early twentieth century. It may be the impact of large historical events, such as the impact the 9/11 attacks had on public perceptions of airport safety and screening procedures. Or maybe new scientific or other sorts of data raise concerns, such as the shifting dialog over climate change and global warming. It may even be that new groups of people enter the conversation, such as the increased prominence in recent years, of advocates for equality regardless of sexual orientation.

One widely discussed social trend that continues to inform American and global discourse is the increasing prominence of women in the workplace during and after the Second World War. At that time, this was a controversial development for many people, who felt that women were leaving traditional gender roles and the home in order to pursue work conventionally identified with men. (Although, as some historians have noted, women have always played an important role in businesses from agriculture to manufacturing, and so this conversation is far older than the mid-twentieth century.)

Most viewers watching an educational film made in 1959 entitled *The Trouble with Women* (see video links at the bottom of the page) find its depiction of female workers to be so incredibly dated that it is almost comical. Changes in social values have rendered the film's discussion between two men about female employees ridiculous. Both the "con" side (with his insistence that female workers are inherently inferior) and the "pro" side (with his argument that what he calls "gals" or "girls" can be just as good) have no mainstream place in contemporary discussions of gender in the workplace. The entire question up for discussion (can women fit into the workplace?) is one that has been answered by fifty years of history in which women have fully integrated into the American workplace, and social values around gender issues and equality have changed.

However, this does not mean that the conversation has ended. Rather, the conversation about whether women should be allowed in the workplace has morphed into a discussion of how all genders are treated in the workplace. Contemporary discussions are more likely to focus on income disparity; the balance between family life, childcare, and the workplace; why certain professions are still dominated by one gender; sexual harassment; etc. Among other factors, the increased prominence of women and the rise in social movements, such as second wave feminism, gave women a greater voice in the public sphere and a greater ability to steer the conversation.

Conversations do not change overnight. A speech made by Ford about women's rights and women in the workplace in 1975, would be very different from a speech made by Google to promote the role women play in leadership positions in the company. What changes in the conversation do you think might have taken place between the educational film and speech in 1975? What changes in the conversation take place between Ford's speech and what is essentially a public relations commercial for Google? What might it say about the current conversation around women in the workplace that Google felt it necessary to create this video? How has the presentation of female professionals changed from 1959 to this 2011 spot? Why might Google be less interested in contemporary issues like income disparity?

Writing to Become Part of a Community and Conversation

The video below discusses every day and academic writing in the context of establishing networks, or conversations with other people carrying on a conversation. It also discusses how academic writing is different from other types of writing. Ultimately, all writing seeks to establish and maintain networks, though these will differ in your personal/social and academic worlds.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 3.1.1

Additional Materials

- *Video: The Trouble with Women*
- Video: First Lady Betty Ford delivers revolutionary speech on the need for equal rights of women in 1975
- Video: Women in leadership at Google

Contributors and Attributions

- Essays as Conversation. Revision and adaptation of the page Writing Commons: Michael Charlton's Understanding How Conversations Change Over Time . **Authored by**: Susan Oaks. **Provided by**: Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **Project**: College Writing. **License**: ***CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial***

This page titled 3.1: Writing as Conversation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.1: Writing as Conversation by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2: What is Academic Writing?

Speaking versus Writing

Now that we've established that writing adds your own view to a conversation that is already in place, we need to distinguish between speaking and writing, for while both mediums add to conversations, writing -- and especially academic writing -- does so with very different means. L. Lennie Irwin, in "What is academic writing?" talks about how the biggest problem first-year writers face is not understanding the differences between spoken and written conversation. The following excerpt talks about these differences and the challenges a writer faces as opposed to a speaker:

> The biggest problem I see in first-year writers is a poor sense of the writing situation in general. To illustrate this problem, let's look at the difference between speaking and writing. When we speak, we inhabit the communication situation bodily in three dimensions, but in writing we are confined within the two-dimensional setting of the flat page (though writing for the web—or multimodal writing—is changing all that).

- Writing resembles having a blindfold over our eyes and our hands tied behind our backs: we can't see exactly whom we're talking to or where we are.
- Separated from our audience in place and time, we imaginatively have to create this context.
- Our words on the page are silent, so we must use punctuation and word choice to communicate our tone.

We can't see our audience to gauge how our communication is being received or if there will be some kind of response. It's the same space we share right now as you read this essay. Novice writers often write as if they were mumbling to themselves in the corner with no sense that their writing will be read by a reader or any sense of the context within which their communication will be received. What's the moral here?

TIP

Developing your "writer's sense" about communicating within the writing situation is the most important thing you should learn in freshman composition. What is this "writing situation?" This situation is explained further in detail elsewhere and consists of:

- knowing your audience
- knowing the occasion or context
- conveying the message clearly
- understanding the formats and genres

Developing your "writer's sense" about communicating within the writing situation is the most important thing you should learn in freshman composition. Figure 1, below, depicting the writing situation, presents a wonderful image describing all the complexities involved in the writing situation.

Looking More Closely at the "Academic Writing" Situation

Writing in college is a fairly specialized writing situation, and it has developed its own codes and conventions that you need to have a keen awareness of if you are going to write successfully in college. Let's break down the writing situation in college: Who's your audience? Primarily the professor and possibly your classmates (though you may be asked to include a secondary outside audience). What's the occasion or context? An assignment given by the teacher within a learning context and designed to have you learn and demonstrate your learning. What's your message? It will be your learning or the interpretation gained from your study of the subject matter. What's your purpose? To show your learning and get a good grade (or to accomplish the goals of the writing assignment). What documents/ genres are used? The essay is the most frequent type of document used. So far, this list looks like nothing new. You've been writing in school toward teachers for years. What's different in college?

Common Academic Writing Myths

Students are often stymied by myths they have adopted throughout their schooling about writing, especially academic writing. All the myths listed below result in problematic writing.

Myth #1:

The “Paint by Numbers” myth. Some writers believe they must perform certain steps in a particular order to write “correctly.” **Truth:** Rather than being a lock-step linear process, writing is “recursive.” That means we cycle through and repeat the various activities of the writing process many times as we write.

Myth #2:

Writers only start writing when they have everything figured out. **Truth:** Writing is not like putting away ironed and folded clothing. Writers figure out much of what they want to write as they write it. Rather than waiting, get some writing on the page—even with gaps or problems. You can come back to patch up rough spots.

Myth #3:

Perfect the first draft. **Truth:** We put unrealistic expectations on early drafts, either by focusing too much on the impossible task of making them perfect (which can limit the development of our ideas), or by making too little effort because we don’t care or know about their inevitable problems. Nobody writes perfect first drafts; polished writing takes lots of revision.

Myth #4:

Some have got it; I don’t—the genius fallacy. **Truth:** When you see your writing ability as something fixed or out of your control (as if it were in your genetic code), then you won’t believe you can improve as a writer and are likely not to make any efforts in that direction. With effort and study, you can improve as a writer. I promise.

Myth #5:

Good grammar is good writing. **Truth:** When people say “I can’t write,” what they often mean is that they have problems with grammatical correctness. Writing, however, is about more than just grammatical correctness. Good writing is a matter of achieving a desired effect upon an intended audience. Plus, as we saw in myth #3, no one writes perfect first drafts. Finally, there is no point in having great grammar if you aren't saying anything worth saying with your writing.

Myth #6:

The Five Paragraph Essay. Some say, avoid it at all costs; while others believe no other way to write exists. **Truth:** With an introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion, the five paragraph essay is a format you should know, but one which you will outgrow. You’ll have to gauge every writing assignment to see whether, and how, this format is useful for you.

Myth #7:

Never use “I”. **Truth:** Adopting this formal stance of objectivity implies a distrust (almost fear) of informality and often leads to artificial, puffed-up prose. Although some writing situations will call on you to avoid using “I” (for example, a lab report), much college writing can be done in a middle, semi-formal style where it is ok to use “I.”

College Writing Assignments: What's Expected

We've seen how college assignments have different expectations than high school assignments, but what about writing assignments specifically? How is college academic writing different from grade school essays? Lee Ann Carroll, a professor at Pepperdine University, performed a study of student writing in college and had this description of the kind of writing you will be

doing in college: *What are usually called 'writing assignments' in college might more accurately be called 'literacy tasks' because they require much more than the ability to construct correct sentences or compose neatly organized paragraphs with topic sentences. . . . Projects calling for high levels of critical literacy in college typically require knowledge of research skills, ability to read complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame.*

Academic writing is always a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting. Writing the paper is never "just" the writing part. To be successful in this kind of writing, you must be completely aware of what the professor expects you to do and accomplish with that particular writing task. For a moment, let's explore more deeply the elements of the college writing "literacy task."

Knowledge of Research Skills

In school, research has perhaps meant checking on Google and Wikipedia. College, however, will require you to search for and find more in-depth information. You'll need to know how to find information in the library, especially what is available from online databases that contain scholarly articles. Researching is also a process, so you'll need to learn how to focus and direct a research project and how to keep track of all your source information. Realize that researching represents a crucial component of most college writing assignments, and you will need to devote lots of time to researching.

The Ability to Read Complex Texts

Whereas your previous writing in school might have been based on your experiences, college writing typically asks you to write on unfamiliar topics. Whether you're reading your textbook, a short story, or scholarly articles from research, your ability to write well will be based upon the quality of your reading. In addition to reading attentively, you'll need to think critically as you read: separating fact from opinion, recognizing biases and assumptions, and making inferences. Inferences are how we, as readers, connect the dots: an inference is a belief (or statement) about something unknown made on the basis of something known. You smell smoke; you infer fire. Inferences are conclusions or interpretations that we arrive at, based upon the known factors we discover from our reading. When you, then, write to argue for these interpretations, your job is to get readers to make the same inferences you have made.

The Understanding of Key Disciplinary Concepts

Each discipline whether it is English, Psychology, or History has its own key concepts (ideas), and language, for describing their specific ways of understanding the world. What Is "Academic" Writing? Don't kid yourself that your professors' writing assignments are asking for your opinion on the topic from just your experience. They want to see you apply and use in your writing the concepts you've read about. This is called text-based writing. Though different from a multiple-choice exam, academic writing also requires you to demonstrate your learning. So whatever writing assignment you receive, inspect it closely for what concepts it asks you to bring into your writing.

Strategies for Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Responding Critically to New Information

To organize your research, you need to develop the skill of a seasoned traveler who can be dropped in any city in the world and is able to navigate his way. Each writing assignment asks you to navigate through a new terrain of information, so you must develop ways to grasp new subject matter in order, and then to use it in your writing. We have already seen the importance of reading and researching for these literacy tasks, but after finding the information, you will need to learn ways of sorting and finding meaningful patterns in this information.

College Assignments & the Cognitive Domain of Learning

The cognitive domain of learning is divided into six main learning-skill levels, or learning-skill stages, which are arranged hierarchically—moving from the simplest of functions like remembering and understanding, to more complex learning skills, like applying and analyzing, to the most complex skills—evaluating and creating. The lower levels are more straightforward and fundamental, and the higher levels are more sophisticated. College assignments require you to work at the higher levels. See Figure 1, below.

Figure 1: The New Version of Bloom's Taxonomy

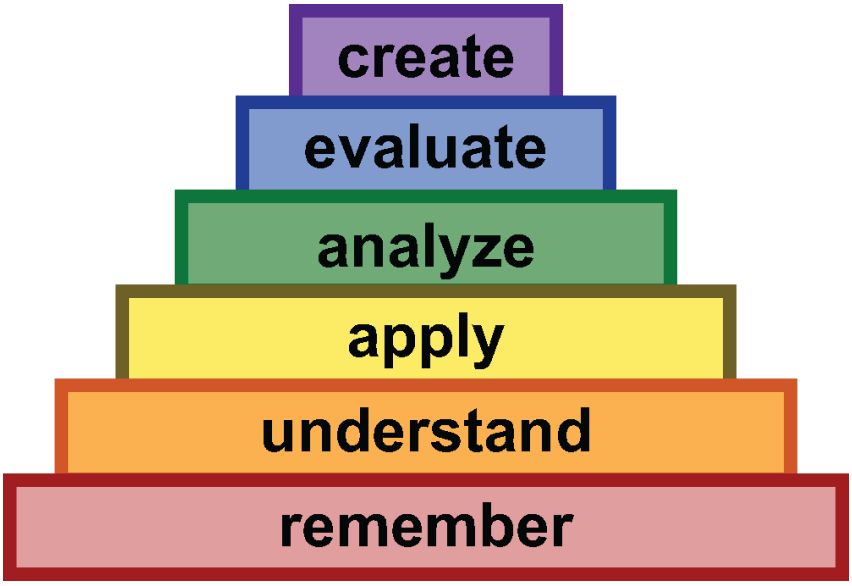


Figure: ." Writing@CSU. 2010. Web. 10 March 2010. Used by permission from Mike Palmquist.

The following table describes the six main skill sets within the cognitive domain.

Table 2.2: Main Skill Sets within the Cognitive Domain

MAIN SKILL LEVELS WITHIN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES OF RELATED LEARNING SKILLS (specific actions related to the skill set)
Remembering	When you are skilled in remembering, you can recognize or recall knowledge you've already gained, and you can use it to produce or retrieve or recite definitions, facts, and lists. *Remembering may be how you studied in grade school or high school, but college will require you to do more with the information.*	identify · relate · list · define · recall · memorize · repeat · record · name
Understanding	Understanding is the ability to grasp or construct meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages. *Each college course will introduce you to new concepts, terms, processes, and functions. Once you gain a firm understanding of new information, you'll find it easier, perhaps later, to comprehend how or why something works.*	restate · locate · report · recognize · explain · express · identify · discuss · describe · discuss · review · infer · illustrate · interpret · draw · represent · differentiate · conclude

MAIN SKILL LEVELS WITHIN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES OF RELATED LEARNING SKILLS (specific actions related to the skill set)
Applying	When you apply, you use learned material (or you implement the material) in new and concrete situations. *In college you will be tested or assessed on what you've learned in the previous levels. You will be asked to solve problems in new situations by applying understanding in new ways. You may need to relate abstract ideas to practical situations.*	apply · relate · develop · translate · use · operate · organize · employ · restructure · interpret · demonstrate · illustrate · practice · calculate · show · exhibit · dramatize
Analyzing	When you analyze, you have the ability to break down or distinguish the parts of material into its components, so that its organizational structure may be better understood. *At this level, you will have a clearer sense that you comprehend the content well. You will be able to answer questions such as what if, or why, or how something would work.*	analyze · compare · probe · inquire · examine · contrast · categorize · differentiate · contrast · investigate · detect · survey · classify · deduce · experiment · scrutinize · discover · inspect · dissect · discriminate · separate
Evaluating	With skills in evaluating, you are able to judge, check, and even critique the value of material for a given purpose. *At this level in college you will be able to think critically, Your understanding of a concept or discipline will be profound. You may need to present and defend opinions.*	judge · assess · compare · evaluate · conclude · measure · deduce · argue · decide · choose · rate · select · estimate · validate · consider · appraise · value · criticize · infer
Creating	With skills in creating, you are able to put parts together to form a coherent or unique new whole. You can reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing. *Creating requires originality and inventiveness. It brings together all levels of learning to theorize, design, and test new products, concepts or functions.*	compose · produce · design · assemble · create · prepare · predict · modify · plan · invent · formulate · collect · generalize · document combine · relate · propose · develop · arrange · construct · organize · originate · derive · write · propose

The following video from the Center for Learning Success at the Louisiana State University discusses Bloom's taxonomy learning levels with regard to student success in college.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 3.2.1

From Bloom's taxonomy of learning skills, you can see that thought and thinking can be understood as patterns—systems and schemes within the mind. There is order and structure in the way we think and in the way we process and internalize information.

As we look at patterns of thought, we can also think about the power of thought. As a result of many amazing and potent research and discoveries, the scientific community is learning a great deal about how plastic, malleable, and constantly changing the brain is. For example, the act of thinking—*just* thinking—can affect not only the way your brain works but also its physical shape and structure. The following video explores some of these discoveries, which relate to all the thinking and thoughts involved in college success.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 3.2.1

Contributors

- Adapted from College Writing. **Authored by:** Susan Oaks. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Authored and provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0
- Adapted from College Success. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Patterns of Thought. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from "What is Academic Writing?." **Authored by:** L. Lennie Irwin. **License:** CC-BY-NC-SA.

This page was most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 3.2: What is Academic Writing? is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.2: What is Academic Writing? by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.3: Critical Thinking

Writing and Critical Thinking

We have seen how writing in college requires you to use higher order thinking skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These higher level abilities require critical thinking, which is a core skill emphasized by college professors, not just for college academic life, but also for navigating the choices you make as a citizen and member of your family and different communities. This is because critical thinking skills are perhaps the most fundamental skills involved in making judgments and solving problems. You use them every day, and you can continue improving them.



Figure 3.3.1: (CC BY; Moyan Brenn via Flickr)

> The ability to think critically about a matter—to analyze a question, situation, or problem down to its most basic parts—is what helps us evaluate the accuracy and truthfulness of statements, claims, and information we read and hear. It is the sharp knife that, when honed, separates fact from fiction, honesty from lies, and the accurate from the misleading. We all use this skill to one degree or another almost every day. For example, we use critical thinking every day as we consider the latest consumer products and why one particular product is the best among its peers. Is it a quality product because a celebrity endorses it? Because a lot of other people may have used it? Because it is made by one company versus another? Or perhaps because it is made in one country or another? These are questions representative of critical thinking.
>
> The academic setting demands more of us in terms of critical thinking than everyday life. It demands that we evaluate information and analyze myriad issues. It is the environment where our critical thinking skills can be the difference between success and failure. In this environment, we must consider information in an analytical, critical manner. We must ask questions—What is the source of this information? Is this source an expert one, and what makes that so? Are there multiple perspectives to consider about an issue? Do multiple sources agree or disagree on an issue? Does quality research substantiate information or opinion? Do I have any personal biases that may affect my consideration of this information?
>
> It is only through purposeful, frequent, intentional questioning such as this that we can sharpen our critical thinking skills and improve as students, learners and researchers.
>
> —Dr. Andrew Robert Baker, *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom*

Defining Critical Thinking

Thinking comes naturally. You don't have to make it happen—it just does. But you can make it happen in different ways. For example, you can think positively or negatively. You can think with "heart," and you can think with rational judgment. You can also think strategically and analytically, as well as mathematically and scientifically. These are a few of multiple ways in which the mind can process thought.

What are some forms of thinking you use? When do you use them, and why?

As a college student, you are tasked with engaging and expanding your thinking skills. One of the most important of these skills is critical thinking. Critical thinking is important because it relates to nearly all tasks, situations, topics, careers, environments, challenges, and opportunities. It's not restricted to a particular subject area.

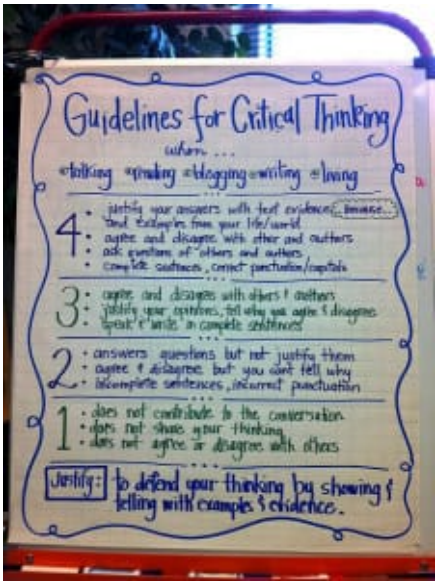


Figure 3.3.2:

Critical thinking is clear, reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. It means asking probing questions like, "How do we know?" or "Is this true in every case or just in this instance?" It involves being skeptical and challenging assumptions, rather than simply memorizing facts or blindly accepting what you hear or read.

Imagine, for example, that you're reading a history textbook. You wonder who wrote it and why because you detect certain assumptions in the writing. You find that the author has a limited scope of research focused only on a particular group within a population. In this case, your critical thinking reveals that there are "other sides to the story."

Who are critical thinkers, and what characteristics do they have in common? Critical thinkers are usually curious and reflective people. They like to explore and probe new areas and seek knowledge, clarification, and new solutions. They ask pertinent questions, evaluate statements and arguments, and they distinguish between facts and opinion. They are also willing to examine their own beliefs, possessing a manner of humility that allows them to admit lack of knowledge or understanding when needed. They are open to changing their mind. Perhaps most of all, they actively enjoy learning, and seeking new knowledge is a lifelong pursuit.

This may well be you!

No matter where you are on the road to being a critical thinker, you can always more fully develop your skills. Doing so will help you develop more balanced arguments, express yourself clearly, read critically, and absorb important information efficiently. Critical thinking skills will help you in any profession or any circumstance of life, from science to art to business to teaching.

Critical Thinking IS	Critical Thinking is NOT
Skepticism	Memorizing
Examining assumptions	Group thinking
Challenging reasoning	Blind acceptance of authority
Uncovering biases	Biased viewpoints

Critical Thinking in Action

The following video, from Lawrence Bland, presents the major concepts and benefits of critical thinking.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 3.3.1: Critical Thinking.wmv. Authored by: Lawrence Bland. *All Rights Reserved.* Standard YouTube license.

Critical Thinking and Logic

Critical thinking is fundamentally a process of questioning information and data. You may question the information you read in a textbook, or you may question what a politician or a professor or a classmate says. You can also question a commonly held belief or a new idea. With critical thinking, anything and everything is subject to question and examination.

Logic's Relationship to Critical Thinking

The word **logic** comes from the Ancient Greek *logike*, referring to the science or art of reasoning. Using logic, a person evaluates arguments and strives to distinguish between good and bad reasoning, or between truth and falsehood. Using logic, you can evaluate ideas or claims people make, make good decisions, and form sound beliefs about the world.[1]

Questions of Logic in Critical Thinking

Let's use a simple example of applying logic to a critical-thinking situation. In this hypothetical scenario, a man has a PhD in political science, and he works as a professor at a local college. His wife works at the college, too. They have three young children in the local school system, and their family is well known in the community.

The man is now running for political office. Are his credentials and experience sufficient for entering public office? Will he be effective in the political office? Some voters might believe that his personal life and current job, on the surface, suggest he will do well in the position, and they will vote for him.

In truth, the characteristics described don't guarantee that the man will do a good job. The information is somewhat irrelevant. What else might you want to know? How about whether the man had already held a political office and done a good job? In this case, we want to ask, "How much information is adequate in order to make a decision based on logic instead of assumptions?"

The following questions, also presented in Figure 1, below, are ones you may apply to formulate a logical, reasoned perspective in the above scenario or any other situation:

1. **What's happening?** Gather the basic information and begin to think of questions.
2. **Why is it important?** Ask yourself why it's significant and whether or not you agree.
3. **What don't I see?** Is there anything important missing?
4. **How do I know?** Ask yourself where the information came from and how it was constructed.
5. **Who is saying it?** What's the position of the speaker and what is influencing them?
6. **What else? What if?** What other ideas exist and are there other possibilities?



Figure: Critical Thinking Questions

Problem-Solving with Critical Thinking



Figure:

For most people, a typical day is filled with critical thinking and problem-solving challenges. In fact, critical thinking and problem-solving go hand-in-hand. They both refer to using knowledge, facts, and data to solve problems effectively. But with problem-solving, you are specifically identifying, selecting, and defending your solution. Below are some examples of using critical thinking to problem solve:

- Your roommate was upset and said some unkind words to you, which put a crimp in your relationship. You try to see through the angry behaviors to determine how you might best support your roommate and help bring your relationship back to a comfortable spot.
- Your campus club has been languishing because of lack of participation and funds. The new club president, though, is a marketing major and has identified some strategies to interest students in joining and supporting the club. Implementation is forthcoming.
- Your final art class project challenges you to conceptualize form in new ways. On the last day of class when students present their projects, you describe the techniques you used to fulfill the assignment. You explain why and how you selected that approach.
- Your math teacher sees that the class is not quite grasping a concept. She uses clever questioning to dispel anxiety and guide you to new understanding of the concept.
- You have a job interview for a position that you feel you are only partially qualified for although you really want the job and you are excited about the prospects. You analyze how you will explain your skills and experiences in a way to show that you are a good match for the prospective employer.
- You are doing well in college, and most of your college and living expenses are covered. But there are some gaps between

what you want and what you feel you can afford. You analyze your income, savings, and budget to better calculate what you will need to stay in college and maintain your desired level of spending.

Problem-Solving Action Checklist

Problem-solving can be an efficient and rewarding process, especially if you are organized and mindful of critical steps and strategies. Remember, too, to assume the attributes of a good critical thinker. If you are curious, reflective, knowledge-seeking, open to change, probing, organized, and ethical, your challenge or problem will be less of a hurdle, and you'll be in a good position to find intelligent solutions.

	STRATEGIES	ACTION CHECKLIST[2]
1	Define the problem	• Identify the problem • Provide as many supporting details as possible • Provide examples • Organize the information logically
2	Identify available solutions	• Use logic to identify your most important goals • Identify implications and consequences • Identify facts • Compare and contrast possible solutions
3	Select your solution	• Use gathered facts and relevant evidence • Support and defend solutions considered valid • Defend your solution

The following video demonstrates problem solving in our personal lives.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

It's Not About the Nail by Jason Headley. *All Rights Reserved.* Standard YouTube license.

While this video is a lighthearted take on relationship problems, it is true that problem solving in any relationship can be difficult, whether that relationship is between two people in an intimate relationship, or between two roommates, or between two friends.

Example of Relationship Problem Solving using Critical Thinking

Anika's roommate, Eli, was upset and he said some unkind words to her, which put a crimp in the relationship. Anika wants to try to see through the angry behaviors to determine how she might best support Eli and help bring the relationship back to a comfortable spot. How should Anika proceed?

First, let's help Anika identify the problem. How would you describe the problem? Here are some options:

- Eli behaved inappropriately
- Anika is being too sensitive
- Anika and Eli are probably not a great fit as roommates

The best problem description is the first one – Eli behaved inappropriately. All of us at some point get upset and say things at times that hurt others. That doesn't mean it's acceptable, but it also doesn't mean that Anika and Eli are unable to solve the problem and continue their relationship.

Now that Anika has identified the problem – Eli behaved inappropriately – what are some possible solutions? Here are some options:

- Anika should ignore Eli – eventually he'll figure out that he did something wrong and apologize.
- Anika should ask Eli to sit down and discuss the problem right away.
- Anika should give Eli a little space and then talk to him.

Ignoring Eli is probably not a good solution. While it's perfectly natural for Anika to be angry about Eli's unkind words and want to ignore him, that doesn't address the problem. The other two options are better solutions.

Think through the pros and cons of each of the two possible solutions. Which one do you think is best?

It's a great idea for Anika to sit down and discuss the problem with Eli – this is a much healthier option than ignoring the problem. Whether or not she talks to Eli right away is likely a judgment call depending on the situation. If Eli is really upset, it might be better to wait a little while until he calms down and can have a more productive discussion.

Anika observed that Eli seemed pretty upset, and so decided to wait a few hours before talking with him. When she did talk to him later that afternoon, Anika told Eli that she valued his friendship, but that his unkind words were hurtful to her.

Eli explained that he has been getting continually more upset since he got a poor grade on his French mid-term. He needs to pass the class for his major, and has been stressed about the situation. He apologized for his earlier words, and Anika forgave him.

By using problem-solving skills, Anika was able to handle this situation in an effective way that resulted in a relatively quick resolution rather than letting it escalate into a more difficult situation that would be harder to resolve and would likely result in more pain on both sides of the relationship.

Exercise

Exercise 1

Use the "Problem Solving Action Checklist" to find a way solve the following problem.

Problem: You are overwhelmed with both work and school and don't know what to do. Your grades are slipping, and your manager has written you up for being late for work. How can you solve this problem and decrease your stress levels?

Define the problem:

Identify available solutions:

Select your solution:

Explain why you selected this solution:

Contributors

- Adapted from Critical Thinking in Basic Reading and Writing. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution.

This page titled 3.3: Critical Thinking is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.3: Critical Thinking by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.4: The Art of Rhetoric

What is Rhetoric?

In its simplest form, **RHETORIC** is the art of persuasion. Every time we write, we engage in debate or argument. Through writing and speaking, we try to persuade and influence our readers, either directly or indirectly. We work to get them to change their minds, to do something, or to begin thinking in new ways. Put simply, to be effective, every writer needs to know, and be able to use, principles of rhetoric.

Writing is about making choices, and knowing the principles of rhetoric allows a writer to make informed choices about various aspects of the writing process. Every act of writing takes place in a specific **RHETORICAL SITUATION,** which is a situation or circumstance in which someone (a writer or speaker) must persuade an audience to do something, to change their minds, to influence them, etc. This "rhetorical situation" is the same concept that L. Lennie Erwin terms "the writing situation" in his discussion on how writing is different from speaking (see "The Difference between Speaking and Writing").

The three most basic, yet important components of a rhetorical situation are:

- **The purpose of writing** or **rhetorical aim** (the goal the writer is trying to achieve or argument the writer is trying to make)
- **The intended audience**
- **The writer/speaker**

These three elements of the rhetorical situation are in a constant and dynamic interrelation. All three are also necessary for communication through writing (or speaking) to take place. For example, if the writer is taken out of this equation, the text will not be created. Similarly, eliminating the text itself will leave the reader and writer, but without any means of conveying ideas between them, and so on.

Other components of the rhetorical situation include:

- **the medium** (the form of communication)
- **the allotted time for the message** (how much time does writer have? appropriate time to persuade?)
- **the political, social, or cultural implications, place, etc.**

All writing (or speaking) that is persuasive comes from a source of urgency or **EXIGENCE** –– a need to communicate the message.

NOTE

Please note that the term “rhetoric” also is used to mean someone speaking bombastic thoughts that are empty of meaning. The online Oxford dictionary defines rhetoric also as “language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience, but often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content” and the example they give is, “all we have from the Opposition is empty rhetoric.” Such a meaning is unfortunately derived from the emphasis of rhetoric on presentation and delivery. In this course, we will focus on rhetoric as a means of effective communication as we aspire to become skilled rhetoricians ourselves.

The following video focuses on the use of rhetoric from the viewpoint as a writer. As you watch, consider how the same elements hold true from the viewpoint of a reader.

YouTube Video

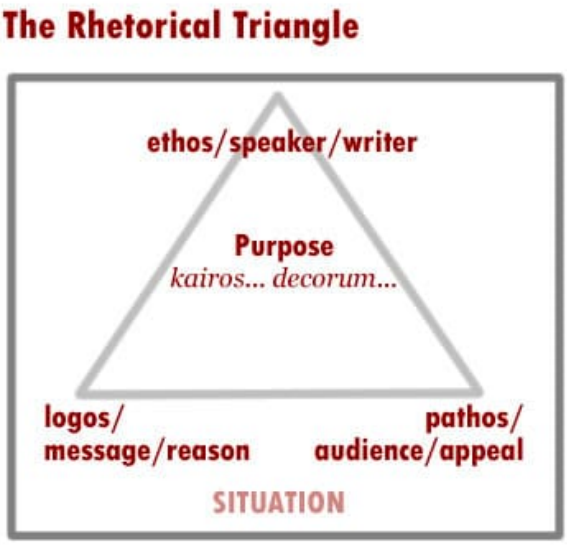
This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

The Rhetorical Situation

When composing an essay, every writer must take into account the conditions under which the writing is produced and will be read. It is customary to represent the three key elements of the rhetorical situation as a triangle of writer, reader, and text, or, as they are represented on this image, as "communicator," "audience," and "message."

Figure 2.4.1: The Rhetorical Triangle



Source: St. Edward's University

Changing the characteristics of any of the elements depicted in the figure above will change the other elements as well. For example, with a change in the beliefs and values of the audience, the message will also change to accommodate those new beliefs.

What does this understanding of rhetoric have to do with academic and research writing? Everything, really. If you have ever had trouble with a writing assignment, chances are it was because you could not figure out the assignment's purpose. Or perhaps you did not understand very well who was your reader. It is hard to commit to purposeless writing done for no one in particular, which is how many students incorrectly approach academic writing.

Rhetorical Appeals

In order to persuade their readers, writers must use three types of proofs, or rhetorical appeals. They are **logos**, or logical appeal; **pathos**, or emotional appeal; and **ethos**, or ethical appeal, or appeal based on the character and credibility of the author. An additional appeal, called **kairos,** refers to whether a message is "of its time period." It is easy to notice that modern words "logical," "pathetic," and "ethical" are derived from those Greek words. In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes that the three appeals must be used together in every piece of persuasive discourse. An argument based on the appeal to logic, or emotions alone will not be an effective one.

Pathos

Pathos can best be described as the use of emotional appeal to sway another's opinion in a rhetorical argument. Emotion itself should require no definition, but it should be noted that effective 'pathetic' appeal (the use of pathos) is often used in ways that can cause anger or sorrow in the minds and hearts of the audience.

Pathos is often the rhetorical vehicle of public service announcements. A number of anti-smoking and passive smoking related commercials use pathos heavily. One of the more memorable videos shows an elderly man rising from the couch to meet his young grandson who, followed by his mother, is taking his first steps toward the grandfather. As the old man coaxes the young child forward, the grandfather begins to disappear. As the child walks through him the mother says "I wish your grandpa could see you now." The audience is left to assume that the grandfather has died, as the voice-over informs us that cigarette smoke kills so many people a year, with a closing statement, "be there for the ones you love." This commercial uses powerful words (like "love") and images to get at the emotions of the viewer, encouraging them to quit smoking. The goal is for the audience to become so "enlightened" and emotionally moved that the smoking viewers will never touch another cigarette.

Ethos

Ethos can be seen as the credibility that authors, writers, and speakers have when they present themselves in front of an audience. If, on the first day of class, your professor walked in, kind of bent over and looking like they had been out all night and picking their nose, how would you perceive that instructor? What would your view of the class he takes be? How confident would you be that this person knows what they are talking about?

Ethos encompasses a large number of different things which can include what a person wears, says, the words they use, their tone of voice, their credentials, their experience, their relationship with the audience, verbal and nonverbal behavior, criminal records, etc. At times, it can be as important to know who the person presenting the material is, as what they are saying about a topic.

Many companies, especially those big enough to afford famous spokespeople, will use celebrities in their ad campaigns to promote the sale of their products. Certain soft drink companies have used the likes of Ray Charles, Madonna, and Britney Spears to sell their products, and have been successful in doing so. The thing you need to ask yourself is: what do these celebrities add to the product other than their fame? Or is it their relationship with the audience that is the selling point?

Often times ads for medical products or even chewing gum might say that four out of five doctors/dentists recommend a certain product. Some commercials may even show a doctor in a white lab coat approving whatever is for sale. Now, provided that the person you are viewing is an actual doctor, this might be an example of a good ethos argument. On the other hand, if an automotive company uses a famous sports figure to endorse a product, we might wonder what that person knows about this product. The campaign and celebrity are not being used to inform the consumer, but rather to catch their attention with what is actually a faulty example of ethos.

How does this apply to writing? To begin, if you are going to cite an article about racial equality published by the Ku Klux Klan, or a Neo-Nazi organization, this might send up a red flag that this particular article might be written from a biased viewpoint. You need to research an author's background to re-assure yourself that what they are writing is unbiased. Also, if you are trying to present a formal project, you may want to increase your positive ethos by using appropriate terminology. Writing that "abortions are all whack and stuff" is probably not the best way to convince your audience of your point of view. It may happen that you as a writer adopt different voices for different assignments, but your word choice and your approach to the assignment should reflect what it is you want to say.

Logos

Logos is most easily defined as the logical appeal of an argument. Say that you are writing a paper on COVID-19 and you say "COVID-19 is just like the flu, so we should take the same measures as the flu." This statement is illogical because the virus itself, it's characteristics, and the overall situation is not like that of the flu. The statement has an illogical comparison. The COVID-19 virus is in a different family of viruses (corona viruses) than are the various influenza viruses, such as H1N1. COVID-19 displays a wide variety of symptoms (or no symptoms) and is much more contagious precisely because it can be transmitted without any symptoms. In addition, we have immunizations against the flu virus, which we do not yet have for the COVID-19 virus.

Kairos

"Kairos" is an important, but sometimes illusive, rhetorical term. The word itself means "time," and time is central to the concept, which means the "right time" or the "ideal moment" for communicating. Kairos is basically about the *context* of the moment: what's relevant to the audience at any particular time? Some rhetoricians describe *kairos* as a fourth "appeal" because rhetors frequently *appeal to* the urgency of a particular time or moment to engage an audience.

Timing, as they sometimes say, is everything. Rhetoric is about finding the best "available means" of persuasion "at any given moment" or "in any given case." Past, present, and future ("forensic," "epideictic," and "demonstrative" as the video, below, on labels them) are definitely part of the picture here, as well.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 3.4.1

Video: How to use rhetoric to get what you want by Camille A. Langston. *All Rights Reserved.* Standard YouTube license.

Summary: Chart

The chart below summarizes the key points relating to the rhetorical appeals:

Rhetorical Appeal	Abbreviated Definition	Reflective Questions
Ethos	Appeal to credibility *You may want to think of ethos as related to "ethics," or the moral principles of the writer: ethos is the author's way of establishing trust with his or her reader.*	• Why should I (the reader) read what the writer has written? • How does the author cite that he or she has something valid and important for me to read? • Does the author mention his or her education or professional experience, or convince me that he or she is a valid, educated, and experienced source?
Pathos	Appeal to emotion *You may want to think of pathos as "empathy," which pertains to the experience of or sensitivity toward emotion.*	• How is the writer trying to make me feel, or what has he or she written that makes me want to do something? • What specific parts of the author's writing make me feel happy, sad, inspired, dejected, and so on?

Logos	Appeal to logic *You may want to think of logos as "logic," because something that is logical "makes sense"—it is reasonable.*	• What evidence does the writer provide that convinces me that his or her argument is logical—that it makes sense? • What proof is the author offering me?
Kairos	Appeal to timeliness *You may want to think of kairos as the type of persuasion that pertains to "the right place and the right time."*	• Does the writer make claims that are particularly important given what is happening right now? • How is the author "making the most of the moment" or attempting to speak to the concern of his or her audience?

How the Appeals Work Together to Persuade

Understanding how logos, pathos, and ethos should work together is very important for writers who use research. Often, research writing assignments are written in a way that seems to emphasize logical proofs over emotional or ethical ones. Such logical proofs in research papers typically consist of factual information, statistics, examples, and other similar evidence. According to this view, writers of academic papers need to be unbiased and objective, and using logical proofs will help them to be that way.

Because of this emphasis on logical proofs, you may be less familiar with the kinds of pathetic and ethical proofs available to you. Pathetic appeals, or appeals to emotions of the audience were considered by ancient rhetoricians as important as logical proofs. Yet, writers are sometimes not easily convinced to use pathetic appeals in their writing. As modern rhetoricians and authors of the influential book Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (1998), Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert Connors said, “People are rather sheepish about acknowledging that their opinions can be affected by their emotions” (86). According to Corbett, many of us think that there may be something wrong about using emotions in argument. But, I agree with Connors, pathetic proofs are not only admissible in argument, but necessary (86-89). The most basic way of evoking appropriate emotional responses in your audience, according to Corbett, is the use of vivid descriptions (94). This is demonstrated at the beginning of many newspaper and magazine feature articles.

Using ethical appeals, or appeals based on the character of the writer, involves establishing and maintaining your credibility in the eyes of your readers. In other words, when writing, think about how you are presenting yourself to your audience. Do you give your readers enough reasons to trust you and your argument, or do you give them reasons to doubt your authority and your credibility? Consider all the times when your decision about the merits of a given argument was affected by the person or people making the argument. For example, when watching television news, are you predisposed against certain cable networks and more inclined toward others because you trust them more?

So, how can writers establish credible personas for their audiences? One way to do that is through external research. Conducting research and using it well in your writing help you with the factual proofs (logos), but it also shows your readers that you, as the author, have done your homework and know what you are talking about. This knowledge, the sense of your authority that using logos creates among your readers, will help you be a more effective writer.

The logical, pathetic, and ethical appeals work in a dynamic combination with one another. It is sometimes hard to separate one kind of proof from another and the methods by which the writer achieves the desired rhetorical effect. If your research contains data that is likely to cause your readers to be emotional, it can enhance the pathetic aspect of your argument. The key to using the three appeals is to use them in combination with each other and in moderation. It is impossible to construct a successful argument by relying too much on one or two appeals while neglecting the others.

Using Rhetorical Appeals in Your Own Writing

Identifying these appeals in persuasive writing is a valuable skill to learn; understanding how to use these appeals in your persuasive writing can prove to be an even more powerful ability to develop. To begin, several ways to appeal to logic exist. Consider the structure and quality of your argument. Digital strategist and rhetorician, Daniel T. Richards, asks writers to consider these questions: "Does your conclusion follow from your premises? Will your audience be able to follow the progression? Does your argument provide sufficient evidence for your audience to be convinced?" To improve the quality of your argument, consider:

- Referring to facts and figures.
- Citing relevant, current statistics.
- Providing examples.
- Including and addressing an opposing view.
- Using visual representations.

In addition, as Lane, McKee, and McIntyre recommend in their article regarding logos: maintain consistency in your argument, and avoid fallacious, or faulty, appeals to logic. For example, in "Fallacious Logos," they provide an overview of several false appeals to logic, including the false dilemma, which assumes that there are only two options when there are more.

Writers may employ several methods to appeal to pathos. Read "Pathos" to explore several suggestions which include:

- Referring to other emotionally compelling stories.
- Citing stark, startling statistics that will invoke a specific emotion in audience members.
- Showing empathy and/or understanding for an opposing view.
- Using humor, if appropriate.

However, in your efforts to appeal to the audience's emotions, avoid relying on faulty appeals. For example, "Fallacious Pathos" points out that using emotional words that evidence does not support leads to the argument by emotive language fallacy.

In pondering how to effectively employ rhetorical devices and aptly avoid fallacies, writers tend to miss the relationship among the rhetorical appeals. Consequently, there is something very right about such arguments as the one advanced by Richards, who argues that "your argument could be sound. It could even be emotionally compelling. But if your audience doesn't trust you, if they don't think you have their interest at heart, it won't matter" ("The 3 Rhetorical Appeals"). Enhance the effectiveness of appeals to pathos and logos with appeals to ethos.

To demonstrate your credibility, try:

- Referring to relevant work and/or life experience.
- Citing your relevant awards, certificates, and/or degrees.
- Providing evidence from relevant, current, and credible sources.
- Carefully proofreading your work, and asking a few other people to so as well.

Additionally, follow McKee and McIntyre's advice in "Fallacious Ethos." McKee and McIntyre provide specific examples of fallacious ethos.

Conversely, appeals to kairos can help you make use of the particular moment (Pantelides, McIntyre, and McKee). Ask yourself if you can capitalize on any of the audience's fast-approaching moments to create a sense of urgency. However, avoid false appeals to kairos. Read "Fallacious Appeals to Kairos" to learn more about this topic.

Good writers write to win. As such, rhetorical appeals underlie much of the successful persuasive writing in society, whether in the form of written arguments, television commercials, or educational campaigns. As previously discussed, some thoughtful, strategic anti-smoking campaigns have reduced smoking-related diseases and death. Additionally, Ariel Chernin, advertising researcher, observes that a large body of literature proves that food marketing affects children's food preferences. Similarly, appealing to logos, pathos, ethos, and kairos in your persuasive writing can help you achieve your goals. Approaching rhetorical appeals from the inside out—from the perspective of the writer—one can note their effectiveness in persuasive writing, and one can write to win.

Contributors

- Adapted from What is Rhetoric by WikiBooks, CC-BY-SA
- Adapted from *Methods of Discovery* by Pavel Zemliansky, provided by Three Rivers Digication, CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from *The Writing Commons.* byThe Writing Commons, CC-NC-ND
- Adapted from RhetPrimer by Alissa Messer, CC-BY-SA

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 3.4: The Art of Rhetoric is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.4: The Art of Rhetoric by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

Logical Fallacies -- Definition

As you rewrite, review, and revise your logical argument, be aware of logical fallacies, or common errors in thinking that can weaken a logical argument.

Fallacies are errors or tricks of reasoning. We can call a fallacy an *error* of reasoning if it occurs accidentally; we call it a *trick* of reasoning if a speaker or writer uses it in order to deceive or manipulate the audience. Fallacies can be either formal or informal.



Figure:

(Decorative image of a traffic sign that says "Oops!") Image authored by Cripi on Pixabay. *CC0: No Rights Reserved*

Most formal fallacies are errors of logic: the conclusion doesn't really follow from, or is not supported by, the premises. Either the premises are untrue or the argument is invalid. For example, the following argument contains an error in assuming that one thing and only that one thing causes a particular outcome: "Nora feeds Johnny eggplant every day, and Johnny is really healthy; therefore, we should feed our Sally more eggplant." While it may be true that eggplant is a healthy food, Johnny's eggplant consumption is assuredly not the only factor contributing to his health. So it does not necessarily follow that Sally should also eat eggplant every day. Formal fallacies are created when the relationship between premise and conclusion does not hold up, or when premises are unsound.

Informal fallacies take many forms and are widespread in everyday discourse. Very often they involve bringing irrelevant information into an argument, or are based on assumptions that, when examined, prove to be incorrect. For example, the following statement plays inaccurately to authority by assuming that one person only knows best, without bringing facts, multiple informed expert opinions, or relevant research into the argument: "Our governor supports a single-payer health care system for the state, so we should, too." While the governor may have information about health care that the average citizen does not have access to, merely the fact that the governor supports a particular cause is not a reason to agree. Informal fallacies often result from the misuse of language and/or evidence.

Whether a fallacy is an error or a trick, whether it is formal or informal, its use undercuts the validity and soundness of any argument. For example, if someone defines a key term in her argument in an ambiguous, vague, or circular way, her argument will appear very weak to a critical audience.

In addition, when listeners or readers spot questionable reasoning or unfair attempts at audience manipulation, more than the

author's argument (*logos*) may be compromised. Their evaluation of the credibility of the speaker/writer (*ethos*), and perhaps their ability to connect with that speaker on the level of shared values (*pathos*), also may be compromised. At the very least, the presence of fallacies will suggest to an audience that the speaker or writer lacks argumentative skill.

Evaluating an Argument for Logical Fallacies



Figure:

One way to go about evaluating an argument for fallacies is to return to the concept of the three types of support for claims: ethos, logos, and pathos.

As a quick reminder,

- Ethos is an argument that appeals to ethics, authority, and/or credibility.
- Logos is an argument that appeals to logic.
- Pathos is an argument that appeals to emotion.

Classifying fallacies as fallacies of ethos, logos, or pathos will help you both to understand their nature and to recognize them when you encounter them. Please keep in mind, however, that some fallacies may fit into multiple categories.

- Fallacies of ethos relate to credibility. These fallacies may unfairly build up the credibility of the author (or the author's allies) or unfairly attack the credibility of the author's opponent (or allies).
- Fallacies of logos give an unfair advantage to the claims of the speaker or writer or an unfair disadvantage to his opponent's claims.
- Fallacies of pathos rely excessively upon emotional appeals, attaching positive associations to the author's argument and negative ones to his opponent's position.

Evaluating an Appeal to Ethos

When you evaluate an appeal to ethos, you examine how successfully a speaker or writer establishes authority or credibility with her intended audience. You are asking yourself what elements of the essay or speech would cause an audience to feel that the author is (or is not) trustworthy and credible.

A good speaker or writer leads the audience to feel comfortable with her knowledge of a topic. The audience sees her as someone worth listening to—a clear or insightful thinker, or at least someone who is well-informed and genuinely interested in the topic.

Some of the questions you can ask yourself as you evaluate an author's ethos may include the following:

- Has the writer or speaker cited her sources or in some way made it possible for the audience to access further information about the issue?
- Does she demonstrate familiarity with different opinions and perspectives?
- Does she provide complete and accurate information about the issue?
- Does she use the evidence fairly? Does she avoid selective use of evidence or other types of manipulation of data?
- Does she speak respectfully about people who may have opinions and perspectives different from her own?

- Does she use unbiased language?
- Does she avoid excessive reliance on emotional appeals?
- Does she accurately convey the positions of people with whom she disagrees?
- Does she acknowledge that an issue may be complex or multifaceted?
- Does her education or experience give her credibility as someone who should be listened to on this issue?

Some of the above questions may strike you as relevant to an evaluation of logos as well as ethos—questions about the completeness and accuracy of information and whether it is used fairly. In fact, illogical thinking and the misuse of evidence may lead an audience to draw conclusions not only about the person making the argument but also about the logic of an argument.

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Ethos

In a perfect world, everyone would tell the truth and we could depend upon the credibility of speakers and authors. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. You would expect that news reporters would be objective and tell new stories based upon the facts. Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Brian Williams all lost their jobs for plagiarizing or fabricating parts of their news stories. Janet Cooke's Pulitzer Prize was revoked after it was discovered that she made up "Jimmy," an eight-year old heroin addict. Brian Williams was fired as anchor of the NBC Nightly News for exaggerating his role in the Iraq War.

Others have become infamous for claiming academic degrees that they didn't earn, as in the case of Marilee Jones. At the time of discovery, she was Dean of Admissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After 28 years of employment, it was determined that she never graduated from college. However, on her website she is still promoting herself as "a sought after speaker, consultant and author" and "one of the nation's most experienced College Admissions Deans."

Beyond lying about their own credentials, authors may employ a number of tricks or fallacies to lure you to their point of view. Some of the more common techniques are described below. When you recognize these fallacies being committed, you should question the credibility of the speaker and the legitimacy of the argument. If you use these when making your own arguments, be aware that they may undermine or destroy your credibility.

Fallacies that Misuse an Appeal to Ethos

Ad hominem: attacking the person making an argument rather than the argument itself. Latin for "argument against the person" or "argument toward the person." Basically, an ad hominem argument goes like this: Person 1 makes claim X. There is something objectionable about Person 1. Therefore claim X is false.

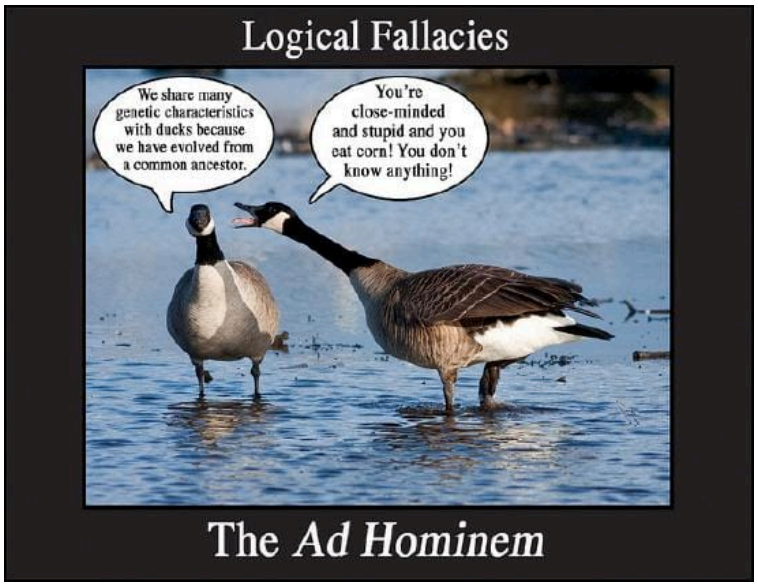


Figure:

False authority: relying on claims of expertise when the claimed expert (a) lacks adequate background/credentials in the relevant field, (b) departs in major ways from the consensus in the field, or (c) is biased, e.g., has a financial stake in the outcome.

Example: “Dr. X is an engineer, and ***he*** doesn’t believe in global warming.”

Guilt by association: linking the person making an argument to an unpopular person or group.

Example: “My opponent is a card-carrying member of the Communist Party.”

Poisoning the well: undermining an opponent’s credibility before they get a chance to speak.

Example: “The prosecution is going to bring up a series or so-called experts who are getting a lot of money to testify here today.”

Transfer fallacy: associating the argument with someone or something popular or respected; hoping that the positive associations will “rub off” onto the argument.

Examples: In politics, decorating a stage with red, white, and blue flags and bunting; in advertising, using pleasant or wholesome settings as the backdrop for print or video ads.

Name-calling: labeling an opponent with words that have negative connotations in an effort to undermine the opponent’s credibility.

Example: “These rabble-rousers are nothing but feminazis.”

Plain folk: presenting yourself as (or associating your position with) ordinary people with whom you hope your audience will identify; arguers imply that they or their supporters are trustworthy because they are "common people" rather than members of the elite.

Example: “Who would you vote for—someone raised in a working-class neighborhood who has the support of Joe the Plumber or some elitist whose daddy sent him to a fancy school?”

Testimonial fallacy (argument from authority): inserting an endorsement of the argument by someone who is popular or respected but who lacks expertise or authority in the area under discussion.

Example: “I’m not a doctor, but I play one on TV”—a famous example of a celebrity endorsement for a cough syrup (Deis, 2011, n.p.).



Figure:

The most general structure of this argument runs something like the following: Person A claims that Person A is a respected scientist or other authority; therefore, the claim they make is true.

Evaluating an Appeal to Logos

When you evaluate an appeal to logos, you consider how logical the argument is and how well-supported it is in terms of evidence. You are asking yourself what elements of the essay or speech would cause an audience to believe that the argument is (or is not) logical and supported by appropriate evidence.

To evaluate whether the evidence is appropriate, apply the **STAR** criteria: how **S**ufficient,**T**ypical;**A**ccurate, and **R**elevant is the evidence?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal

Diagramming the argument – identifying the main claim and the main supporting points or premises – can help you determine if an appeal to logos is manipulative. Write out the main claim or conclusion. Then identify the supporting claims or premises. Are the premises true? Does the conclusion follow logically from the premises? Is there sufficient, typical, accurate, and relevant evidence to support the reasoning? Is the speaker or author attempting to divert your attention from the real issues? These are some of the elements you might consider while evaluating an argument for the use of logos.

Pay particular attention to numbers, statistics, findings, and quotes used to support an argument. Be critical of the source and do your own investigation of the “facts.” Maybe you’ve heard or read that half of all marriages in America will end in divorce. It is so often discussed that we assume it must be true. Careful research will show that the original marriage study was flawed, and divorce rates in America have steadily declined since 1985 (Peck, 1993). If there is no scientific evidence, why do we continue to believe it? Part of the reason might be that it supports the commonly held idea of the dissolution of the American family.

Deductive Logic

An argument using deductive logic is one that works from the top to the bottom. It begins with what is known as a "major premise," adds a "minor premise," and attempts to reach a conclusion. A major premise is a statement that comments about a large group, a minor premise refers to a single member, and the conclusion attempts to prove that because this single member is a part of the larger group, it must, therefore, also have the trait named in the major premise.

For example:

> Now, if it is true that men are tall, and that Bob is a man, then we can safely infer that Bob must be tall. However, beware the logical fallacy. Though it may be true that in certain cultures men are, on average, taller than women, certainly this is not always the case. Being that our major premise is not altogether true, we can now say that this argument is flawed. Further, we might ask what our definition of "tall" is. Tall is different if we are talking about the average population, different for basketball players. Also, what is a man? Are transgendered individuals included? We see that the problem becomes far more complex the more we look into it.

Inductive Logic

While some would argue that a deductive argument works from the top down, toward a conclusion, and that an inductive argument works from the bottom up. This is mildly misleading. What is meant by this is that an inductive logical argument begins with a firm affirmation of truth, a conclusive statement. By getting the audience to agree with this statement, the argument moves to the next "logical" step. It proceeds in this manner until the argument has led you from one seemingly reasonable conclusion to another that you may not have originally agreed with. Take the following as an example. (Move through the argument slowly, making sure you understand and agree with each step in the process -- and please forgive the religious content, you'll come to see it is irrelevant anyway).

> The human soul is inherently free. This is its very nature. We are confined to our mortal, earthly bodies, but our souls must be kept free, or the nature of the soul is entirely negated. If one chooses to believe in a soul, they can only believe that it embraces this (vague idea of) freedom.
>
> At conception, a child is given a soul. Some may argue that that happens after birth, but if those very same persons are pro-life, they confuse their arguments. Thus, if someone is pro-life, and believes in a soul, they must believe in the freedom of that soul, and also accept that the soul is granted upon conception.

A soul cannot die. By the same means by which it is free over the body, a soul claims immortality while the body decomposes and is ended. To deny that a soul is immortal is again to deny the very essence of a soul. Thus, if someone is pro-life, and believes in a soul, they must believe in the freedom of that soul, the immortality of the soul, and also accept that the soul is granted upon conception.

A soul cannot be born. It is immortal and cannot die, it is not earthly, it forever exists, and cannot be born. There are tales in Greek mythology of Athena's birth, yet she is born from her father's head a fully decorated woman. She was not born. She existed previously, as Milton writes the Son in Paradise Lost. If one accepts the Bible's teachings, there can be no reincarnation, no other form of birth, or rebirth. Thus, if someone is pro-life, and believes in a soul, and does not accept reincarnation, they must believe in the freedom of that soul, the immortality of the soul that is always and forever (which cannot be born and cannot die), and also accept that the soul is granted upon conception.

A soul being always an essence, and not being able to be reincarnated, can only exist outside of the body, somewhere, until the act of conception occurs. That soul must then be placed in the body that was forever intended to receive it, as it belongs nowhere else. The soul is fated to that one body. Thus, if someone is pro-life, and believes in a soul, and does not accept reincarnation, namely a practicing Catholic, they must also believe in the freedom of the soul, and in the concept of fate. Fate, however, completely opposes the idea of freedom. One cannot then believe in a soul, for it immediately enforces a belief in fate which directly negates the belief in the soul. If our actions are written in a Divine plan, we are not free to make our own choices. Every action has been scripted.

Don't worry, it must be that you were meant to read this.

Here's a sample inductive argument by Ben Doberstein.

Having seen this, some might say that the argument defeats Catholicism from an atheist standpoint. Others might find that it argues for the secularization of religion. Still, there are ways in which it supports Catholicism at the same time.

Though the argument might seem as if it is disagreeing with the Catholic religion, and some would agree that it is, we must always be looking for the logical fallacy. Upon closer inspection, you may notice that all this argument truly does, in one reading of the text, is to explain the complexity of God through the mind of a human. Catholicism has argued since the beginning that God is impossible to fully explain using the conceptions of man. In that way, this argument only supports that conclusion.

Be aware that there will be logic fallacies hidden in almost every argument. If there is more than one side to an argument, such as in religious or political debates, it is most likely because the argument is impossible to prove. Hence, there is a logical fallacy in the argument.

Fallacies that misuse appeals to logos or attempt to manipulate the logic of an argument are discussed below.

Fallacies that Misuse an Appeal to Logos

Hasty generalization: jumping to conclusions based upon an unrepresentative sample or insufficient evidence.

Example: "10 of the last 14 National Spelling Bee Champions have been Indian American. Indian Americans must all be great spellers!"

Appeal to ignorance—true believer's form: arguing along the lines that if an opponent can't prove something ***isn't*** the case, then it is reasonable to believe that it ***is*** the case; transfers the burden of proof away from the person making the claim (the proponent).

Example: "You can't prove that extraterrestrials ***haven't*** visited earth, so it is reasonable to believe that they ***have*** visited earth."

Appeal to ignorance—skeptic's form: confusing absence of evidence with evidence of absence; assumes that if you cannot ***now*** prove something exists, then it is shown that it doesn't exist.

Example: "There's no proof that starting classes later in the day will improve the performance of our high school students; therefore, this change in schedule will not work."

Begging the question: circular argument because the premise is the same as the claim that you are trying to prove.

Example: “This legislation is sinful because it is the wrong thing to do.”

False dilemma: misuse of the either/or argument; presenting only two options when other choices exist

Example: “Either we pass this ordinance or there will be rioting in the streets.”

Post hoc ergo propter hoc: Latin phrase meaning “after this, therefore because of this”; confuses correlation with causation by concluding that an event preceding a second event must be the cause of that second event.

Example: “My child was diagnosed with autism after receiving vaccinations. That is proof that vaccines are to blame.”

Non-sequitur: Latin for “does not follow”; the conclusion cannot be inferred from the premises because there is a break in the logical connection between a claim and the premises that are meant to support it, either because a premise is untrue (or missing) or because the relationship between premises does not support the deduction stated in the claim.

Example (untrue premise): “If she is a Radford student, she is a member of a sorority. She is a Radford student. Therefore she is a member of a sorority.”

Smoke screen: avoiding the real issue or a tough question by introducing an unrelated topic as a distraction; sometimes called a **red herring**.

Example: “My opponent says I am weak on crime, but I have been one of the most reliable participants in city council meetings.”

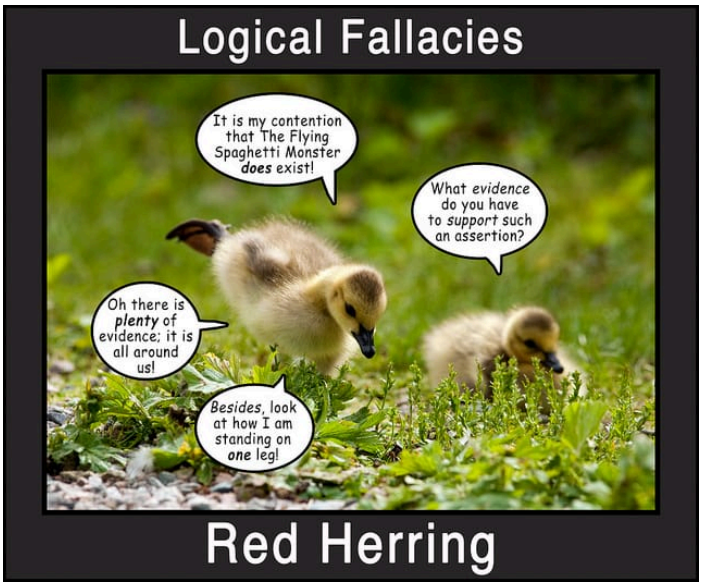


Figure: (Visual example of a red herring fallacy.)

Image by Mark Klotz on flickr *CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial*

The red herring is as much a debate tactic as it is a logical fallacy. It is a fallacy of distraction and is committed when a listener attempts to divert an arguer from his argument by introducing another topic. This can be one of the most frustrating, and effective, fallacies to observe.The fallacy gets its name from fox hunting, specifically from the practice of using smoked herrings, which are red, to distract hounds from the scent of their quarry. Just as a hound may be prevented from catching a fox by distracting it with a red herring, so an arguer may be prevented from proving his point by distracting him with a tangential issue.

Straw man: pretending to criticize an opponent’s position but actually misrepresenting his or her view as simpler and/or more extreme than it is and therefore easier to refute than the original or actual position; unfairly undermines credibility of ***claim*** if not ***source*** of claim.

Example: “Senator Smith says we should cut back the Defense budget. His position is that we should let down our defenses and just trust our enemies not to attack us!”

Evaluating an Appeal to Pathos

People may be uninterested in an issue unless they can find a personal connection to it, so a communicator may try to connect to her audience by evoking emotions or by suggesting that author and audience share attitudes, beliefs, and values—in other words, by making an appeal to pathos. Even in formal writing, such as academic books or journals, an author often will try to present an issue in such a way as to connect to the feelings or attitudes of his audience.

When you evaluate pathos, you are asking whether a speech or essay arouses the audience's interest and sympathy. You are looking for the elements of the essay or speech that might cause the audience to feel (or not feel) an emotional connection to the content.

An author may use an audience's attitudes, beliefs, or values as a kind of foundation for his argument—a layer that the writer knows is already in place at the outset of the argument. So one of the questions you can ask yourself as you evaluate an author's use of pathos is whether there are points at which the writer or speaker makes statements assuming that the audience shares his feelings or attitudes. For example, in an argument about the First Amendment, does the author seem to take it for granted that the audience is religious?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Pathos

Up to a certain point, an appeal to pathos can be a legitimate part of an argument. For example, a writer or speaker may begin with an anecdote showing the effect of a law on an individual. This anecdote will be a means of the author gaining an audience's attention for an argument in which they use evidence and reason to present their full case as to why the law should/should not be repealed or amended. In such a context, engaging the emotions, values, or beliefs of the audience is a legitimate tool, the effective use of which should lead you to give the author high marks.

An appropriate appeal to pathos is different than trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a manipulative use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out". An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) commercials featuring the song "*In the Arms on an Angel*" and footage of abused animals. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing (Brekke, 2014).

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based argument. In addition to making use of pathos, authors must establish their credibility (ethos) and must supply reasons and evidence (logos) in support of their position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone should be given low marks.

See below for the most common fallacies that misuse appeals to pathos.

Fallacies that Misuse an Appeal to Pathos

Appeal to fear: using scare tactics; emphasizing threats or exaggerating possible dangers.

Example: "Without this additional insurance, you could find yourself broke and homeless."

Appeal to guilt and **appeal to pity**: trying to evoke an emotional reaction that will cause the audience to behave sympathetically even if it means disregarding the issue at hand.

Example: "I know I missed assignments, but if you fail me, I will lose my financial aid and have to drop out."

Appeal to popularity (bandwagon): urging tthe audience to follow a course of action because "everyone does it."

Example: "Nine out of ten shoppers have switched to Blindingly-Bright-Smile Toothpaste."

Slippery Slope: making an unsupported or inadequately supported claim that "One thing inevitably leads to another." This may be considered a fallacy of logos as well as pathos but is placed in this section because it often is used to evoke the emotion of fear.

Example: "We can't legalize marijuana; if we do, then the next thing you know people will be strung out on heroin."

Appeal to the people: also called **stirring symbols** fallacy; the communicator distracts the readers or listeners with symbols that are very meaningful to them, with strong associations or connotations.

Example: This fallacy is referred to in the sentence “That politician always wraps himself in the flag.”

Appeal to tradition: people have done it a certain way for a long time; assumes that what has been customary in the past is correct and proper.

Example: “A boy always serves as student-body president; a girl always serves as secretary.”

Loaded-Language and other emotionally charged uses of language: using slanted or biased language, including Goodness terms, devil terms, euphemisms, and dysphemisms.

Example: In the sentence “Cutting access to food stamps would encourage personal responsibility,” the "goodness" term is “personal responsibility.” It might seem as if it would be hard to argue against “personal responsibility” or related "goodness" terms such as “independence” and “self-reliance.” However, it would require a definition of “personal responsibility,” combined with evidence from studies of people’s behavior in the face of food stamp or other benefit reductions, to argue that cutting access to food stamps would lead to the intended results.

Conclusion

Fallacies can crop up whenever definitions, inferences, and facts are at issue. Once we become familiar with fallacies we may start to see them everywhere. That can be good and bad. Since persuasion is ever-present, it is good to be on guard against various hidden persuaders. But whether a persuasive strategy is considered fallacious may be dependent on context. For example, we *expect* advertisements, political speeches, and editorials on public policy or ethical issues to try to sway us emotionally.

However, as a writer of logical argument, your task is to evaluate your draft in order to identify and eliminate inappropriate logical fallacies, which often try to argue through emotional means, personal attack, or inappropriate evidence and conclusions. Your purpose, as a writer of logical argument, is to get your reader to see the value in what you’re asserting, to get that person to say “I understand and accept the validity of your point of view,” even though he may still not agree.

Exercise 1

Identifying Hasty Generalizations

A generalization is a reasonably true statement based on statistically valid data. A hasty generalization is a statement that is true in general but may not be true in any particular case. A generalization becomes a hasty generalization when the statement is assumed to be true about an individual or when the generalization is statistically invalid. Hasty generalizations are one of the most common logical fallacies.

Decide whether the following statements are generalizations or hasty generalizations:

A. Dogs developed from wolves.

B. You’ll be a victim of a crime if you are out between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m.

C. Crime happens more often in cities than in suburbs.

D. Women are more neurotic than men (according to a fired Google employee manifesto).

E. Pit bulls are killers.

F. Billionaires are greedy.

Exercise 2

Identifying Logical Fallacies and Appeals

Individually or in groups, identify the logical fallacies (by name) or appeals in the following statements.

1. Pilots claim to have seen unidentified flying objects (spacecraft from other planets). Pilots are trained in observation and are reliable, so UFOs must exist.

2. The universe has all the properties to support life; therefore, it was designed specifically to support life.

3. What are skeptics of alternative medicines afraid of?

4. There is no evidence to show ghosts exist, so ghosts do not exist.

5. Mammals live on land. Whales are mammals. Therefore, whales must live on land.

6. The number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years.

7. More people in the world smoke than in the past. The rate of people dying from lung cancer is declining. Smoking does not cause lung cancer.

8. Drinking alcohol increases one's risk for breast cancer. Katie drinks four glasses of wine per week. She will develop breast cancer.

9. Computers are the brains of machines, so people should not need much sleep for their brains to work properly.

10. The earliest remains of *Homo erectus* are in Africa and Asia, so the species originated in one of those places.

11. The extinction of large mammals will inevitably lead to the extinction of humans.

12. Humans are destroying Earth, so we should colonize Mars so we can survive.

13. We don't know how placebos work, so they must not work.

Logical Fallacies Review

The following video, while relatively lengthy, clearly explains many common logical fallacies such as hasty generalization, slippery slope, and more. As such, it provides a good review of the fallacies that you should be identifying and editing out of your logical argument essay drafts.

Video: Logical Fallacies by US Represented. *All Rights Reserved.* Standard YouTube license.

Contributors:

- Adapted from College Writing, authored by Susan Oaks, provided by Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA:*

This page last updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.6: Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis

We have heard that “you can’t judge a book by its cover,” but, in fact, we do it all the time. Daily we find ourselves in situations where we are forced to make snap judgments. Each day we meet different people, encounter unfamiliar situations, and see media that asks us to do, think, buy, and act in all sorts of ways.

In fact, our saturation in media and its images is one of the reasons why learning to do rhetorical analysis is so important. The more we know about how to analyze situations and draw informed conclusions, the better we can become about making savvy judgments about the people, situations, and media we encounter.

Rhetorical Analysis is a high-order critical thinking skill. It takes practice to become effective at formal and intentional analysis of text and media. An ***analysis*** breaks a subject apart to study it closely, and from this inspection, ideas for writing emerge. When writing assignments call on you to analyze, they require you to identify the parts of the subject (parts of an ad, parts of a short story, parts of Hamlet’s character), and then show how these parts fit or don’t fit together to create some larger effect or meaning. Your interpretation of how these parts fit together constitutes your claim or thesis, and the task of your essay is then to present an argument defending your interpretation as a valid or plausible one to make. Our biggest bit of advice about analysis is to don't try to do it all in your head. Analysis works best when you put all the cards on the table, so to

speak. Identify and isolate the parts of your analysis, and record important features and characteristics of each one. As patterns emerge, you sort and connect these parts in meaningful ways.. The critical reading skills you are developing–like differentiating fact from opinion and making inferences–will help you become a more savvy consumer and a more discerning citizen.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Facts versus Opinions

Facts

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

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; this credibility is sometimes called "ethos" and is one way that we make our arguments persuasive. 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 they 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.

Media and Rhetoric

Media is one of the most important places where this kind of analysis needs to happen. *Rhetoric*—the way we use language and images to persuade—is what makes media work. Think of all the media you see and hear every day: Twitter, television shows, web pages, billboards, text messages, podcasts, and more. Media is constantly asking you to buy something, act in some way, believe something to be true, or interact with others in a specific manner. Understanding rhetorical messages is essential to help us become informed consumers, but it also helps evaluate the ethics of messages, how they affect us personally, and how they affect society.

Take, for example, a commercial for men's deodorant that tells you that you'll be irresistible to women if you use their product. This campaign doesn't just ask you to buy the product, though. It also asks you to trust the company's credibility, or ethos, and to believe the messages they send about how men and women interact, about sexuality, and about what constitutes a healthy body. You have to decide whether or not you will choose to buy the product and how you will choose to respond to the messages that the commercial sends.

Because media rhetoric surrounds us, it is important to understand how rhetoric works. If we refuse to stop and think about how and why it persuades us, we can become mindless consumers who buy into arguments about what makes us value ourselves and what makes us happy.

Rhetoric as Social Influence

Our worlds are full of these kinds of social influences. As we interact with other people and with media, we are continually creating and interpreting rhetoric. In the same way that you decide how to process, analyze or ignore these messages, you create them. You probably think about what your clothing will communicate as you go to a job interview or get ready for a date. You are use rhetoric when trying to persuade your parents to send you money or your friends to see the movie that interests you. When you post to your blog or favorite social media app, you are using rhetoric.

Most of our actions are persuasive in nature. What we choose to wear (tennis shoes vs. flip flops), where we shop (Whole Foods Market vs. Wal-Mart), what we eat (organic vs. fast food), or even the way we send information (snail mail vs. text message) can work to persuade others.

Chances are you have grown up learning to interpret and analyze these types of rhetoric. They become so commonplace that we don't realize how often and how quickly we are able to perform this kind of rhetorical analysis. When your teacher walked in on the first day of class, you probably didn't think to yourself, "I think I'll do some rhetorical analysis on her clothing and draw some conclusions about what kind of personality she might have and whether I think I'll like her." And, yet, you probably were able to come up with some conclusions based on the evidence you had.

However, when this same teacher hands you an advertisement, photograph or article and asks you to write a rhetorical analysis of it, you might have been baffled or felt a little overwhelmed. The good news is that many of the analytical processes that you already use to interpret the rhetoric around you are the same ones that you'll use for these assignments.

Exercise 1

- Watch the *Mad Men* advertising pitch for “The Kodak Carousel,” "Mad Men - It's not a slide projector, or a wheel... it's a Carousel" by SpeechCoachLA, and think about the way the advertisers use images and language to persuade...this is rhetoric!
- Answer the following questions in a file/document:
  1. What is it about the advertising pitch that is supposed to connect with the public and get them to buy the product, in this case the Kodak Carousel?
  2. What is it about nostalgia (Don Draper said in Greek it means “the pain of an old wound”) that is more powerful than memory?
  3. Is the advertising pitch by Don Draper effective at persuading the public? Why or why not?

You will be graded on the following criteria:

Rhetorical Analysis and Media				
Criteria				
Describe an author’s point of view and tone				
Analyze an author’s effectiveness in achieving intended purpose				
Explains why advertising pitch will appeal to consumer				
Explains what it is about nostalgia that is more powerful than memory				
Explains why advertising pitch is or is not effective at persuasion				

Exercise 2: Further study

1. Download Backpacks vs Briefcases: Steps Toward Rhetorical Analysis.
2. Annotate the text.
3. Answer the following questions in a document/file:
   1. What are the implications of rhetorical analysis? (p. 3, p. 46)
   2. What is the “rhetorical situation”? (p. 5, p.48)
   3. What is the argument in rhetorical analysis? (p. 9, p. 52)
   4. What does context have to do with Rhetorical Analysis? (p.12, p.55)
   5. Why is rhetorical analysis important in college? (p.14, p.57)
   6. What are examples of rhetoric that you see and hear on a daily basis?
   7. What are some ways that you create rhetoric?

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from What is Academic Writing? by L. Lennie Irvin in Writing Spaces. CC-NC-SA
- Adapted from Analyzing Arguments: Rhetorical Analysis by Amy Hofer and Robbie Pock in OER Commons. CC-BY-Attribution
- Adapted from Successful College Composition by Kathryn Crowther, Lauren Curtright, Nancy Gilbert, Barbara Hall, Tracienne Ravita, and Kirk Swenson at Galileo, Georgia's Virtual Library. CC-NC-SA-4.0.

This page was most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 3.6: Rhetorical Analysis is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.6: Rhetorical Analysis by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.7: Key Takeaways

- Writing is a way of entering a conversation, including the larger civil discourse in society. Academic writing is part of this, just as texting with friends in writing as a way of entering into conversation.
- Unlike in spoken conversation, in writing, you have to create the context and tone on your own.
- Developing your “writer’s sense” about communicating within the writing situation is the most important thing you should learn in first-year composition.
- Much more is expected of college students cognitively in college reading and writing.
- Critical thinking for problem solving is an analytical process that we practice intensely in college and use every day to various degrees. It can be learned through practice.
- The rhetorical appeals -- ethos, pathos, logos -- need to be used in balance with kairos for effective argumentation.
- Identifying logical fallacies and inappropriate appeals to pathos are important for your writing and ideas to be taken seriously.
- Rhetorical analysis allows us to understand how the messages that surround us function.

This page titled 3.7: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 2.7: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4: THE READING-WRITING CONNECTION

4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection

4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context

4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing

4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics

4.4: Questioning Strategies

4.5: Inferences

4.6: Vocabulary

4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes

4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details

4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing

4.10: How to Read Like a Writer

4.11: Key Takeaways

This page titled 4: The Reading-Writing Connection is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection

Importance of Reading

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

The Reading-Writing Connection

Creating New Meanings

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

Engaging in a Dialog

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

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

Active Reading

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

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

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

Exercise 1 4.1.1

Literacy4DS: "Active Reading"Page

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

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.1.1

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

- As you watch the video, make brief notes of key ideas, as well as any words or concepts you don't understand well.
- Next, take a few moments to reflect on the video. Consider questions like: What was the most memorable part of the video? What is one new piece of information you learned? What questions do you have about the video?
- Review your notes. If you do not understand all of the main points, watch the video a second time. You don't have to watch the whole thing again – it's okay to just review sections that address the specific questions you have.

- Finally, add to or revise your initial notes. Were you able to answer your unresolved questions? Can you list the most important "take-aways" from the video? In other words, what are two or thre things from this video that you want to remember?

Print vs. Online Reading

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

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

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

The Why, What, How of Reading Comprehension

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

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

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

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

Purpose Of Academic Reading

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

- **Information comes from reputable sources**: Web sites and blogs can be a source of insight and information, but not all are useful as academic resources. They may be written by people or companies whose main purpose is to share an opinion or sell you something. Academic sources such as textbooks and scholarly journal articles, on the other hand, are usually written by experts in the field and have to pass stringent peer review requirements in order to get published.
- **Learn how to form arguments**: In most college classes except for creating writing, when instructors ask you to write a paper, they expect it to be argumentative in style. This means that the goal of the paper is to research a topic and develop an argument about it using evidence and facts to support your position. Since many college reading assignments (especially journal articles) are written in a similar style, you'll gain experience studying their strategies and learning to emulate them.
- **Exposure to different viewpoints**: One purpose of assigned academic readings is to give students exposure to different viewpoints and ideas. For example, in an ethics class, you might be asked to read a series of articles written by medical professionals and religious leaders who are pro-life or pro-choice and consider the validity of their arguments. Such experience can help you wrestle with ideas and beliefs in new ways and develop a better understanding of how others' views differ from your own.

Active Learning When Reading

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

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

- **Write in your books**: You can underline and circle key terms, or write questions and comments in the margins of your books. The writing serves as a visual aid for studying and makes it easier for you to remember what you've read or what you'd like to discuss in class. If you are borrowing a book or want to keep it unmarked so you can resell it later, try writing key words and notes on Post-its and sticking them on the relevant pages.
- **Annotate a text**: Annotations typically mean writing a brief summary of a text and recording the works-cited information (title, author, publisher, etc.). This is a great way to "digest" and evaluate the sources you're collecting for a research paper, but it's also invaluable for shorter assignments and texts, since it requires you to actively think and write about what you read.

The activity, below, will give you practice annotating texts.

- **Create mind maps**: Mind maps are effective visual tools for students, as they highlight the main points of readings or lessons. Think of a mind map as an outline with more graphics than words. For example, if a student were reading an article about America's First Ladies, she might write, "First Ladies" in a large circle in the center of a piece of paper. Connected to the middle circle would be lines or arrows leading to smaller circles with visual representations of the women discussed in the article. Then, these circles might branch out to even smaller circles containing the attributes of each of these women.

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.1.1

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

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

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

Planning and Managing Your Reading for Optimal Comprehension

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

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

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

Planning Your Reading

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

Managing Your Reading Time

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

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

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

Tip:

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Setting a Purpose

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

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

- **How did my instructor frame the assignment?** Often your instructor will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading:
  - Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current teaching practices in elementary math.
  - Read these two articles and compare Smith's and Jones's perspectives on the 2010 health care reform bill.
  - Read Chapter 5 and think about how you could apply these guidelines to running your own business.
- **How deeply do I need to understand the reading?** If you are majoring in computer science and you are assigned to read Chapter 1, "Introduction to Computer Science," it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts that you will be expected to master. However, for some reading assignments, you may be expected to form a general understanding but not necessarily master the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.
- **How does this assignment relate to other course readings or to concepts discussed in class?** Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections on your own. (Needless to say, it helps to take detailed notes-- when in class and when you read.)
- **How might I use this text again in the future?** If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

Improving Your Comprehension

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

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

Responding, Not Reacting, to Texts

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

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

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

Writing in the Reading Process

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

Overall Strategies

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

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Reading Responses

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

the text you are reading than note-taking, or underlining, will allow.

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

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

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

Talk about the Text

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

Get into the habit of composing extended responses to readings. Writing students are often asked to write one or two-page exploratory responses to readings, but they are not always clear on the purpose of these responses and on how to approach writing them. By writing reading responses, you are continuing the important activities of critical reading, which you began when you compiled notes on the salient points of the text you are analyzing. You are extending the meaning of the text by creating your own commentary to it and perhaps even branching off into creating your own argument inspired by your reading. Your teacher may give you a writing prompt, or ask you to come up with your own topic for a response. In either case, realize that reading responses are supposed to be exploratory; they are designed to help you delve deeper into the text you are reading than mere note-taking or underlining will allow. Sometimes, parts of your reading responses may wind up in an essay you write.

Monitoring Your Comprehension

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

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

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

1. **Summarize.** At the end of each section, pause to summarize -- in your own words -- the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, revisit that section.
2. **Ask and answer questions.** When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to

answer after you finish it. Write down your questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why. Is the answer buried in that section of reading but just not coming across to you? Or do you expect to find the answer in another part of the reading?

3. **Do not read in a vacuum.** Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with your classmates. Many instructors set up online discussion forums or blogs specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as your peers'.

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

Exercise 1

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

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

TIP

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

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

Contributors

- Adapted from EDUC 1300: Effective Learning Strategies. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. Public Domain: No Known Copyright
- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **L**CC-NC-SA 3.0.

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.1: The Reading-Writing Connection by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context

Reading and Rhetorical Context

We have looked at the use of rhetoric from the viewpoint of a writer. Consider how the same elements hold true from the viewpoint as a reader.

As a reader, pay attention to these factors that shaped the document. Consider:

- What do I know about the **author**, just by reading this text? How does the author's experience or education shape the reading?
- What do I know about the **goals** for this work, just by reading this text? How do these goals influence what actually appears in the text?
- What do I know about the **intended audience** for this work? Am I a member of that intended audience?

In the following video, see how reading can literally "change your brain" to help with learning:

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.2.1

Reading Can Change Your Brain! Authored by: Seeker. *All Rights Reserved. Standard YouTube license.*

Critical 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 reading a good story although this sometimes means not thinking deeply about the story you are reading. At the heart of writing and research, however, lies the kind of reading known as critical reading. The critical examination of sources is what makes their use in research possible and what allows writers to create rhetorically effective and engaging texts.

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; instead, they work hard in order to create such meaning. Critical readers are not made overnight. Becoming a critical reader takes 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.

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 will 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.

The idea behind the rhetorical theory of reading is that when we read, we not only take in ideas, information, and facts, but in

the process we also “update our view of the world.” This is what it means to be a monitoring citizen. You cannot force someone to update his or her worldview; therefore, the purpose of writing is persuasion, and the purpose of reading is to be 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.

Key features of the critical approach to reading:

- No text, however skillfully written or authoritative, contains its own, pre-determined meaning. Audiences bring their education, situated knowledge, and experience to bear on texts in order to better understand their meanings.
- Readers must work hard to create meaning from every text. All complex texts contain surface meaning and subtext. Often, readers have to think of the bigger picture in making sense of how a subject can influence broader culture.
- Critical readers interact with the texts that they read by questioning them, responding to them, and expanding them, usually in writing.
- Critical readers actively search for related texts to place these works in conversation with each other to advance important ideas. Consider how subjects from your other courses and experiences connect to the sources you are reading.

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.

- 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.
- Annotate the text while you read. Annotation is a key reading-writing activity. Writing while you read allows you to have a conversation with the text. It keeps your brain active while you read, it clarifies questions that you might want to bring to class, and it gives you a place to start your writing because you've already thought about it. We cannot overstate the importance of annotation while reading. There are a number of ways to annotate, and strategies for that are explained below.
- 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.

Evaluating Information with Critical Thinking

Evaluating information can be one of the most complex tasks you will be faced with in college. But if you utilize the following four strategies, you will be well on your way to success:

- Read to understand, by using text coding
- Examine arguments
- Clarify thinking
- Cultivate “habits of mind”

1. Read for Understanding Using Text Coding

When you read and take notes, use the **text coding strategy**. Text coding is a way of tracking your thinking while reading. It entails marking the text and recording what you are thinking either in the margins or perhaps on Post-it notes (if your copy of the text is from the library or rented). As you make connections and ask questions in response to what you read, monitor your comprehension and enhance your long-term understanding of the material.

With text coding, mark important arguments and key facts. Indicate where you agree and disagree or have further questions. You don’t necessarily need to read every word, but make sure you understand the concepts or the intentions behind what is written. Feel free to develop your own shorthand style when reading or taking notes. The following are a few options to consider using while coding text.

Shorthand	Meaning
!	Important

Shorthand	Meaning
L	Learned something new
!	Big idea surfaced
*	Interesting or important fact
?	Dig deeper
✓	Agree
≠	Disagree

2. Examine Arguments

When you examine arguments or claims that an author, speaker, or other source is making, your goal is to identify and examine the hard facts. You can use the **spectrum of authority strategy** for this purpose. The spectrum of authority strategy assists you in identifying the "hot" end of an argument—feelings, beliefs, cultural influences, and societal influences—and the "cold" end of an argument—scientific influences. The following video explains this strategy.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.2.1

Critical Thinking: Spectrum of Authority. Authored by: UBC Learn. *All Rights Reserved. Standard YouTube license.*

3. Clarify Thinking

When you use critical thinking to evaluate information, you need to clarify your thinking to yourself and, maybe, to others. Doing this well is mainly a process of asking and answering probing questions, such as the logic questions discussed earlier in this chapter. Design your questions to fit your needs, but be sure to cover adequate ground. What is the purpose? What question are we trying to answer? What point of view is being expressed? What assumptions are we, or others, making? What are the facts and data we know, and how do we know them? What are the concepts we're working with? What are the conclusions, and do they make sense? What are the implications?

4. Cultivate "Habits of Mind"

"Habits of mind" are the personal commitments, values, and standards you have adopted about the principles of good thinking. Consider your intellectual commitments, values, and standards. Do you approach problems with an open mind, a respect for truth, and an inquiring attitude? Some good habits to have when thinking critically are: being receptive to having your opinions changed, having respect for others, being independent and not accepting something is true until you've had the time to examine the available evidence, being fair-minded, having respect for a reason, having an inquiring mind, not making assumptions, and always, especially, questioning your own conclusions—in other words, developing an intellectual work ethic. Try to work these qualities into your daily life.

Contributors

- Adapted from Critical Thinking Skills from College Success. Provided by: Lumen Learning. CC BY: Attribution.

- Text Coding. Provided by: PB Works. License: Not indicated (public wiki).

This page most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

This page titled 4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing

Pre-reading Strategies

The few minutes you spend preparing BEFORE reading any difficult material can motivate you to read it, as well as increase your ability to understand and remember what you read. Think about it like this: when you are driving to a new place, you would probably look at a map first (or at least turn on your GPS) so you don't waste time getting lost. Similarly, when you approach a new academic reading, it's best to use the 4P's (***p**urpose, **p**review, **p**rior knowledge, and **p**redict)* so you don't struggle as much to figure out what the authors want to say or how they plan to say it. Preparing to read can also help you estimate how long you'll take to read so you can plan your time more efficiently.

Reading Strategy: Previewing

What It Is

Previewing is a strategy that readers use to recall prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading. It calls for readers to skim a text before reading, looking for various features and information that will help as they return to read it in detail later.

Why Use It

According to research, previewing a text can improve comprehension (Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1983, cited in Paris et al., 1991).

Previewing a text helps readers prepare for what they are about to read and set a purpose for reading.

The **genre** determines the reader's methods for previewing:

- Readers preview nonfiction to find out what they know about the subject and what they want to find out. It also helps them understand how an author has organized information.
- Readers preview biographies to determine something about the person in the biography, the time period, and some possible places and events in the life of the person.
- Readers preview fiction to determine characters, setting, and plot. They also preview to make predictions about story's problems and solutions.

When To Use It

Previewing is a strategy readers use before and during reading.

How To Use It

When readers preview a text before they read, they first ask themselves whether the text is fiction or nonfiction.

- If the text is fiction or biography, readers look at the title, chapter headings, introductory notes, and illustrations for a better understanding of the content and possible settings or events.
- If the text is nonfiction, readers look at text features and illustrations (and their captions) to determine subject matter and to recall prior knowledge, to decide what they know about the subject. Previewing also helps readers figure out what they don't know and what they want to find out.

How to Preview



Figure: CC BY-NC

Previewing a text is similar to watching a movie preview.

Think of previewing a text as similar to watching a movie trailer. A successful preview for either a movie or a reading experience will capture what the overall work is going to be about, generally what expectations the audience can have of the experience to come, how the piece is structured, and what kinds of patterns will emerge.

Previewing engages your prior experience and asks you to think about what you already know about this subject matter, or this author, or this publication. Then anticipate what new information might be ahead of you when you return to read this text more closely.

Specific Previewing Strategies

KWL+

KWL+ is a simple strategy that is both a reading-writing strategy, as well as an overall structure for research papers. **K** stands for "What I **K**now". **W** stands for "What I **W**ant to Know." **L** stands for "What I **L**earned." **+** stands for "What I Still (**+**) Want to Know.

Exercise 4.3.1

After a brief review of the topic you will be reading about, on a piece of paper, create a table like the one below with the topic at the top of the page. Write down what you already know about the topic in the **K** column and what you want to learn in the **W** column. Use the "K" column as an "into the reading" activity and the "W" column as a guide for what you will look for as you read about the topic. After you have done your research or reading, write down what you learned in the **"L"** column. Then -- at the end of the research process or when you are done reading -- write down what you still want to know in the **"+"** column. This becomes a recursive process (routine) in which the "+" can then become the base for the next round of your inquiry.

Topic: _____

K (What I Know)	**W** (What I Want to Know)	**L** (What I Learned)	**+** (What I Still Want to Know)

Answer available at the end of this section.

The 4 "P"s: Purpose, Preview, Prior Knowledge, Predict

1. *Purpose:* Determining your reading goals can help motivate you to read. It will also determine how carefully you need to read and what reading strategies you can use.

- Are you looking for general main ideas or specific details, or both?
- Are you going to discuss what you read in class, take a test, use what you read in an essay? Or are you just reading for pleasure?
- How does this reading task tie into the unit or the whole course?

2. Preview: **Spend a few minutes looking at visual clues to the author's central idea, supporting points, and organization of ideas.** Depending on the type of reading, look at some, or all, of the following elements:

- Title
- Introductory information about the author and/or selection
- First and last paragraphs
- First sentence of body paragraphs
- Headings and subheadings
- *Italics*, **bold print**, numbers, symbols
- Comprehension questions or, other after-reading assignment

3. Prior Knowledge: What do you already know about this topic? Using your own background knowledge and experiences can help stimulate your interest and increase your comprehension.

4. Predict: After previewing a text, a reader can begin to make guesses about what the writer wants to say. These *predictions* are important in motivating you and keep you focused while reading.

Use the SQ3R Strategy

One strategy you can use to become a more active, engaged reader is the SQ3R strategy, a step-by-step process to follow before, during, and after reading. You may already be using some variation of it. In essence, the process works like this:

1. **Survey** the text in advance.

2. Form **questions** before you start reading.

3. **Read** the text.

4. **Recite** and/or **record** important points during and after reading.

5. **Review** and **reflect** on the text after you read.

Before reading, survey -- or preview -- the text. As noted earlier, reading introductory paragraphs and headings can help you figure out the text's main point and identify what important topics will be covered. However, surveying does not stop there. Look over sidebars, photographs, and any other text or graphic features that catch your eye. Skim a few paragraphs. Preview any boldfaced or italicized vocabulary terms. This will help you form a first impression of the material.

Next, start brainstorming questions about the text. What do you expect to learn from the reading? You may find that some questions come to mind immediately based on your initial survey or based on previous readings and class discussions. If not, try using headings and subheadings in the text to formulate questions. For instance, if one heading i your textbook reads "Medicare and Medicaid," you might ask yourself:

- When was Medicare and Medicaid legislation enacted? Why?
- What are the major differences between these two programs?

Although some of your questions may be simple factual questions, try to come up with a few that are ore open-ended. Asking in-depth questions will help you stay more engaged as you read.

The next step is simple: read. As you read, notice whether your first impressions of the text were correct. Are the author's main points and overall approach about the same as what you predicted--or does the text contain a few surprises? Also, look for answers to your earlier questions and begin forming new questions. Continue to revise your impressions and questions as you read.

While you are reading, pause occasionally to record/recite important points. It is best to do this at the end of each section or where there is an obvious shift in the writer's train of thought. Put the book aside for a moment and recite aloud the main points of the section or any important answers you found there. You might also record ideas by jotting down a few brief notes in addition to, or instead of, reciting aloud. Either way, the physical act of articulating information makes you more likely to remember it.

After you have completed the reading, take some time to review the material more thoroughly. If the textbook includes review questions or your instructor has provided a study guide, use these tools to guide your review. You will want to record information in a more detailed format than you did during reading (which would be an outline or a list).

As you review the material, reflect on what you learned. Did anything surprise you, upset you, or make you think? Did you find yourself strongly agree or disagreeing with any points in the text? What topics would you like to explore further? Jot down your reflections in your notes. (Instructors sometimes require students to write brief response papers or maintain a reading journal. Use these assignments to help you reflect on what you read.)

The video below explains a little more about the SQ3R strategy.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.3.1

Exercise 4.3.1

Choose another text that you have been assigned to read for a class. Use the SQ3R process to complete the reading. (Keep in mind that you may need to spread the reading over more than one sesion, especially if the text is long.)

Be sure to complete all the steps involved. Then, reflect o n how helpful you found this process. On a scale of one to ten, how useful did you find it? How does it compare with other study techniques you have used?

Use Other Active Reading Strategies

The SQ3R process encompasses a number of valuable active reading strategies: previewing a text, making predictions, asking and answering quesitons, and summarizing. You can use the following additional strategies to further deepen your understanding of what you read.

- **Connect what you read to what you already know.** Look for ways the reading supports, extends, or challenges concepts you have learned elsewhere.
- **Relate the reading to your own life.** What statements, people, or situations relate to your personal experiences?
- **Visualize.** For both fiction and nonfiction texts, try to picture what is described. Visualizing is especially helpful when you are readinga narrative text, such as a novel or a historical account, or when you read expository texts that describes a process,

such as how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- **Pay attention to graphics a well as text**. Photographs, diagrams, flow charts, tables, and other graphics can help make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable.
- **Understand the text in context.** Understanding context means thinking about who wrote the text, when and where it was written, the author's purpose in writing it, and what assumptions or agendas influenced the author's ideas. For instance, two writers address the subject of health care reform, but if one article is an opinion piece and one is a news story, the rhetorical context is different.
- **Plan to talk or write about what you read.** Jot down a few questions or comments in your notebook so you can bring them up in class. (This also gives you a source of topic ideas for papers and presentations later in the semester.) Discuss the reading on a class discussion board or blog about it.

Additional Strategies

Following are some strategies you can use to enhance your reading even further:

- **Pace yourself.** Figure out how much time you have to complete the assignment. Divide the assignment into smaller blocks rather than trying to read the entire assignment in one sitting. If you have a week to do the assignment, for example, divide the work into five daily blocks, not seven; that way you won't be behind if something comes up to prevent you from doing your work on a given day. If everything works out on schedule, you'll end up with an extra day for review.
- **Schedule your reading.** Set aside blocks of time, preferably at the time of the day when you are most alert, to do your reading assignments. Don't just leave them for the end of the day after completing written and other assignments.
- **Get yourself in the right space.** Choose to read in a quiet, well-lit space. Your chair should be comfortable but provide good support. Libraries were designed for reading—they should be your first option! Don't use your bed for reading textbooks; since the time you were read bedtime stories, you have probably associated reading in bed with preparation for sleeping. The combination of the cozy bed, comforting memories, and dry text is sure to invite some shut-eye!
- **Avoid distractions.** Active reading takes place in your short-term memory. Every time you move from task to task, you have to "reboot" your short-term memory and you lose the continuity of active reading. Multitasking—listening to music or texting on your cell phone while you read—will cause you to lose your place and force you to start over again. Every time you lose focus, you cut your effectiveness and increase the amount of time you need to complete the assignment.
- **Avoid reading fatigue.** Work for about fifty minutes, and then give yourself a break for five to ten minutes. Put down the book, walk around, get a snack, stretch, or do some deep knee bends. Short physical activity will do wonders to help you feel refreshed.
- **Read your most difficult assignments early** in your reading time, when you are freshest.
- **Make your reading interesting.** Try connecting the material you are reading with your class lectures or with other chapters. Ask yourself where you disagree with the author. Approach finding answers to your questions like an investigative reporter. Carry on a mental conversation with the author.
- **Highlight** your reading material. Most readers tend to highlight too much, hiding key ideas in a sea of yellow lines, making it difficult to pick out the main points when it is time to review. When it comes to highlighting, less is more. Think critically before you highlight. Your choices will have a big impact on what you study and learn for the course. Make it your objective to highlight no more than 15-25% of what you read. Use highlighting after you have read a section to note the most important points, key terms, and concepts. Y**ou can't know what the most important thing is unless you've read the whole section, so don't highlight as you read.**
- **Annotate** your reading material. Marking up your book may go against what you were told in high school when the school owned the books and expected to use them year after year. In college, *you* bought the book. Make it truly yours. Although some students may tell you that you can get more cash by selling a used book that is not marked up, this should *not* be a concern at this time—that's not nearly as important as understanding the reading and doing well in the class!

  The purpose of marking your textbook is to make it your personal studying assistant with the key ideas called out in the text. Use your pencil also to make annotations in the margin. Use a symbol like an exclamation mark (*!*) or an asterisk (*) to mark an idea that is particularly important. Use a question mark (*?*) to indicate something you don't understand or are unclear about. Box new words, then write a short definition in the margin. Use "TQ" (for "test question") or some other shorthand or symbol to signal key things that may appear in test or quiz questions. Write personal notes on items where you disagree with the author. Don't feel you have to use the symbols listed here; create your own if you want, but be consistent. Your notes won't help you if the first question you later have is "I wonder what I meant by that?"

  Watch the following video on annotating texts:

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.3.1

Video: Annotate It! Authored by: Janene Davison. *All Rights Reserved.* Standard YouTube license.

- **Get to Know the Conventions.** Academic texts, like scientific studies and journal articles, may have sections that are new to you. If you're not sure what an "abstract" is, research it online or ask your instructor. Understanding the meaning and purpose of such conventions is not only helpful for reading comprehension but for writing, too.
- **Look up and Keep Track of Unfamiliar Terms and Phrases.** Have a good college dictionary such as Merriam-Webster handy (or find it online) when you read complex academic texts, so you can look up the meaning of unfamiliar words and terms. Many textbooks also contain glossaries or "key terms" sections at the ends of chapters or the end of the book. Many books available on an e-reader have definitions already embedded if you highlight the unknown word. If you can't find the words you're looking for in a standard dictionary, you may need one specially written for a particular discipline. For example, a medical dictionary would be a good resource for a course in anatomy and physiology. If you circle or underline terms and phrases that appear repeatedly, you'll have a visual reminder to review and learn them. Repetition helps to lock in these new words and to get their meaning into long-term memory, so the more you review them, the more you'll understand and feel comfortable using them.
- **Make Flashcards.** If you are studying certain words for a test, or you know that certain phrases will be used frequently in a course or field, try making flashcards for review. For each key term, write the word on one side of an index card and the definition on the other. Drill yourself, and then ask your friends to help quiz you. Developing a strong vocabulary is similar to most hobbies and activities. Even experts in a field continue to encounter and adopt new words.

Contributors

- Adapted from Previewing in College Composition. Provided by: Lumen Learning. *CC BY-SA*
- Adapted from Successful College Composition. **Authored by:** Kathryn Crowther, Lauren Curtright, Nancy Gilbert, Barbara Hall, Tracienne Ravita, and Kirk Swenson. Provided by: Galileo, Georgia's Virtual Library. CC-NC-SA-4.0
- Adapted from EDUC 1300: Effective Learning Strategies. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. Public Domain: No Known Copyright

This page most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

Answers

Exercise 4.3.1

Topic: _____

This page titled 4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics

Annotating Texts

What is annotation?

Annotation can be:

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

Why annotate?

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

How do you annotate?

Summarize key points in your own words.

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

Circle key concepts and phrases

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

Write brief comments and questions in the margins

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

Use abbreviations and symbols

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

Highlight/underline

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

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

- Are you using a pdf? Explore its highlight, edit, and comment functions to support your annotations
- Some browsers have add-ons or extensions that allow you to annotate web pages or web-based documents
- Does your digital or online textbook come with an annotation feature?

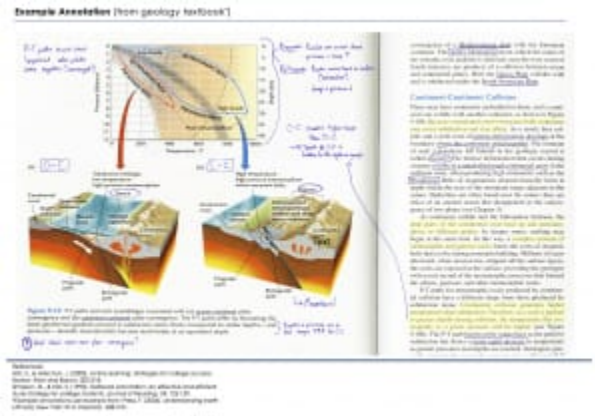
- Can your digital text be imported into a note-taking tool like OneNote, EverNote, or Google Keep? If so, you might be able to annotate texts in those apps

What are the most important takeaways?

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

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

Passage from Text	Too Much Writing	Not Enough	Good Balance
The shape of metamorphic P-T paths provides insight into the manner in which these rocks are metamorphosed. In convergent margin settings, P-T paths indicate rapid subduction of rocks and sediments to sites with high pressures and relatively low temperatures. In settings where subduction leads to continental collision, rocks are pushed down to depths where pressure and temperature are both high. In both settings, the P-T paths form loops. These loops show that after the rocks experienced the maximum pressures and temperatures, they were pushed back up to shallow depths.	Shape of P-T paths tells us about the conditions of metamorphosis: - Convergent margin settings: rocks are subducted to depths with high temperature and low pressure - Continental collision settings: rocks are subducted to depths with high temperature and high pressure In both cases the P-T paths form loops, showing that the rocks were pushed back up.	P-T paths show conditions Two settings P-T paths loop	Shape of P-T paths reveals subduction site depths, temps, pressure Settings: 1. Convergent margins: HIGH temp, LOW pressure 2. Continental collision: HIGH temp, HIGH pressure P-T paths loop in both settings



A common concern about annotating texts: It takes time!

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

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

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

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

Works consulted:

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

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

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

Contributions and Attributions

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

This page titled 4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

4.4: Questioning Strategies

Questioning Circles

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

There are three levels of questions in this model:

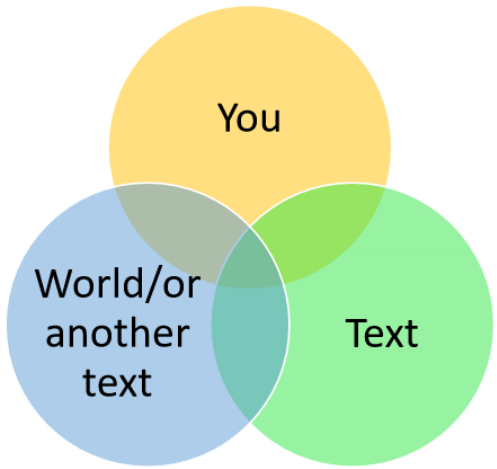
Level 1 (Clear) Questions: These are about one domain only and can only be answered with a fact.

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

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

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

Figure 3.3.1: Questioning Circle Domains



Examples of Questioning Circle Questions

Level 1 questions can be answered with facts only.

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

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

- Level 2 question about you and the text: Do you think you would respond in the same way as (character) did if you were in

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

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

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

Contributors

CC LICENSED CONTENT, ORIGINAL:

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

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

This page titled 4.4: Questioning Strategies is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.4: Questioning Strategies by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.5: Inferences

Inferences vs. Guessing

What is an inference? What's the difference between an inference and a guess? And what does any of this have to do with college-level reading and writing?

An inference is a conclusion you reach by applying logic to the evidence you are given. Making inferences while reading is a strategy that will help you learn, remember, and apply what you have read. When you make inferences, you are "reading between the lines". This tactic is similar to what Sherlock Holmes does when he sees that Dr. Watson has a tan and makes a conclusion about where Watson has recently traveled.

You already make inferences all of the time. For example, if you go over to a friend's house and they point at the sofa and say, "Don't sit there; Candy came over with her baby again," what could you logically conclude? First, you know there must be a reason not to sit where your friend is pointing. Further, you know that the reason to not sit there is related to the fact that Cindy just visited with her baby. You don't know what exactly happened, but you can infer enough and don't need to ask any more questions to know that you do not want to sit there.



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Other examples of inferences are when a doctor makes a diagnosis about why you are sick or when a mechanic figures out what is wrong with your car. What can you infer from the image above? Try making some inferences yourself. Imagine you witness each of the following – what can you infer about each situation?

1. You see a woman pushing a baby stroller down the street.
2. You are at a corner and see two cars stopped at an intersection. The rear car starts honking its horn.
3. You are walking down the street, and all of a sudden a dog comes running out of an opened door with its tail between its legs.

For the first example, you probably came up with something simple, such as that there was a baby in the stroller. For the second, you could infer that the first car should have started moving or was waiting too long at the corner and holding up the second car. For the third, you could reasonably guess that the dog had done something wrong and was afraid of being punished. You do not know for certain that these inferences are true.

Just like Sherlock Holmes, you would have to test your theories. If you checked 100 strollers, 99 times you would find a baby, but maybe one time you would find something else, like groceries or a small dog.

Exercise 4.5.1

Write a conclusion you could infer from the following:

1. You see a man running and frantically waving at a bus that is pulling away from a bus stop.
2. You are giving a speech in front of an audience and notice several people laughing and pointing at something on your pants.
3. Your sister comes home from spending the evening with her friends, slams the front door and runs to her room while crying.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Making Inferences from Reading Material

To make inferences from reading material, take two or more details from the reading and see if you can draw a conclusion. Remember, making an inference is not just making a guess even though the answer is not stated in the reading passage. You need to make a judgment that can be supported, just as you could reasonably infer there is a baby in a stroller, because even though you do not know for certain, it is the most likely possibility. For example, at the end of the story "The Five Orange Pips," you are not told what exactly happened to the Lone Star, but you can infer that it was wrecked in a storm based on the other details provided:

- There was a storm.
- The ship did not arrive at its next destination.
- Wreckage with the initials L.S. were seen by other sailors.

You could claim that the ship was taken by pirates, was sunk by a whale, or even that it landed on a deserted island; however, the only reasonable explanation from the facts is the same one implied by Dr. Watson: the ship was destroyed by the storm.

When you are asked to make an inference, go back over the reading and look for hints within the text, such as words that are directly related to the question. Also check for tone: are there words or phrases that indicate whether something is positive or negative? For example, if someone is referred to as being, sharp, friendly, and loyal, you would know that those are positive attributes, whereas if they were referred to as being slovenly, dull, and selfish, those are negative attributes.

In order to make reasonable inferences that help you better comprehend what you read, remember to do the following:

Understand the stated information. You don't necessarily have to identify the main ideas to make a reasonable inference. However, you do need to understand the important vocabulary and facts in the text. So ask yourself, "What do these details seem to show? Is there enough evidence to support my inference?" "*Are there any other possible ways to interpret this?*"

Use your prior knowledge of the situation and your common sense. However, do not ignore the facts in favor of your own personal opinions.

Consider the alternatives so you don't "jump to conclusions." Inferences tend to be "reasonable" when they are the result of "reasoned" thinking, not emotional reactions. When you go to a doctor for advice, he or she will think of different possible diagnoses before settling on the one that is most likely, given your symptoms. If the doctor jumped too quickly to one conclusion, he might give you the wrong treatment. If, as a reader, you jump too quickly to one interpretation of the text, you may not understand what the writer intended to convey.

Example: Imagine that it is a sunny day and you decide to go see a movie. After the movie is over, you step back outside and see that the sky is now cloudy and the streets and sidewalks are all wet. What can we reasonably infer happened?

If you said that it rained while you were in the theater, you're right! But what if you said that everything is wet because a water truck driving down the street was hit by a piano falling from an upper story window, causing the water truck to burst open and spill water all? This is a very unlikely scenario.

Questioning/responding (after you read): After you read a text, or part of a book, you will often be asked to respond to

questions about the text. Just as you did when you annotated, you will often be asked to write down main ideas from the text as well as your own personal reactions to the text. **Hint: Read these questions BEFORE you read the text as a pre-reading exercise. This will help you build more SCHEMA (representation of a theory in the form of an outline) about the text.**

Exercise 4.5.2

Read the following passage, and then determine what you can infer from the passage.

Hybrid cars are good for the environment, but they may not perform as well as cars that run only on gasoline. The Toyota Prius gets great gas mileage and has low emissions, making it a good "green" option. However, many people think that it is unattractive. The Prius also cannot accelerate as quickly as other models and cannot hold as many passengers as larger gas-fueled SUVs. Although they save money on fuel, hybrid cars cost more up front than gas-fueled cars. A new hybrid car can cost almost $3,500 more than the same car configured to run just on gasoline.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage?

1. Hybrid cars are more dangerous than other options.
2. Toyota is making a lot of money from the Prius.
3. Cars that use gasoline are going to destroy the environment.
4. Hybrid cars may not be the best choice for everyone.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 4.5.3

Read the following passage, and then determine what you can infer from the passage.

Redwood trees are rare. They are found only on the coastal slopes of Northern California and Oregon, and in China. Redwoods were thought to be extinct in China, but they were rediscovered by a Chinese forester in 1948. These trees can grow hundreds of feet high and live to be thousands of years old. They are endangered due to logging, pollution, and global warming, which is reducing the amount of fog on the coast. Redwoods get their water from the fog.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage:

1. The Chinese logged the Redwoods almost into extinction.
2. Redwood trees will continue to grow taller throughout their whole lives.
3. Using non-recyclable products will kill Redwood trees.
4. Redwoods can only grow in places that get a lot of fog.

Paragraph 2:

Shannelle is a very good baker. Whenever there is a bake sale to raise money for a cause, Shannelle is always asked to make cupcakes or a pie. People say that they only come to the bake sales if they know that Shannelle is making something. She always agreed to bake things because she hated to say no to anyone. One week, her oven broke and she could not bake, so she decided to go for a hike instead. Shannelle enjoyed it so much that she realized she needed to learn to make time for herself, and not just donate all of her free time to charity.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage:

1. Shannelle is a generous person.
2. Shannelle's mother did a good job teaching her how to bake.
3. The people in the community were taking advantage of Shannelle.
4. Shannelle's brother broke her oven so she would get a day off.

Building on Your Knowledge of Inferences

Previously, we covered the basics of **inferences** and **reasonable conclusions**. Now we are going to look at another strategy to help you make valid inferences: the if-then statement. To use an if-then statement, look at the information presented in the reading and see if you could rephrase it into a statement using the words "if" and "then", which establish a cause-and-effect relationship.

For example:

In the 1800s in England, laws were applied differently depending on the gender of the accused. Women could not own land or vote. Women were barred from receiving a death sentence for crimes that a man could be executed for because people thought it would be too shocking to see a woman hanged publicly. In some places, men could be fined for certain behaviors done in the presence of a woman, such as swearing or spitting, but not if those same behaviors were done only in the presence of men.

What **if-then statements** could we make based on the paragraph above? Let's go through sentence-by-sentence.

1. If we were back in England in the 1800s, then the laws would be applied differently for men and women.
2. If we were back in England in the 1800s, then women could not own land or vote.
3. If a woman committed a capital crime ("capital" meaning one that could earn a death sentence), then she would not be executed.
4. If a woman were hung, then the public would be shocked.
5. If a man swore in the presence of a woman, then he could be fined.

Broken down like this you can see how much easier it is to make logical inferences. Suppose you were asked if a woman who murdered her husband would be executed.

If-then statement #3 would tell you that the answer is "no," even though that information is not directly mentioned in the text. If you were asked if women were involved in government, you would say "no" because you know that they could not vote (#2). If you were asked if men could own real estate, you would say "yes" because #2 indicates that the fact that women could NOT own real estate was different from what men could do.

Exercise 4.5.4

Now do the same thing with the next paragraph. Write your if-then statements first, then your inferences, and then check your work below.

Many people don't realize that our sun is actually a star. Our sun seems very large because it is so close to us; however, some stars are actually much larger than our sun. Betelguese (pronounced beetle-juice), a star located in the constellation Orion, is much larger than our own sun. In fact, if it were located where our sun is located, its surface would engulf both Earth and Mars. Because other stars are so distant, they appear to be fainter, which is why we cannot see them in the daytime. Betelguese is the 8th brightest star in the night sky. To find Betelguese, first locate the constellation Orion. This star forms his left shoulder.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 4.5.5

Write an if-then statement for each sentence in the following paragraphs.

1) Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. The population in Nicaragua, hovering at approximately 6 million, is multiethnic. Segments of the population include indigenous native tribes from the Mosquito Coast, Europeans, Africans, Asians, and people of Middle East origin. The main language is Spanish although native tribes on the eastern coast speak their native languages, such as Miskito, Sumo, and Rama, as well as English Creole. The mixture of cultural traditions has generated substantial diversity in art, cuisine, literature, and music.

2) Childhood obesity is a condition where excess body fat negatively affects a child's health or well-being. Since methods to directly determine the amount of body fat are difficult, the diagnosis of obesity is often based on the Body Mass Index (BMI). Due to the rising prevalence of obesity in children and its many adverse health effects, obesity is being recognized as a serious public health concern. The term "overweight" is often used instead of "obese" for children because it is less stigmatizing.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Making Inferences. Provided by: Saylor Academy. CC-BY: Attribution Unported.
- Adapted from Writing for Success. Provided by: The Saylor Foundation. CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

Answers

Exercise 4.5.2

You will notice right away that there is nothing about car safety in the passage at all, so you can eliminate choice A. Choice B could be the answer, since the passage mentions that hybrids cost more to purchase. But is it the most reasonable conclusion?

To be sure, you need to go through all of the answers – don't just stop when you find one that looks okay. You may think that choice C is true; after all, many people want hybrid cars because emissions are harmful to the environment. Although this choice seems accurate, it does not follow from anything in the passage. Choice D could be inferred from the text. If a person had a large family, was short on money or needed a car that could accelerate quickly, then a hybrid might not be the best choice for them.

Now compare choice D with the other possible answer, choice B. Choice B might not be as good an answer because you don't know how much it costs Toyota to make the cars, and you don't know how many they sell, so you can't reasonably infer that they are making a lot of money. Choice D is the correct answer.

Exercise 4.5.4

These are just examples, but your answers should be similar to them.

If something is far away, then it will appear smaller. If something looks smaller, then it may not be smaller if it is far away.

From here, there are dozens of conclusions you could infer. For example, if you were asked why Star A appears smaller than Star B, you would know it might be because it is actually smaller. Then again, it might also appear smaller because it is farther away. The if-then statement is a useful strategy that can help you make inferences and increase your reading comprehension.

- If a star is much larger than the sun, then it could be Betelguese.
- If a star is fainter than the sun, then it cannot be seen during the day.
- If a star is the 8th brightest in the night sky, then it is Betelguese.
- If you know which constellation a star is in, then it is easier to find.

This page titled 4.5: Inferences is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.5: Inferences by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.6: Vocabulary

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

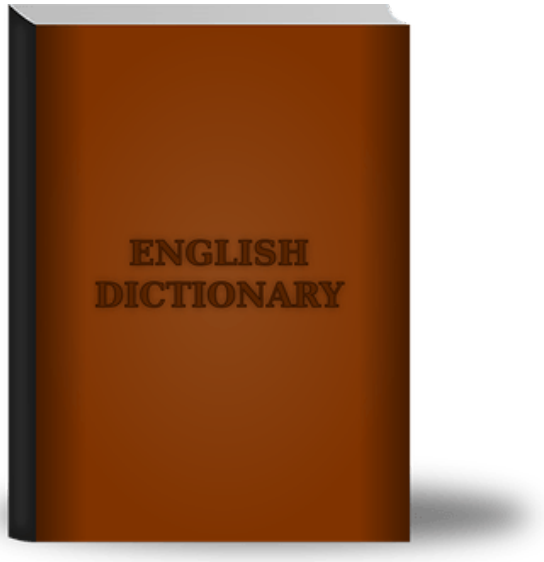


Figure: Image from Pixabay

Strategies for Dealing with Unfamiliar Words

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

To summarize:

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

Context Clues

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

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

1) Brief Definition or Restatement

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

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

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

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

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

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

2) Synonyms and Antonyms

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

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

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

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

I abhor clothes shopping, but I adore grocery shopping.

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

3) Examples

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

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

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

Tip

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

Exercise 4.6.1

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

Vocabulary From Context Activity

Word #1: _____

Sentence that word appears in:

_____

What you think the word means from context: _____

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

_____

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

_____

Were you right? _____

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

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

Exercise 4.6.2

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

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

Exercise 4.6.3

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

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

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

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

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

Writing Application

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

For some practice using context clues to understand new vocabulary, **try these activities** from Lethbridge College.

Understanding Words Through the Word Structure

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

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

Prefixes

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

Tip:

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

Table 3.6.1 - Common Prefixes

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

Prefix	Meaning	Example
sub	under	sub + merge = submerge
anti	against, opposing	anti + bacterial = antibacterial

Exercise 4.6.4

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

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

Exercise 4.6.5

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

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

Suffixes

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

Table 3.6.2 -- Suffixes

Suffix	**Meaning**	**Example**
Noun Suffixes		
er	someone who performs an action	helper
ion	action or process of	celebration
ity	the state or condition of	equality
ment	the action or result of	movement
ness	a state or quality	fairness
or	a person who is something	investigator
sion	state or being	confusion
ship	position held	internship
th	state or quality	strength

Adjective suffixes		
able, ible	capable of being/doing	preventable
al	pertaining to	theatrical
ant	inclined to or tending to	defiant
ary	of or relating to	budgetary
ful	full of	grateful
ic	relating to	heroic
ious, ous	having qualities of	gracious
ive	quality or nature of	creative
less	without something	hopeless
y	made up of or characterized by	tasty
Verb Suffixes		
ed	past tense version of a verb	climbed
en	become	lengthen
er	action or process, making a comparison	faster
ing	verb form/present participle of an action	swimming
ize, ise	to cause or to become	advertize
Adverb Suffixes		
ly	the manner in which something is done	slowly
ward	in a certain direction	forward
wise	in relation to	clockwise

Suffixes and Spelling

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

Rule 1

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 1

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

Examples:

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

Rule 2

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 2

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

Examples:

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

Rule 3

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 3

Examples:

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

Rule 4

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

Examples:

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

Rule 5

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

Examples:

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

- prefer + ed = preferred

Exercise 4.6.6

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

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

Writing Application

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

Additional Practice

For practice of this skill, try the **Structural Analysis Exercises** from Lethbridge College.

Using Reference Tools

The Dictionary

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

The Thesaurus

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



Figure: CC BY-ND: Attribution-NoDerivatives

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

Quiz

To check your understanding of vocabulary, take this quiz.

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page titled 4.6: Vocabulary is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.6: Vocabulary by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes

Note-Taking Methods

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

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

General Note Taking Guidelines

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

Organizing Ideas in Your Notes

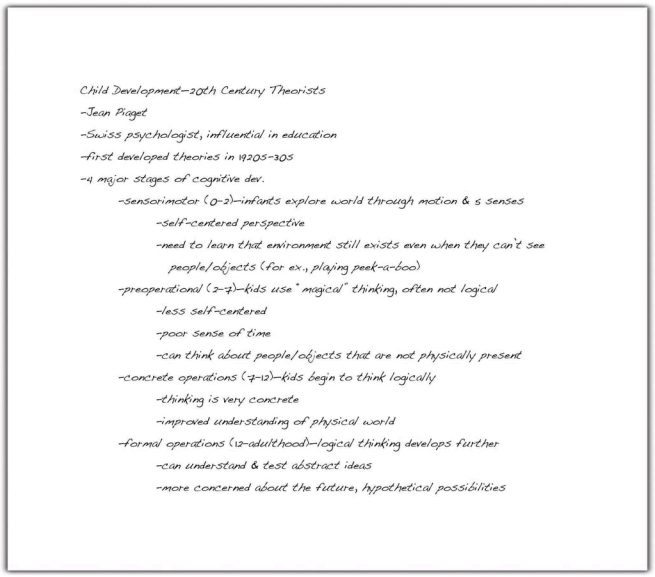
A good note-taking system needs to help you differentiate among major points, related subtopics, and supporting details. It visually represents the connections between ideas. Finally, to be effective, your note-taking system must allow you to record and organize information fairly quickly. Although some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

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

Modified Outline Format

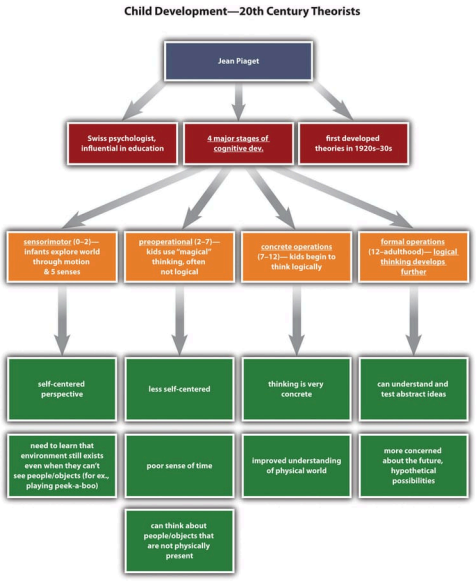
A modified outline format uses indented spacing to show the hierarchy of ideas without including roman numerals, lettering, and so forth. Just use a dash or bullet to signify each new point unless your instructor specifically presents a numbered list of items.

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



Idea Mapping

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



Charting

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

THEORIST	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	YEARS ACTIVE	STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Jean Piaget	Switzerland	1920s through 1970s	1. sensorimotor (0-2) 2. preoperational (2-7) 3. concrete operational (7-12) 4. formal operational (12-adulthood)
Erik Erikson	Denmark (studied in Austria, emigrated to US in 1930s)	1930s through 1980s	1. trust vs. mistrust (infants) 2. autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddler) 3. initiative vs. guilt (preschool-K) 4. industry vs. inferiority (elementary school) 5. identity vs. role confusion (teen years) ***See also stages of adult development

The Cornell Note-Taking System

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

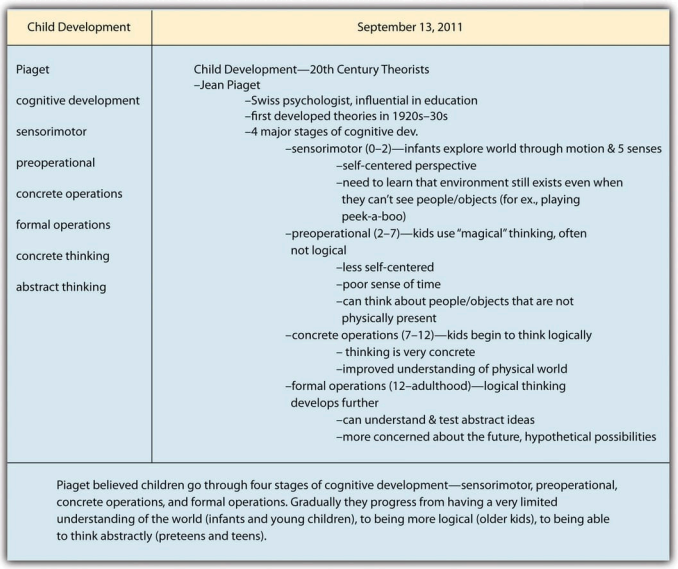
To use the Cornell system, begin by setting up the page with these components:

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

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

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

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



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

WRITING AT WORK

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

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

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

Underline or Highlight Interesting and Important Places in the Text

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

Annotation

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

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

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

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

Key: We annotate differently depending on the purpose.

There are four general reasons for annotation.

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

What you might do or think:	**What you might write:**
Respond to the text emotionally	*Inspiring :-) Discouraging :-(*
Relate to the text	*Ref. Psych Prof. point about anxiety* *Me in 9th grade*
Visualize information or concept	Doodle or draw a picture to remind yourself quickly.
Ask questions	*How does this compare to middle-class students?*
Observations about text	*Disagree (with the opinion he just described)*
Predict what is coming next	*I think the character will….*
Connect with other knowledge	*Different cause/effect than Wise describes*

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

What you might do or think:	**What you might write:**
You don't understand a word or term, so you go back and reread the sentence and figure it out – or you look it up.	Circle the word, and, after you figure out its meaning, write the meaning next to the word.

You don't understand a word, but realize you can keep reading and still understand.	Circle the word and look it up later.
You don't understand what the author is saying as it applies to that particular situation.	Write your question next to the text and bring it up in class or with a tutor.

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

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

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

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

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

Taking Notes

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

Here are some things you can do in your comments:

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

Keep a Double-Entry Journal

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

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page most recently updated on June 6, 2020.

This page titled 4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details

Analyze Thesis or Main Ideas of Texts

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

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

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

Implicit vs. Explicit Main Idea/ Thesis Statements

According to author Pavel Zemliansky,

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

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

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

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.8.1

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

Take the quiz about implicit and explicit thesis statements to see how well you have understood the information.

Thesis and Topic Sentences

You'll remember that the first step of the reading process, **previewing,** allows you to get a big-picture view of the document you're reading. This way, you can begin to understand the structure of the overall text. A later step in the reading process, **summarizing**, allows you to encapsulate what a paragraph, section, or the whole document is about. When summarizing individual paragraphs, it's likely that your summary ends up looking like a paraphrase of that paragraph's **topic sentence**.

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

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

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

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

The Three Parts of a Paragraph

1) Topic

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

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

2) Main Idea

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

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

3) Supporting Details

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

Tips for Identifying Main Ideas

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

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

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

Difference Between the Topic and Main Idea

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

Exercise 4.8.1

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

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

Choose the Main Idea:

a) Women who lift weights cannot become as muscular as men.

b) There are several myths about exercise.

c) Exercise is beneficial to everyone.

d) People use many different excuses to avoid exercising.

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

a) _____

_____

b) _____

_____

c) _____

_____

d) _____

_____

Exercise 4.8.2

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

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

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 4.8.3

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

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

a. One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street.

b. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers

c. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind.

d. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 4.8.4

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

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

a. At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned.

b. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning.

c. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be

d. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Reading-Writing Connection: Thesis Statements

Exercise 4.8.5

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

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

Supporting Details

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

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

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.8.1

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

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

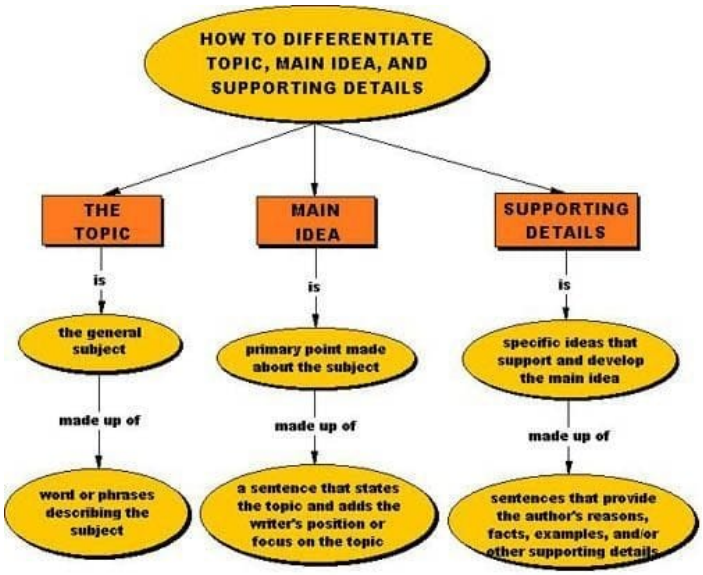


Figure: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

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

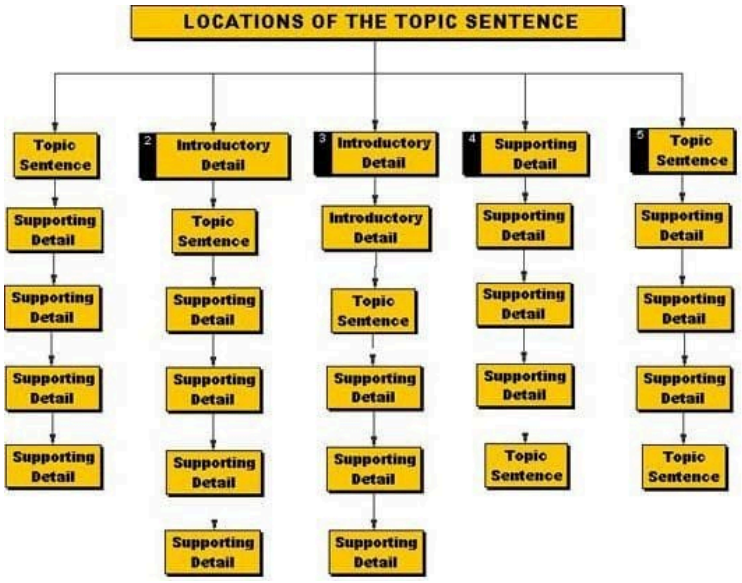


Figure: CC BY-SA

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

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

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



Figure: CC BY-SA

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

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

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

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

All Claims Need Evidence

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

What are the types of evidence?

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

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

Logos, Ethos, Pathos

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



Figure: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

Logical Appeals

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

- established facts

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

Authoritative Appeals

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

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

Emotional Appeals

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

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

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

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

Check your understanding of supporting details by doing this quiz.

Exercise 4.8.6

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

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

Answer

Answer available at the end of this section.

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

MAIN IDEA

EXPLAIN (2)-_____EXPLAIN (4)

EXAMPLE (3) EXAMPLE (5)

Major and Minor Supporting Details

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

Exercise 4.8.7

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

Single parents have to overcome many obstacles to return to school. If the child is very young, finding quality babysitting can be difficult. Many babysitters are unreliable and that can mean that the parent has to miss many classes, which can hurt their grades. It is also hard to find enough time to study. Children require a lot of attention and are also noisy, and that can interfere with a parent's ability to complete their homework. Finally, raising children is expensive. Many single parents discover that they can't meet the costs of both raising children and paying for tuition, books, and fees.

Sentence #1:
Sentence #2:
Sentence #3:
Sentence #4:
Sentence #5:
Sentence #6:
Sentence #7:

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

Sentence #1:
Sentence #2:
Sentence #3:
Sentence #4:
Sentence #5:
Sentence #6:
Sentence #7

Exercise 4.8.8

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

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

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

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

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

Major:
Minor:
Major:
Minor:

Reading-Writing Connection: Supporting Details

Exercise 4.8.9

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

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

Contributors

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

This page last updated June 6, 2020.

Answers

Exercise 4.8.2

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

Exercise 4.8.3

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

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

Exercise 4.8.4

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

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

Exercise 4.8.6

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

This page titled 4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Paraphrasing

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

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

1. Change the words so you are using **synonyms** wherever possible. For example, imagine you are paraphrasing the sentence "After work, Judy rushed back to her house." Instead of "her house" you can say "her home" or "her place." Instead of "rushed" you could say "hurried."

2. Change the **sentence structure** so that it is different. One method is to switch the order of dependent and independent clauses. For example, instead of "After work, Judy rushed back to her house" you might write, "Judy was in a hurry to get back home at the end of the day."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 4.9.1

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

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

How to avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing a text:

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

Exercise 14.9.1

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

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

Exercise 24.9.1

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

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

Summarizing

How to Write a Summary

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

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

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

How to Write a Summary (A Review)

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

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

Step A. Annotating the Text for Main Ideas

1. Annotate for engagement and understanding: be sure you stayed awake and actually understood what you read!

2. Find the main ideas of each of the sections and, when appropriate, each of the paragraphs in your section.

3. You may underline the main ideas, or write them in your own words in the margin.

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

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

Step B. Planning the Summary

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

Step C. Write a Draft Summary

1. Introduce the name of the article and the author in the first sentence along with the main idea of the article.

2. Type up the paraphrased main ideas in complete sentences.

3. Analyze how the ideas connect and relate to each other. (For example, does one idea cause the next? Are some ideas examples of a larger point?) Organize the sentences into a logical order.

4. Include transition words that help the reader understand these connections.

5. Edit out ideas that repeat, and change the order of sentences as necessary.

6. Write the name of the article, the authors, and the controlling idea (main idea of the whole reading) in the first or second sentence.

7. Make sure that important details are included, but not details that are too specific.

8. Do not give your own opinions or say whether the authors do a good or bad job.

9. If the article discusses a study, the summary should briefly describe the purpose of the study and include the results of the study on a high level.

Summary Writing Format

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

Example 4.9.1

Summary Writing Format Example

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

Summary: Using it Wisely

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strategies for Writing a Summary

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

T=topic

I=main idea

P=major supporting points

S=summarize

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

How to Write a Summary by Paraphrasing Source Material

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

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

Example 4.9.1

Example Paraphrase Writing Format

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

Exercise 4.9.1

Summarizing Circles: A small group/ class activity

Practice summarizing by working with teams.

1. Divide the text you are summarizing into small sections.

2. In groups of three or so, ask students to summarize each section. They must use words such as

"In other words,...." "Here the author is saying that...."To summarize,

3. Students should try to write their section down in a single line using these starters. They should not use the words used in the text, but instead come up with their own words to explain the ideas in the text. They should get at the main idea in the section rather than just repeat the details.

4. As a class, determine the main idea of the whole passage. Write up a sample summary on the board based on the summaries from the sections.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from English Composition I: Rhetorical Methods-Based, Provided by Lumen Learning, License: *CC BY: Attribution*

This page most recently revised on June 6, 2020.

This page titled 4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.10: How to Read Like a Writer



Figure: Image by Pixabay

How to Read Like a Writer

by Mike Bunn

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

My job (in addition to wearing a red tuxedo jacket) was to sit inside the dark theater with the patrons and make sure nothing went wrong. It didn't seem to matter to my supervisor that I had no training in security and no idea where we kept the fire extinguishers. I was pretty sure that if there *was* any trouble I'd be running down the back stairs, leaving the patrons to fend for themselves. I had no intention of dying in a bright red tuxedo.

There was a Red Coat stationed on each of the theater's four floors, and we all passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights. It's not easy trying to read in the dim light of a theatre—flashlight or no flashlight—and it's even tougher with shrieks and shouts and gunshots coming from the stage. I had to focus intently on each and every word, often rereading a single sentence several times. Sometimes I got distracted and had to re-read entire paragraphs. As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process. The intense concentration required to read in the theater helped me recognize some of the interesting ways that authors string words into phrases into paragraphs into entire books.

I came to realize that all writing consists of a series of choices.

I was an English major in college, but I don't think I ever thought much about reading. I read all the time. I read for my classes and on the computer and sometimes for fun, but I never really thought about the important connections between reading and writing, and how reading in a particular way could also make me a better writer.

What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer?

When you Read Like a Writer (RLW) you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you can better understand

how such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.

You are reading to learn about writing.

Instead of reading for content or to better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can learn about writing by reading a particular text. As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and respond the way you do?

The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most important writerly choices represented in the text—choices as large as the overall structure or as small as a single word used only once—to consider the effect of those choices on potential readers (including yourself). Then you can go one step further and imagine what *different* choices the author *might* have made instead, and what effect those different choices would have on readers.

Say you're reading an essay in class that begins with a short quote from President Barack Obama about the war in Iraq. As a writer, what do you think of this technique? Do you think it is effective to begin the essay with a quote? What if the essay began with a quote from someone else? What if it was a much *longer* quote from President Obama, or a quote from the President about something other than the war?

And here is where we get to the most important part: *Would you want to try this technique in your own writing?*

Would you want to start your own essay with a quote? Do you think it would be effective to begin your essay with a quote from President Obama? What about a quote from someone else? You could make yourself a list. What are the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote? What about the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from the President? How would other readers respond to this technique? Would certain readers (say Democrats or liberals) appreciate an essay that started with a quote from President Obama better than other readers (say Republicans or conservatives)? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from a *less* divisive person? What about starting with a quote from someone *more* divisive?

The goal is to carefully consider the choices the author made and the techniques that he or she used, and then decide whether you want to make those same choices or use those same techniques in your own writing. Author and professor Wendy Bishop explains how her reading process changed when she began to read like a writer:

It wasn't until I claimed the sentence as my area of desire, interest, and expertise—until I wanted to be a writer writing better—that I had to look underneath my initial readings . . . I started asking, *how—how* did the writer get me to feel, *how* did the writer say something so that it remains in my memory when many other things too easily fall out, *how* did the writer communicate his/her intentions about genre, about irony? (119–20).

Bishop moved from simply reporting her personal reactions to the things she read to attempting to uncover *how* the author led her (and other readers) to have those reactions. This effort to uncover how authors build texts is what makes Reading Like a Writer so useful for student writers.

How Is RLW Different from "Normal" Reading?

Most of the time we read for information. We read a recipe to learn how to bake lasagna. We read the sports page to see if our school won the game, Facebook to see who has commented on our status update, a history book to learn about the Vietnam War, and the syllabus to see when the next writing assignment is due. Reading Like a Writer asks for something very different.

In 1940, a famous poet and critic named Allen Tate discussed two different ways of reading:

There are many ways to read, but generally speaking there are two ways. They correspond to the two ways in which we may be interested in a piece of architecture. If the building has Corinthian columns, we can trace the origin and development of Corinthian columns; we are interested as historians. But if we are interested as architects, we may or may not know about the history of the Corinthian style; we must, however, know all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams. We have got to know this if we are going to put up buildings ourselves (506).

While I don't know anything about Corinthian columns (and doubt that I will ever *want* to know anything about Corinthian

columns), Allen Tate's metaphor of reading as if you were an architect is a great way to think about RLW. When you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to "build" one for yourself. Author David Jauss makes a similar comparison when he writes that "reading won't help you much unless you learn to read like a writer. You must look at a book the way a carpenter looks at a house someone else built, examining the details in order to see how it was made" (64).

Perhaps I should change the name and call this Reading Like an Architect, or Reading Like a Carpenter. In a way those names make perfect sense. You are reading to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself.

Why Learn to Read Like a Writer?

For most college students RLW is a new way to read, and it can be difficult to learn at first. Making things even *more* difficult is that your college writing instructor may expect you to read this way for class but never actually teach you how to do it. He or she may not even tell you that you're supposed to read this way. This is because most writing instructors are so focused on teaching writing that they forget to show students how they want them to read.

That's what this essay is for.

In addition to the fact that your college writing instructor may expect you to read like a writer, this kind of reading is also one of the very best ways to learn how to write well. Reading like a writer can help you understand how the process of writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

Charles Moran, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, urges us to read like writers because:

When we read like writers we understand and participate in the writing. We see the choices the writer has made, and we see how the writer has coped with the consequences of those choices . . . We "see" what the writer is doing because we read as writers; we see because we have written ourselves and know the territory, know the feel of it, know some of the moves ourselves (61).

You are already an author, and that means you have a built-in advantage when reading like a writer. All of your previous writing experiences—inside the classroom and out—can contribute to your success with RLW. Because you "have written" things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to "see" the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read. This in turn helps you to think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

What Are Some Questions to Ask Before You Start Reading?

As I sat down to work on this essay, I contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom and also to get their thoughts on RLW. Throughout the rest of the essay I'd like to share some of their insights and suggestions; after all, who is better qualified to help you learn what you need to know about reading in college writing courses than students who recently took those courses themselves?

One of the things that several students mentioned you should do first, before you even start reading, is to consider the *context* surrounding both the assignment and the text you're reading. As one former student, Alison, states: "The reading I did in college asked me to go above and beyond, not only in breadth of subject matter, but in depth, with regards to informed analysis and background information on *context*." Alison was asked to think about some of the factors that went into the creation of the text, as well as some of the factors influencing her own experience of reading—taken together these constitute the *context* of reading. Another former student, Jamie, suggests that students "learn about the historical context of the writings" they will read for class. Writing professor Richard Straub puts it this way: "You're not going to just read a text. You're going to read a text within a certain context, a set of circumstances . . . It's one kind of writing or another, designed for one audience and purpose or another" (138).

Among the contextual factors you'll want to consider before you even start reading are:

- Do you know the author's purpose when writing this piece?
- Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

It may be that you need to start reading before you can answer these first two questions, but it's worth trying to answer them before you start. For example, if you know at the outset that the author is trying to reach a very specific group of readers, then his or her writerly techniques may seem more or less effective than if he/she was trying to reach a more general audience. Similarly—returning to our earlier example of beginning an essay with a quote from President Obama about the war in Iraq—if you know that the author's purpose is to address some of the dangers and drawbacks of warfare, this may be a very effective opening. If the purpose is to encourage Americans to wear sunscreen while at the beach this opening makes no sense at all. One former student, Lola, explained that most of her reading assignments in college writing classes were designed "to provoke analysis and criticisms into the style, structure, and *purpose* of the writing itself."

In What Genre Is This Written?

Another important thing to consider before reading is the genre of the text. Genre means a few different things in college English classes, but it's most often used to indicate the *type* of writing: a poem, a newspaper article, an essay, a short story, a novel, a legal brief, an instruction manual, etc. Because the conventions for each genre can be very different (who ever heard of a 900-page newspaper article?), techniques that are effective for one genre may not work well in another. Many readers expect poems and pop songs to rhyme, for example, but might react negatively to a legal brief or instruction manual that did so. Another former student, Mike, comments on how important the genre of the text can be for reading:

I think a lot of the way I read, and of course, that depends on the type of text I'm reading. If I'm reading philosophy, I always look for signaling words (however, therefore, furthermore, despite) indicating the direction of the argument . . . when I read fiction or creative nonfiction, I look for how the author inserts dialogue or character sketches within narration or environmental observation. After reading To the Lighthouse [sic] last semester, I have noticed how much more attentive I've become to the types of narration (omniscient, impersonal, psychological, realistic, etc.), and how these different approaches are utilized to achieve an author's overall effect.

Although Mike specifically mentions what he looked for while reading a published novel, one of the great things about RLW is that it can be used equally well with either published or student-produced writing.

Is This a Published or a Student-Produced Piece of Writing?

As you read both kinds of texts you can locate the choices the author made and imagine the different decisions that he/she might have made. While it might seem a little weird at first to imagine how published texts could be written differently—after all, they were good enough to be published—remember that all writing can be improved. Scholar Nancy Walker believes that it's important for students to read published work using RLW because "the work ceases to be a mere artifact, a stone tablet, and becomes instead a living utterance with immediacy and texture. It could have been better or worse than it is had the author made different choices" (36). As Walker suggests, it's worth thinking about how the published text would be different—maybe even *better*—if the

author had made different choices in the writing because you may be faced with similar choices in your own work.

Is This the Kind of Writing You Will Be Assigned to Write Yourself?

Knowing ahead of time what kind of writing assignments you will be asked to complete can really help you to read like a writer. It's probably impossible (and definitely too time consuming) to identify *all* of the choices the author made and *all* techniques an author used, so it's important to prioritize while reading. Knowing what you'll be writing yourself can help you prioritize. Maybe your instructor has assigned the text you're reading to serve as a model for the kind of writing you'll be doing later. Jessie, a former student, writes, "In college writing classes, we knew we were reading for a purpose—to influence or inspire our own work. The reading that I have done in college writing courses has always been really specific to a certain type of writing, and it allows me to focus and experiment on that specific style in depth and without distraction."

If the text you're reading is a model of a particular style of writing—for example, highly-emotional or humorous—RLW is particularly helpful because you can look at a piece you're reading and think about whether you want to adopt a similar style in your own writing. You might realize that the author is trying to arouse sympathy in readers and examine what techniques he/she uses to do this; then you can decide whether these techniques might work well in your own writing. You might notice that the author keeps including jokes or funny stories and think about whether you want to include them in your writing—what would the impact be on your potential readers

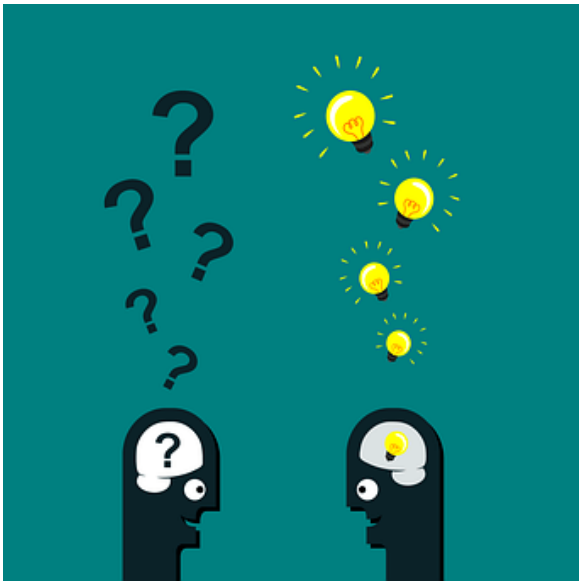


Figure: Image by Pixabay

Questions to Ask As You Are Reading

It is helpful to continue to ask yourself questions *as* you read like a writer. As you're first learning to read in this new way, you may want to have a set of questions written or typed out in front of you that you can refer to while reading. Eventually—after plenty of practice—you will start to ask certain questions and locate certain things in the text almost automatically. Remember, for you, and most students, this is a new way of reading, and you'll have to train yourself to do it well. Also keep in mind that you're reading to understand how the text was *written*—how the house was built—more than you're trying to determine the meaning of the things you read or assess whether the texts are good or bad.

First, return to two of the same questions I suggested that you consider *before* reading:

- What is the author's purpose in this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?

Think about these two questions again as you read. It may be that you couldn't really answer them before, or that your ideas will change while reading. Knowing *why* the piece was written and *who* it's for can help explain why the author might have made certain choices or used particular techniques in the writing. And you can assess those choices and techniques based in part on

how effective they are in fulfilling that purpose and/or reaching the intended audience.

Beyond these initial two questions, there is an almost endless list of questions you might ask regarding writing choices and techniques. Here are some of the questions that one former student, Clare, asks herself:

When reading I tend to be asking myself a million questions. If I were writing this, where would I go with the story? If the author goes in a different direction (as they so often do) from what I am thinking, I will ask myself, why did they do this? What are they telling me?

Clare tries to figure out why the author might have made a move in the writing that she hadn't anticipated, but even more importantly, she asks herself what *she* would do if she were the author. Reading the text becomes an opportunity for Clare to think about her own role as an author.

Here are some additional examples of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself as you read:

- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Depending on the subject matter and the intended audience, it may make sense to be more, or less, formal in terms of language. As you begin reading, you can ask yourself whether the word choice and tone/ language of the writing seem appropriate.

- What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?
- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?

To some extent the kinds of questions you ask should be determined by the genre of writing you are reading. For example, it's probably worth examining the evidence that the author uses to support his/ her claims if you're reading an opinion column, but less important if you're reading a short story. An opinion column is often intended to convince readers of something, so the kinds of evidence used are often very important. A short story *may* be intended to convince readers of something, sometimes, but probably not in the same way. A short story rarely includes claims or evidence in the way that we usually think about them.

- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What is it about the writing in those places that makes it unclear or confusing?

It's pretty normal to get confused sometimes while reading, especially while reading for class, so it can be helpful to look closely at the writing to try and get a sense of exactly what tripped you up. This way you can learn to avoid those same problems in your own writing.

- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?

Notice that in these questions I am encouraging you to question whether aspects of the writing are *appropriate* and *effective* in addition to deciding whether you liked or disliked them. You need to imagine how other readers might respond to the writing and the techniques you've identified. Deciding whether you liked or disliked something is only about you; considering whether a technique is appropriate or effective lets you contemplate what the author might have been trying to do and to decide whether a majority of readers would find the technique successful. This is important because it's the same thing you should be thinking about while you are writing: how will readers respond to this technique I am using, to this sentence, to this word? As you read, ask yourself what the author is doing each step of the way, and then consider whether the same choice or technique might work in your own writing.

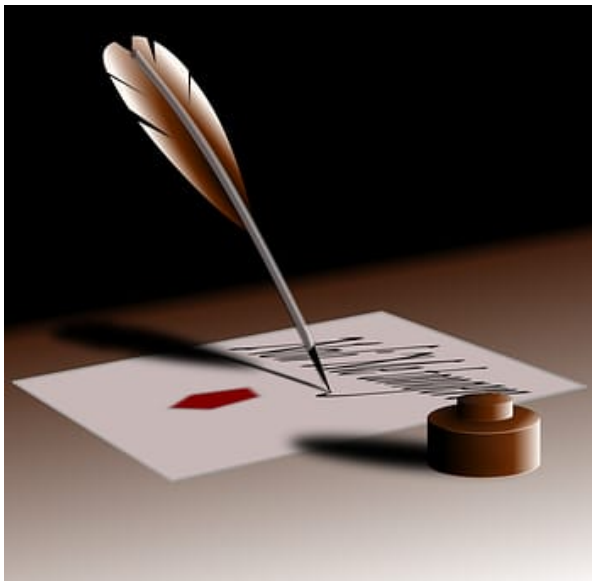


Figure: Image by Pixabay

What Should You Be Writing As You Are Reading?

The most common suggestion made by former students—was to mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself notes and summaries both during and after reading. Often the notes students took while reading became ideas or material for the students to use in their own papers. It's important to read with a pen or highlighter in your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then try to answer the following three questions on my notepad:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing?

By utilizing this same process of highlighting and note taking, you'll end up with a useful list of specific techniques to have at your disposal when it comes time to begin your own writing.

What Does RLW Look Like in Action?

Let's go back to the opening paragraph of this essay and spend some time reading like writers, as a way to get more comfortable with the process:

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.*

Let's begin with those questions I encouraged you to try to answer *before* you start reading. (I realize we're cheating a little bit in this case since you've already read most of this essay, but this is just practice. When doing this on your own, you should attempt to answer these questions before reading, and then return to them as you read to further develop your answers.)

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing? I hope the purpose is clear by now; if it isn't, I'm doing a pretty lousy job of explaining how and why you might read like a writer.
- Do you know who the intended audience is? Again, I hope that you know this one by now.
- What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would you call it?
- You know that it's a published work and not student writing. How does this influence your expectations for what you will read?
- Are you going to be asked to write something like this yourself? Probably not in your college writing class, but you can still

use RLW to learn about writerly techniques that you might want to use in whatever you do end up writing.

Now ask yourself questions *as* you read.

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables. *Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.*

Since this paragraph is the very first one, it makes sense to think about how it introduces readers to the essay. What technique(s) does the author use to begin the text? This is a personal story about his time working in London. What else do you notice as you read over this passage? Is the passage vague or specific about where he worked? You know that the author worked in a famous part of London in a beautiful theater owned by a well-known composer. Are these details important? How different would this opening be if instead I had written:

In 1997, I was living in London and working at a theatre that showed Les Miserables.

This is certainly shorter, and some of you may prefer this version. It's quick. To the point. But what (if anything) is lost by eliminating so much of the detail? I *chose* to include each of the details that the revised sentence omits, so it's worth considering why. Why did I mention where the theater was located? Why did I explain that I was living in London right after finishing college? Does it matter that it was after college? What effect might I have hoped the inclusion of these details would have on readers? Is this reference to college an attempt to connect with my audience of college students? Am I trying to establish my credibility as an author by announcing that I went to college? Why might I want the readers to know that this was a theater owned by Andrew Lloyd Weber? Do you think I am just trying to mention a famous name that readers will recognize? Will Andrew Lloyd Weber figure prominently in the rest of the essay?

These are all reasonable questions to ask. They are not necessarily the right questions to ask because there are no right questions. They certainly aren't the only questions you could ask, either. The goal is to train yourself to formulate questions as you read based on whatever you notice in the text. Your own reactions to what you're reading will help determine the kinds of questions to ask.

Now take a broader perspective. I begin this essay—an essay about *reading*—by talking about my job in a theater in London. Why? Doesn't this seem like an odd way to begin an essay about reading? If you read on a little further (feel free to scan back up at the top of this essay) you learn in the third full paragraph what the connection is between working in the theater and reading like a writer, but why include this information at all? What does this story add to the essay? Is it worth the space it takes up?

Think about what effect presenting this personal information might have on readers. Does it make it feel like a real person, some "ordinary guy," is talking to you? Does it draw you into the essay and make you want to keep reading?

What about the language I use? Is it formal or more informal? This is a time when you can really narrow your focus and look at particular words:

Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

What is the effect of using the word "antiquated" to describe the fire safety laws? It certainly projects a negative impression; if the laws are described as antiquated it means I view them as old-fashioned or obsolete. This is a fairly uncommon word, so it stands out, drawing attention to my choice in using it. The word also sounds quite formal. Am I formal in the rest of this sentence?

I use the word "performance" when I just as easily could have written "show." For that matter, I could have written "old" instead of "antiquated." You can proceed like this throughout the sentence, thinking about alternative choices I could have made and what the effect would be. Instead of "staff members" I could have written "employees" or just "workers." Notice the difference if the sentence had been written:

Because of old fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of workers inside watching the show in case of an emergency.

Which version is more likely to appeal to readers? You can try to answer this question by thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of using formal language. When would you want to use formal language in your writing and when would it make more sense to be more conversational?

As you can see from discussing just this one paragraph, you could ask questions about the text forever. Luckily, you don't have to. As you continue reading like a writer, you'll learn to notice techniques that seem new and pay less attention to the ones you've thought about before. The more you practice the quicker the process becomes until you're reading like a writer almost automatically.

I want to end this essay by sharing one more set of comments by my former student, Lola, this time about what it means to her to read like a writer:

Reading as a writer would compel me to question what might have brought the author to make these decisions, and then decide what worked and what didn't. What could have made that chapter better or easier to understand? How can I make sure I include some of the good attributes of this writing style into my own? How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?

Questioning why the author made certain decisions. Considering what techniques could have made the text better. Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about.

Are you ready to start reading?

Discussion

1. How is "Reading Like a Writer" similar to and/or different from the way(s) you read for other classes?
2. What kinds of choices do you make as a writer that readers might identify in your written work?
3. Is there anything you notice in this essay that you might like to try in your own writing? What is that technique or strategy? When do you plan to try using it?
4. What are some of the different ways that you can learn about the context of a text before you begin reading it?

Contributors and Attributions

- How to Read Like a Writer. **Authored by:** Mike Bunn. **Provided by:** Writing Spaces. CC BY-NC-SA

This page most recently updated June 6, 2020.

This page titled 4.10: How to Read Like a Writer is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 3.10: How to Read Like a Writer by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.11: Key Takeaways

- Annotating while reading is the heart of the reading-writing connection because it allows you to monitor your comprehension and extend and explore the ideas in a text.
- Use previewing strategies to read actively.
- Vocabulary brings together your reading and writing because reading a new word helps you learn new words, and learning new words usually helps make your writing clearer.
- Learning to differentiate main ideas from supporting details is important for both reading and writing.
- Reading critically and questioning assumptions are essential to evaluate what you think about a source.
- Annotating gives you some writing to work with as you begin to draft your essay.
- If-then statements can help you break down the logic of statement to make stronger inferences and increase your reading comprehension.
- Thinking about the choices a writer might have made while you are reading will help you become a better writer.

This page titled 4.11: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 3.11: Key Takeaways has no license indicated.

5: THE READING-WRITING PROCESS- PREWRITING

5.1: The Reading-Writing Process

5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process

5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking

5.4: Argument

5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment

5.6: Prewriting Strategies

5.7: Outlining

5.8: Key Takeaways

This page titled 5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

5.1: The Reading-Writing Process

Reading and Writing in History

Compared to speaking and listening, writing and reading are much more recent phenomena. For many centuries it was assumed that the best way to learn to write well was either to pray, entreat the muses, or carefully imitate writings that were already considered great. In England in the Middle Ages, reading was reserved for those in the clergy, nobles, and other elites' and "in 1820, only 12% of the world population could read and write."

In the Middle Ages, the invention of the printing press revolutionized the accessibility of books and pamphlets, and laws that had previously prevented people from learning to read were revoked, so more people learned to read. As more people read, more people wanted to write. Later, as more people went to school, teachers created rules to help them write "correctly." Unfortunately, this heavy emphasis on correctness and writing with a narrow set of rules did little to improve student writing. Simply knowing how to write grammatically correct prose is important, but it is not enough, by itself, to make writing effective or persuasive. Indeed, too much attention to correctness can result in unintentionally rigid or even comical writing. Legend has it that Winston Churchill grew so irritated at pedants telling him not to end his sentences with prepositions that he said to one of them, "Madame, that is a rule up with which I shall not put." Really, the best way to learn to become a better writer is to read more and note what the writer says.

Since the 1970s, writing instructors have been teaching writing, not as the following of fixed rules but rather as a dynamic process: a series of steps that writers can follow to produce texts. At first, these steps were taught as a somewhat rigid sequence. Since then, however, writing teachers began to emphasize "recursivity"--moving forward through some steps and then circling back to redo previous steps--as the more natural way to write. These steps involve both reading (someone else's or your own work) and writing throughout the composition process. In other words, while we still think of writing as a process taking place in a series of steps, we now understand that good writers tend to switch frequently among the different steps as they work, and each of these steps involve both reading and writing. An insight gained while editing (reading) one chapter might convince the writer that an additional chapter is needed; as a result, she might start another drafting phase--or even decide to divide one chapter into two or three, and begin reorganizing and developing new drafts. Likewise, failure to satisfy a publisher--whether it is your boss looking at a pamphlet you've written, or a book publisher deciding whether to print and sell your book--might lead the author all the way back to the idea-development or organizing stages. In short, while it is very useful to think of writing as a process, the process is not a clear, always-the-same series of steps. Instead, it is sometimes a forward-and-backward process in which you strive for simplicity while appealing to your audience, create but also organize, go crazy but follow some rules, and eventually create a product that works.

Product versus Process Approach to Writing



Figure: .

How do you develop an essay? The first and most important concept to understand is this: Essays do not happen all at once. An essay writer rarely creates an essay (the product) in one sitting due to the nature of essay writing. Essay writing is a process and, like any process, there are several stages or steps that you can learn and apply so that eventually you will develop your own process or processes for writing.

The chart below offers a fuller comparison of process versus product writing.

Product-Based Writing **Example: writing a news story under a deadline for a blog post**	**Process-Based Writing** **Example: writing a college essay**
• Assumes that writers produce texts in “one sitting,” without revising or taking pauses in their work.	• Assumes that the meaning of the writing is created and evolves during composing and revision.
• Forces the writer to “think before writing.” Product-oriented writers must have a clear plan for writing in their heads before composing.	• Multiple drafts are necessary as writing is a means of making knowledge, learning, and critical thinking.

• Immediacy and one draft forces the writer to settle for what came first, which may or may not be the writer's best work.	• Writing happens in stages that include prewriting, writing, and revising. • Writing is a non-linear process, and its stages often overlap.
• Little or no opportunity for feedback from others.	• Writers actively seek feedback from readers and judiciously use that feedback in their revisions.
• The product model is a “make it or break it” model. The very first reader who sees the writing, be it a boss at work or a teacher at school, is its judge and jury. The very first reader of a piece (a news editor or teacher) grades it or evaluates it in some way, returning the verdict to the writer.	• The process model empowers writers by encouraging them to understand and refine their writing strategies and techniques.

Process-Based Writing and Reading

In order to learn to see reading and writing as processes, it is first important to understand that the meaning of any text is created during the act of writing itself, not before. This is not to say that meaning is completely determined by the writer. A reader can also help conjure the meaning of a text, and -- during the drafting process -- can help the writers develop meanings that they may not have seen on their own.

In addition, reading is also a process that -- when a person reads actively -- involves writing. For example, when readers annotate texts, they think about their own experiences, the meaning of the words, and the connections between what the text says and other aspects of their lived experiences. Readers may annotate -- or take notes -- on the text, which in itself, is an act of creation.

Here are some basic principles of process-based reading and writing:

- Writing is a process and practice. The meaning of any text is created and evolves during composing and revision.
- In order to develop meaning fully, multiple drafts (which a writer and others read and re-read), are necessary. Writing is much more than a transcription tool. It is a means of making knowledge, learning, and critical thinking.
- The reading-writing process can be divided into stages that include research, invention, revision, and editing.
- Writing is a non-linear process, and its stages often overlap.
- Writers actively seek feedback from readers and judiciously use that feedback in their revisions.
- The process model empowers writers by encouraging them to understand and refine their writing strategies and techniques, and it encourages readers to look at texts and ideas from different points of view and revisit their original understanding.

Most writers do not begin a new piece with a set meaning in their minds. We may have an initial idea for a piece of writing, but in order to implement that idea, we have to shape and re-shape it constantly as we write, read, and re-write. The meaning of any text is an ever-evolving entity. Thinking does not precede writing, but happens simultaneously with writing. This shaping and re-shaping of the text’s meaning takes place through drafting, re-reading, and revision. For example, all of the chapters in this book went through several reads and drafts with multiple revisions before it was published.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Common Misconceptions about the Reading-Writing Process

Most people have used this creative process in one way or another, but many have misconceptions about how to use it to write. Here are a few of the most common misconceptions students have about the writing process:

- **"I do not have to waste time on prewriting if I understand the assignment."** Even if the task is straightforward and you feel ready to start writing, take some time to develop ideas before you plunge into your draft. **Freewriting**—writing about the topic non-stop for a set period of time—is one prewriting technique
- **"It is important to complete a formal, numbered outline for every writing assignment."** For some assignments, such as lengthy research papers, proceeding without a formal outline can be very difficult. However, for other assignments, a structured set of notes or a detailed graphic organizer may suffice. The important thing is to have a solid plan for organizing ideas and details.
- **"My draft will be better if I write it when I am feeling inspired."** By all means, take advantage of those moments of inspiration. However, understand that sometimes you will have to write when you are not in the mood. Sit down and start your draft even if you do not feel like it. If necessary, force yourself to write for just one hour. By the end of the hour, you may be far more engaged and motivated to continue. If not, at least you will have accomplished part of the task.
- **"My instructor will tell me everything I need to revise."** If your instructor chooses to review drafts, the feedback can help you improve. However, it is still your job, not your instructor's, to transform the draft into a final, polished piece. That task will be much easier if you give your best effort to the draft before submitting it. During revision, do not just go through and implement your instructor's corrections, see where else the comments written by your instructor apply. Remember, instructors are not editors; instructors guide you to learn to edit your own work. Take time to determine what you can change to make the work the best it can be.
- **"I am a good writer, so I do not need to revise or edit."** Even the best writers need to revise and edit their work.(It could help you catch an embarrassing typo or two). Revising and editing are the two steps that make good writers into great writers.

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page most recently updated June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.1: The Reading-Writing Process is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.1: The Reading-Writing Process by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process

Steps in the Reading-Writing Process

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

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

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

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

Table 4.2.1 -- The Writing Process

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

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



Image from College Writing by Susan Oaks.

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

Although the table above implies a sequence to these processes, given that we generally read tables from left to right and from top to bottom, the sequence actually varies from writer to writer, and from writing project to writing project. Often, writing processes are depicted as in the image: a circle that can be accessed at any given point. However you choose to visualize "how

writing happens," just remember that it doesn't happen all at once, and it certainly can happen in different ways.

Tip:

Timed Writing

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

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page last revised on June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking



Figure: Image by Pixabay

The Prompt: What Does "Analyze" Mean Anyway?

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

1. *Focus on the* verbs. Look for verbs like "compare," "explain," "justify," "reflect" or the all-purpose "analyze." You're not just producing a paper as an artifact; you're conveying, in written communication, some intellectual work you have done. So the question is, what kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning?
2. *Put the assignment in context*. Many professors think in terms of assignment sequences. For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then a first draft, then a final draft, and, perhaps, a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you're on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date, and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing your discussion.[5] If the assignment isn't part of a sequence, think about where it falls in the semester, and how it relates to readings and other assignments. Are there headings on the syllabus that indicate larger units of material? For example, if you see that a paper comes at the end of a three-week unit on the role of the Internet in organizational behavior, then your professor likely wants you to synthesize that material in your own way. You should also check your notes and online course resources for any other guidelines about the workflow. Maybe you got a rubric a couple weeks ago and forgot about it. Maybe your instructor posted a link about "how to make an annotated bibliography" but then forgot to mention it in class.
3. *Try a free-write*. When handing out an assignment, teachers often ask students to do a five-minute or ten-minute free-write. A free-write is when you just write, without stopping, for a set period of time. That doesn't sound very "free;" it actually sounds kind of coerced. The "free" part is *what* you write—it can be whatever comes to mind. Professional writers use free-writing to get started on a challenging (or distasteful) writing task or to overcome writers block or a powerful urge to procrastinate. The idea is that if you just make yourself write, you can't help but produce some kind of useful nugget. Thus, even if the first

eight sentences of your free write are all variations on “I don’t understand this” or “I’d really rather be doing something else,” eventually you’ll write something like “I guess the main point of this is …” and then you’re off and running. As instructors, we’ve found that asking students to do a brief free-write right after I hand out an assignment generates useful clarification questions. If your instructor doesn’t make time for that in class, a quick free-write on your own will quickly reveal whether you need clarification about the assignment and, often, what questions to ask.

4. *Ask for clarification the right way*. Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, especially because students’ familiarity with the field can vary enormously. Asking for clarification is a good thing. Be aware, though, that instructors get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and instead receive an exact recipe for an 'A' paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification, but try to convey that you want to learn and you’re ready to work.In general, avoid starting a question with “Do we have to …” because I can guarantee that your instructor is thinking, “You don’t *have* to do crap. You’re an adult. You chose college. You chose this class. You’re free to exercise your right to fail.” Similarly, avoid asking the professor about what he or she “wants.” You’re not performing some service for the professor when you write a paper. What they “want” is for you to really think about the material.
5. *So what does analyze mean?* Analyze means breaking down a topic into component parts and exploring and examining those various parts to come to some sort of new understanding.

Table 4.3.1 -- Clarifying Questions for Essay Assignments

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

Three Common Types of College Writing Assignments

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

The Closed Writing Assignment

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

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

The Semi-Open Writing Assignment

- Discuss the role of law in Antigone.

- Show how the Fugitive Slave Act influenced the Abolitionist Movement.

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

The Open Writing Assignment

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

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Rubrics as Road Maps

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

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

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

Critical Thinking in the College Essay Assignments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

reflections. Artists of all kinds find satisfaction in continually seeking greater challenges. Continual reflection and improvement is part of the craft.

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

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

> A bat and ball cost $1.10.
>
> The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.
>
> How much does the ball cost?

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

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

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

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

Other Resources

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

Exercise 1

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

Video

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 5.3.1

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

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page last updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

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

5.4: Argument



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Argument

Making a claim

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

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

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

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

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

Arguments in academic writing are usually complex and take time to develop. Your argument will need to be more than a simple or obvious statement such as “Frank Lloyd Wright was a great architect.” Such a statement might capture your initial impressions of

Wright as you have studied him in class; however, you need to look deeper and express specifically what caused that "greatness." Your instructor will probably expect something more complicated, such as "Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture combines elements of European modernism, Asian aesthetic form, and locally found materials to create a unique new style," or "There are many strong similarities between Wright's building designs and those of his mother, which suggests that he may have borrowed some of her ideas." To develop your argument, you would then define your terms and prove your claim with evidence from Wright's drawings and buildings and those of the other architects you mentioned.

Evidence

Do not stop with having a point. You have to back up your point with evidence. The strength of your evidence, and your use of it, can make or break your argument. See this handout on evidence. You already have the natural inclination for this type of thinking, if not in an academic setting. Think about how you talked your parents into letting you borrow the family car. Did you present them with lots of instances of your past trustworthiness? Did you make them feel guilty because your friends' parents all let them drive? Did you whine until they just wanted you to shut up? Did you look up statistics on teen driving and use them to show how you didn't fit the dangerous-driver profile? These are all types of argumentation, and they exist in academia in similar forms.

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

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Counter-argument

One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing is to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Audience

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

Critical reading

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

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

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

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page most recently updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.4: Argument is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.4: Argument by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment

Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

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

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

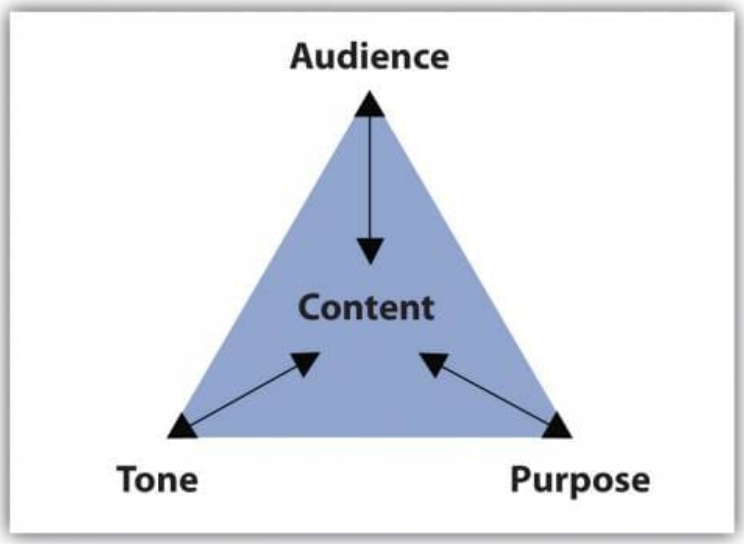


Figure: Amazon.

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

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

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

Identifying the Audience

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role as does the audience of a play. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even

detect the audience-driven decisions. For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send e-mails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message. In other words, being aware of "invisible" readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke. Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit through writing a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers imply their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose. Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

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

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

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

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

Exercise 1

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

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

1. Audience: An instructor
    1. Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis

    2. Content:
2. Audience: Classmates
    1. Purpose: To summarize the effects of the $700 billion government bailout
    2. Content:
3. Audience: An employer
    1. Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery
    2. Content:

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

Exercise 2

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

My assignment:

My purpose:

My audience:

My tone:

My content ideas:

Managing Your Time

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

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

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

Tip:

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

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

Table 4.5.1 -- Time-Planning Example

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

Contributors and Attributions

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

This page most recently updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.6: Prewriting Strategies

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

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

These are the five steps in the writing process:

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

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

Prewriting

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Choosing a Topic

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

On this page, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she prepares a piece of writing. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself why you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and for whom you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Using Experience and Observations

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

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

Reading

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

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

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

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

Free writing

Free writing is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes). During

the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, just copy the same word or phrase over and over until you come up with a new thought.

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

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

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

Tip

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



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

Exercise 1

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

Asking Questions

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

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you choose your topic, answering these

questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

When Mariah reread her free writing notes, she found she had rambled and her thoughts were disjointed. She realized that the topic that interested her most was the one she started with, the media. She then decided to explore that topic by asking herself questions about it. Her purpose was to refine media into a topic she felt comfortable writing about. To see how asking questions can help you choose a topic, take a look at the following chart that Mariah completed to record her questions and answers. She asked herself the questions that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are often called the 5WH questions, after their initial letters.

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

Tip

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

Exercise 2

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

5WH Questions

1. Who?

   _____

2. What?

   _____

3. Where?

   _____

4. When?

   _____

5. Why?

   _____

6. How?

   _____

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

Exercise 3

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

My general topic: _____

Tip

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

More Prewriting Techniques

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

- Brainstorming
- Idea mapping
- Searching the Internet

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

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

Brainstorming

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

The following image is Mariah's brainstorming list:



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

Writing at Work



Figure:

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

Idea Mapping

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

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

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



Image from @api.

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

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

Searching the Internet

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

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

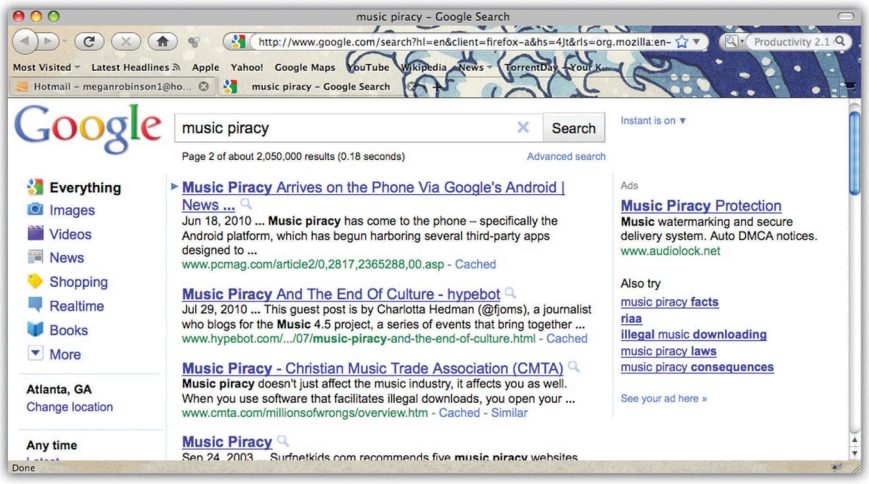
When you search the Internet, type some key words from your broad topic or words from your narrowed focus into your browser's search engine (many good general and specialized search engines are available for you to try). Then look over the results for relevant and interesting articles.

Results from an Internet search show writers the following information:

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

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

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



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

Image from @api.

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

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

Exercise 4

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

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

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

Topic Checklist

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

- Am I interested in this topic?
- Would my audience be interested?

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

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

My narrowed topic: _____

Watch this video that covers the basics of prewriting:

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 5.6.1

Contributors and Attributions

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

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED CONTENT:

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

This page most recently updated June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.6: Prewriting Strategies is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.6: Prewriting Strategies by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.7: Outlining



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Organizing Your Ideas

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

Simply passing your eyes over an article or textbook chapter one time through is not sufficient to learn the material. Organizing information after you read it is the way to make sure you both *understand* it and *remember* it, whether for class discussion, for a test, or for an essay assignment. With practice, you will learn to organize what you read in ways that best suit your own learning style and the materials you are reading.

How do I do this?

Review your annotations and class notes and find some of the following information that you may need.

- Vocabulary
- Main ideas
- Supporting details
- Information that supports your inferences
- Information you find interesting or important
- Information you find confusing
- Information you could use in your essay

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

When you write, you need to organize your ideas in an order that makes sense. The writing you complete in all your courses exposes how analytically and critically your mind works. In some courses, the only direct contact you may have with your instructor

is through the assignments you write for the course. You can make a good impression by spending time ordering your ideas.

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

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

Methods of Organizing Writing

The three common methods of organizing writing are chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance. Another common way to order your ideas is background/problem/solution. You need to keep these organizational structures in mind as you plan how to arrange the information you have gathered in an outline. An outline is a written plan that serves as a skeleton for the paragraphs you write. Later, when you draft paragraphs in the next stage of the writing process, you will add support to create “flesh” and “muscle” for your assignment.

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

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

Table 8.1 Order versus Purpose

Order	P
Chronological Order	To explain the history of an event or a topic
	To tell a story or relate an experience
	To explain how to do or make something
	To explain the steps in a process
Spatial Order	To help readers visualize something as you want them to see it
	To create a main impression using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
Order of Importance	To persuade or convince
	To rank items by their importance, benefit, or significance
Cause and effect or Problem and solution	To explain the cause or correlation of a couple of things and the effect of that To explain a problem (an effect, and maybe its causes) and provide potential solutions

Chronological Order

Chronological arrangement has the following purposes:

- To explain the history of an event or a topic
- To tell a story or relate an experience
- To explain how to do or to make something
- To explain the steps in a process

Chronological order is mostly used in expository writing, which is a form of writing that narrates, describes, informs, or explains a process. When using chronological order, arrange the events in the order that they actually happened, or will happen if you are giving instructions. This method requires you to use words such as *first*, *second*, *then*, *after that*, *later*, and *finally*. These transition words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis.

For example, if you are writing an essay about the history of the airline industry, you would begin with its conception and detail the essential timeline events up until present day. You would follow the chain of events using words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, and so on.

Writing at Work

At some point in your career you may have to file a complaint with your human resources department. Using chronological order is a useful tool in describing the events that led up to your filing the grievance. You would logically lay out the events in the order that they occurred using the key transition words. The more logical your complaint, the more likely you will be well received and helped.

Exercise 1

Choose an accomplishment you have achieved in your life. The important moment could be in sports, schooling, family, or extracurricular activities. On your own sheet of paper, list the steps you took to reach your goal. Try to be as specific as possible with the steps you took. Pay attention to using transition words to focus your writing.

Keep in mind that chronological order is most appropriate for the following purposes:

- Writing essays containing heavy research
- Writing essays with the aim of listing, explaining, or narrating
- Writing essays that analyze literary works such as poems, plays, or books

Tip

When using chronological order, your introduction should indicate the information you will cover and in what order, and the introduction should also establish the relevance of the information. Your body paragraphs should then provide clear divisions or steps in chronology. You can divide your paragraphs by time (such as decades, wars, or other historical events) or by the same structure of the work you are examining (such as a line-by-line explication of a poem).

Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that describes a process you are familiar with and can do well. Assume that your reader is unfamiliar with the procedure. Remember to use the chronological key words, such as *first*, *second*, *then*, and *finally*.

Spatial Order

Spatial order is best used for the following purposes:

- Helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it
- Evoking a scene using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
- Writing a descriptive essay

Spatial order means that you explain or describe objects as they are arranged around you in your space, for example in a bedroom. As the writer, you create a picture for your reader, and their perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you.

The view must move in an orderly, logical progression, giving the reader clear directional signals to follow from place to place. The key to using this method is to choose a specific starting point and then guide the reader to follow your eye as it moves in an orderly trajectory from your starting point.

Pay attention to the following student's description of her bedroom and how she guides the reader through the viewing process, foot by foot.

Attached to my bedroom wall is a small wooden rack dangling with red and turquoise necklaces that shimmer as you enter. Just to the right of the rack is my window, framed by billowy white curtains. The peace of such an image is a stark contrast to my desk, which sits to the right of the window, layered in textbooks, crumpled papers, coffee cups, and an overflowing ashtray. Turning my head to the right, I see a set of two bare windows that frame the trees outside the glass like a 3D painting. Below the windows is an oak chest from which blankets and scarves are protruding. Against the wall opposite the billowy curtains is an antique dresser, on top of which sits a jewelry box and a few picture frames. A tall mirror attached to the dresser takes up most of the wall, which is the color of lavender.

This paragraph incorporates both an implied topic sentence and spatial order. Often in a descriptive essay, the two work together.

The following are possible transition words to include when using spatial order:

- Just to the left or just to the right
- Behind
- Between
- On the left or on the right
- Across from
- A little further down
- To the south, to the east, and so on
- A few yards away
- Turning left or turning right

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph using spatial order that describes your commute to work, school, or another location you visit often.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers

Order of Importance

The order of importance is best used for the following purposes:

- Persuading and convincing
- Ranking items by their importance, benefit, or significance
- Illustrating a situation, problem, or solution

Most essays move from the least to the most important point, and the paragraphs are arranged in an effort to build the essay's strength. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to begin with your most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable. Depending on your audience, when writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading.

For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

Writing at Work

During your career, you may be required to work on a team that devises a strategy for a specific goal of your company, such as increasing profits. When planning your strategy you should organize your steps in order of importance. This demonstrates the ability to prioritize and plan. Using the order of importance technique also shows that you can create a resolution with logical steps for accomplishing a common goal.

Exercise 4

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that discusses a passion of yours. Your passion could be music, a particular sport, filmmaking, and so on. Your paragraph should be built upon the reasons why you feel so strongly. Briefly discuss your reasons in the order of least to greatest importance

Cause and Effect

Cause and effect is best used when you:

- Want to explain why a problem occurs, or
- Want to explain a phenomenon (i.e., why tornadoes happen).

It always usually makes sense to discuss and explain the causes before writing about the effects because generally they are chronological in order. Sometimes, however, the logic may be conditional (i.e., under these conditions, this effect occurs). Therefore, when writing about cause and effect, many different logical joiners may be used to indicate the logic. Please see Joining Words.

Sometimes, however, the effect is what will motivate the reader, especially when that effect is a problem, and it's something you would like the reader to act upon. In this case, sometimes the effect is demonstrated through an example first -- in the introduction. This is a common way that writers of feature articles for newspapers and magazines begin their essays.

Writing at Work

A common need for writing at work is to propose alternative or better ways of doing things, whether that be a process or policy improvement (for efficiency or quality control, etc.) These are basically problem/solution "papers" that must show the cause and effect of the "problem" before providing potential solutions. Ordering your writing with the problem before the solution is always best to keep your reader engaged with yoru proposal.

Exercise 5

On a separate piece of paper, think of a problem in society (yes, there are many from which to choose). This problem is the effect of something. Now think of some of the causes of that problem/effect. While one thing may not be a cause in and of itself, combined with other causes, they may together create an effect that is a problem. **Careful though!** Just because one event occurs before another doesn't mean that the first event *caused* the second event. It could just be a concidence. Assuming this is called a fallacy of the consequent (see logical fallacies). But write downa list of things that may -- together or individually -- help cause the effect. Then think about how those causes relate to each other to create the effect.

Writing an Outline

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

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

outline.

Drafting an Outline

While there are distinct differences between developing and organizing support, and between developing/organizing support and drafting the essay, differentiating these steps can sometimes be difficult – in many cases, they blend into one another. As you develop support, you may find that you are also organizing that support into categories, thus creating a draft in outline form.

If outlining seems logical to your way of thinking and approaching a writing project, know that there are several different kinds of outlines:

- Roman or Arabic Numeral (highly structured, more formal). You can use this for full sentence outlines.
- bullet point (less structured, more informal)
- mind map (less structured, more informal)
- other methods as appropriate, such as a timeline, PowerPoint slides, or whatever method works for the topic and your own way of thinking about the topic

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

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

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

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

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



Figure: of outline from Amazon.

Note

In an outline, any supporting detail can be developed with subpoints. For simplicity, the model shows them only under the first main point.

Tip

Formal outlines are often quite rigid in their organization. As many instructors will specify, you cannot subdivide one point if it is only one part. For example, for every roman numeral I, there must be a II. For every A, there must be a B. For every Arabic numeral 1, there must be a 2. See for yourself on the sample outlines above.

Constructing Topic Outlines

A topic outline is the same as a sentence outline except you use words or phrases instead of complete sentences. Words and phrases keep the outline short and easier to comprehend. All the headings, however, must be written in parallel structure. (For more information on parallel structure, see Chapter 12 “Grammatical Parallelism".)

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

Checklist

1.Writing an Effective Topic Outline

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

- Do I have a controlling idea that guides the development of the entire piece of writing?
- Do I have three or more main points that I want to make in this piece of writing? Does each main point connect to my controlling idea?
- Is my outline in the best order—chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance—for me to present my main points? Will this order help me get my main point across?
- Do I have supporting details that will help me inform, explain, or prove my main points?

- Do I need to add more support? If so, where?
- Do I need to make any adjustments in my working thesis statement before I consider it the final version?

Bullet Point/Topic Outline

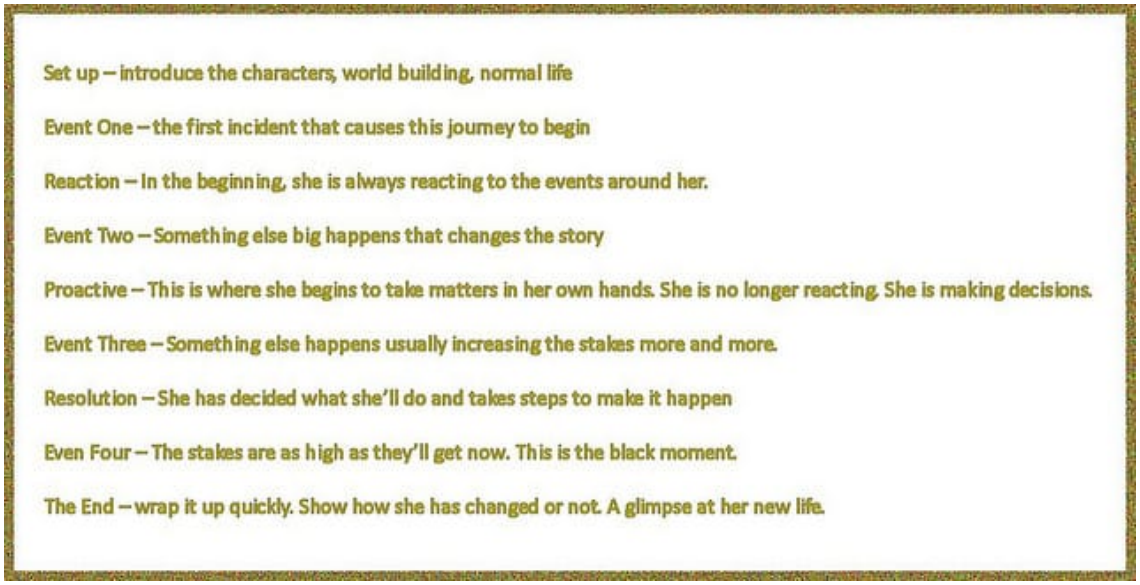


Figure: from Amazon.

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 5

Using the working thesis statement you wrote and the reading you did in Section 4.6 "Prewriting Strategies", construct a topic outline for your essay. Be sure to observe correct outline form, including correct indentions and the use of Roman and Arabic numerals and capital letters.

2. Constructing Sentence Outlines

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

Thesis statement: E-mail and internet monitoring, as currently practiced, is an invasion of employees' rights in the workplace.

1. 1. The situation: Over 80% of today's companies monitor their employees.
      1. To prevent fraudulent activities, theft, and other workplace related violations.
      2. To more efficiently monitor employee productivity.
      3. To prevent any legal liabilities due to harassing or offensive communications.
   2. What are employees' privacy rights when it comes to electronic monitoring and surveillance in the workplace?
      1. American employees have basically no legal protection from mean and snooping bosses.
         1. There are no federal or state laws protecting employees.
         2. Employees may assert privacy protection for their own personal effects.
      2. Most managers believe that there is no right to privacy in the workplace.
         1. Workplace communications should be about work; anything else is a misuse of company equipment and

company time.
2. Employers have a right to prevent misuse by monitoring employee communications.

Tip

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

3. Mind Map Outline

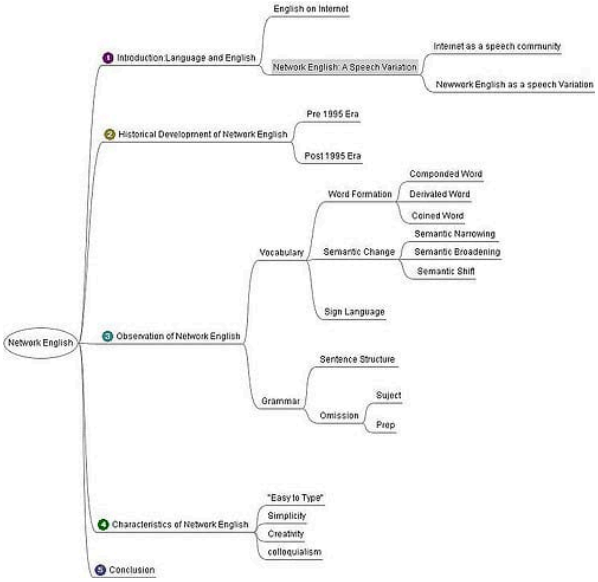


Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Wrapping Up

Whichever type of outline you've started with, it can conveniently morph into an essay draft, simply by choosing a portion of the outline as a place to start writing. Start developing that portion with topic sentences, full sentences, complete thoughts, details, examples, facts, opinions, and all appropriate types of support. Remember that an outline identifies the ideas you intend to use in the essay; you develop the actual essay draft by adding support and explanation to those ideas.

One of the many advantages to working from an outline is that you create an idea structure and can see visually how/whether those ideas relate, so you can see what needs to be added or edited. Because outlines capture ideas, they also allow you to begin your draft with whatever section or group of ideas you choose. Pick a section you feel strongly about, and start there. Move around your outline in whatever order you choose, in order to keep the momentum going to develop your essay draft.

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 6

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

The following video explains a little more about outlining.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 5.7.1

Outlines. **Authored By:** University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill Writing Center. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Post-Outlining

Some people have to write a complete draft first. If you *must* do this, you should do a post-outline. The process of writing a post-outline involves going through your very rough draft and writing down the thesis (if there is one -- it may appear at the beginning of the conclusion), the main idea of each paragraph, and the major subpoints of each paragraph in a formal outline form. Then, make sure that each subpoint actually relates to the main idea of each paragraph and that each main idea/topic sentence relates to your thesis. You may find that you need to move some parts of paragraphs to different paragraph or delete some parts of paragraphs that are completely off-topic. Then, do the same thing with the major subpoints and the supporting information. Be sure that each quote or paraphrase supports the major subpoint. If it doesn't, find more appropriate support. This process can take a lot longer than writing an outline before you draft and really only works if you are writing a shorter paper. Do try to write an outline first before drafting longer papers.

Contributors

- Adapted from English Compostion II. **Provided by:** Saylor Academy. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page most recently updated on June 3, 2020.

This page titled 5.7: Outlining is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.7: Outlining by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

5.8: Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Reading and writing – especially academic reading and writing -- are recursive processes in which meaning is made during the acts of reading and writing.
- The interaction between audience, tone, and purpose all affect various aspects of the content you choose to use.
- Making an argument involves choosing evidence that is both appropriate for what you want to prove and also effective for the audience.
- Counter-argument involves anticipating the audience's potential objections to your argument and addressing them.
- Using prewriting strategies can help you narrow your focus and decide if the topic is going to work for you.
- There are a number of ways to develop an outline, and you should do so for any essay that requires you to think about how you might organize your thoughts.

This page titled 5.8: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 4.8: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6: THESIS STATEMENTS, TOPIC SENTENCES AND THE FIRST DRAFT

6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement

6.2: Topic Sentences

6.3: Writing the Essay Draft

6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

6.5: Key Takeaways

This page titled 6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Have you ever known a person who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following his train of thought as he jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe he told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. His ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.

Just as a personal anecdote can be a disorganized mess, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body.

Just like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

Elements of a Thesis Statement

For every essay you write, you must focus on a central idea. This idea stems from a topic you have chosen or been assigned or from a question your teacher has asked. It is not enough merely to discuss a general topic or simply answer a question with a yes or no. You have to form a specific opinion, and then articulate that into a controlling idea—the main idea upon which you build your thesis.

Remember that a thesis is not the topic itself, but rather your interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic your professor gives you, you must ask yourself, "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 one sentence long and appears toward the end of your 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 you will organize your information. Remember that a thesis statement does not summarize an issue but rather dissects it.

A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

- **Specificity.** A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care 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 is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.
- **Ability to be argued.** A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.
- **Ability to be demonstrated.** For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.
- **Forcefulness.** A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.
- **Confidence.** In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as *I feel* or *I believe* actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as *in my opinion* or *I believe*. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, write a thesis statement for each of the following topics. Remember to make each statement specific, precise, demonstrable, forceful and confident.

Topics

- Texting while driving
- The legal drinking age in the United States
- Steroid use among professional athletes
- Abortion
- Racism

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
- Precision
- Ability to be argued
- Ability to be demonstrated
- Forcefulness
- Confidence

1. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived

through segregation and integration in the United States.
2. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
3. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
4. J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.
5. Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.
6. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
7. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

Five Ways of Looking at a Thesis

1. A thesis creates an argument that builds from one point to the next, giving the paper a direction that the audience can follow as the paper develops.

This point often separates the best theses from the pack. A good thesis can prevent the two weakest ways of organizing a critical paper: the pile of information and the plot summary with comments. A paper that presents a pile of information will frequently introduce new paragraphs with transitions that simply indicate the addition of more stuff. ("Another character who exhibits these traits is X," for instance.) Consider these examples:

A: *The Rules* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* both tell women how to act.

B: By looking at *The Rules*, a modern conduct book for women, we can see how Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is itself like a conduct book, questioning the rules for social success in her society and offering a new model.

Example A would almost inevitably lead to a paper organized as a pile of information. A plot summary with comments follows the chronological development of a text while picking out the same element of every segment; a transition in such a paper might read, "In the next scene, the color blue also figures prominently." Both of these approaches constitute too much of a good thing. Papers must compile evidence, of course, and following the chronology of a text can sometimes help a reader keep track of a paper's argument.

The best papers, however, will develop according to a more complex logic articulated in a strong thesis. Example B above would lead a paper to organize its evidence according to the paper's own logic.

2. A thesis fits comfortably into the Magic Thesis Sentence (MTS).

The MTS: By looking at _____, we can see _____, which most readers don't see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because _____.

Try it out with the examples from the first point:

A: By telling the story of Wesley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the narrator's grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

Notice that the MTS adds a new dimension to point number one above. The first part of the MTS asks you to find something strange ("which most readers don't see"), and the second part asks you to think about the importance of the strangeness. Thesis A would not work at all in the MTS; one could not reasonably state that "most readers [or viewers] don't see" that film's affirmation of true love, and the statement does not even attempt to explain the importance of its claim. Thesis B, on the other hand, gives us a way to complete the MTS, as in "By looking at the way fighting sticks link the plot and frame of *The Princess Bride*, we can see the way the narrator's grandson is trained in true love, which most people don't see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because unlike the rest of the film, the fighting sticks suggest that love is not natural but socialized." One does not need to write out the MTS in such a neat one-sentence form, of course, but thinking through the structure of the MTS can help refine thesis ideas.

3. A thesis says something about the text(s) *exclusively*.

If a thesis could describe many works equally well, it needs to be more specific. Let's return to our examples from above:

A: By telling the story of Wesley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the narrator's grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

Try substituting other works:

A: By telling the story of Darcy and Elizabeth's triumph over evil, *Pride and Prejudice* affirms the power of true love.

Sure, that makes sense. Bad sign.

B: Although the main plot of *Pride and Prejudice* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that it is not natural but socialized.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Um, nope. Even if you have never read *Pride and Prejudice*, you can probably guess that such a precise thesis could hardly apply to other works. Good sign. The point here is that the thesis needs to be specific enough that its meaning relates to the specific work(s) you are writing about -- be it fiction or nonfiction.

4. A thesis makes a lot of information irrelevant.

If the thesis is specific enough, it will make a point that focuses on only a small part of the text be analyzed or a particular aspect of a larger topic. A writer should ultimately apply that point to the work as a whole, but a thesis will call attention to specific parts of it. Let's look at those examples again. (This is the last time, I promise.)

A: By telling the story of Wesley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the narrator's grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

One way of spotting the problem with Example A is to note that a simple plot summary would support its point. That is not of true example B, which tells the reader exactly what moments the paper will be discussed and why. The thesis is focused and concentrated.

5. Remember to Address the Work as a Whole: The “So What?”

As you complete your analysis, remember to think about what the effect this will have on the world of academia.

- Does your thesis introduce your topic in a clear way?
- Does the introduction mention what you will be addressing? Social constructs, gender issues, etc.

Writing a Thesis Statement

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

Tip

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

Developing Thesis Statements from Topics

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

Table 5.1 “Topics and Thesis Statements” compares topics and thesis statements.

Table 5.1 Topics and Thesis Statements

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

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

Exercise 2

Using the topic you selected in Section 4.6 “Prewriting Strategies”, develop a working thesis statement that states your controlling idea for the piece of writing you are doing. On a sheet of paper, write your working thesis statement.

Tip

You will make several attempts before you devise a working thesis statement that you think is effective. Each draft of the thesis statement will bring you closer to the wording that expresses your meaning exactly. Sometimes, this refinement of the thesis statement happens after your write your first draft of the paper.

Guidelines for Drafting a Thesis Statement

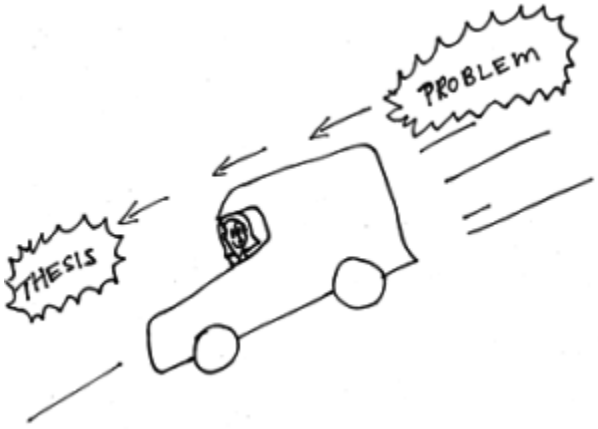


Figure: from Amazon AWS.

It helps to understand why readers value the arguable thesis. What larger purpose does it serve? Readers will bring a set of expectations to an essay. If writers can anticipate the expectations of their readers, the better they will be able to persuade the audience to find the arguments convincing, interesting, and relevant.

Academic readers (and readers more generally) read to learn something new. They want to see the writer challenge commonplaces—either everyday assumptions about the object of study or truisms in the scholarly literature. In other words, academic readers want to be surprised so that their thinking shifts or at least becomes more complex by the time they finish reading an essay. Good essays problematize what we think we know and offer an alternative explanation in its place. They leave their reader with a fresh perspective on a problem.

We all bring important past experiences and beliefs to our interpretations of texts, objects, and problems. Writers can harness these observational powers to engage critically with what they are studying. The key is to be alert to what strikes you as strange, problematic, paradoxical, or puzzling about your topic. If writers can articulate this and a claim in response, they are well on their way to formulating an arguable thesis in the introduction.

How do I set up a “problem” and an arguable thesis in response?

All good writing has a purpose or motive for existing. The thesis is the writer’s surprising response to this problem or motive. This is why it seldom makes sense to start a writing project by articulating the thesis. The first step is to articulate the question or problem your paper addresses.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Here are some possible ways to introduce a conceptual problem in your paper's introduction.

1. Challenge a commonplace interpretation (or your own first impressions).



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

How are readers likely to interpret this source or issue? What might intelligent readers think at first glance? (Or, if you've been given secondary sources or have been asked to conduct research to locate secondary sources, what do other writers or scholars assume is true or important about your primary source or issue?)

What does this commonplace interpretation leave out, overlook, or under-emphasize?

2. Help the reader see the complexity of your topic.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Identify and describe for the reader a paradox, puzzle, or contradiction in a primary source(s).

What larger questions does this paradox or contradiction raise for readers?

3. If research is part of the assignment, piggyback off another scholar's research.



Figure: Summarize another scholar's argument about the topic, primary source, or case study and explain to the reader why this claim is interesting and explain how the claim will extend this scholar's argument to explore an issue or case study that the scholar doesn't address fully.

4. If research is part of the assignment, identify a gap in another scholar's or a group of scholars' research.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Summarize another scholar's argument about your topic, primary source, or case study and explain to the reader why this claim is interesting. Or, summarize how scholars in the field tend to approach the topic.

Next, explain what important aspect this scholarly representation misses or distorts. Introduce the particular approach to the topic and its value.

5. If research is part of the assignment, bring in a new lens for investigating the case study or problem.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Summarize how a scholar or group of scholars has approached the topic.

Introduce a theoretical source (possibly from another discipline) and explain how it helps to address this issue from a new and productive angle.

Tip: your introductory paragraph will probably look like this:



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Testing Your Thesis

Test a thesis statement's arguability by asking the following questions:

1) Does the thesis only or mostly summarize a source?

If so, try some of the exercises above to articulate the paper's conceptual problem or question.

2) Is the thesis arguable – can it be supported by evidence, and is it surprising and contentious?

If not, return to the sources and practice the exercises above.

3) Is the thesis about the primary source, or is it about the world?

If it's about the world, revise it so that it focuses on primary source(s). Remember to include solid evidence to support the thesis.

"THREE-STORY THESIS STATEMENTS" BY AMY GUPTIL

How do you produce a good, strong thesis? And how do you know when you've gotten there? Many instructors and writers find useful a metaphor based on this passage by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.:[3]

> There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight.

One-story theses state inarguable facts. Two-story theses bring in an arguable (interpretive or analytical) point. Three-story theses nest that point within its larger, compelling implications. [4]

The biggest benefit of the three-story metaphor is that it describes a process for building a thesis. To build the first story, you first have to get familiar with the complex, relevant facts surrounding the problem or question. You have to be able to describe the situation thoroughly and accurately. Then, with that first story built, you can layer on the second story by formulating the insightful, arguable point that animates the analysis. That's often the most effortful part: brainstorming, elaborating and comparing alternative ideas, finalizing your point. With that specified, you can frame up the third story by articulating why the point you make matters beyond its particular topic or case.

Thesis: that's the word that pops at me whenever I write an essay. Seeing this word in the prompt scared me and made me think to myself, "Oh great, what are they really looking for?" or "How am I going to make a thesis for a college paper?" When rehearing that I would be focusing on theses again in a class, I said to myself, "Here we go again!" But after learning about the three story thesis, I never had a problem with writing another thesis. In fact, I look forward to being asked on a paper to create a thesis.

Timothée Pizarro

For example, imagine you have been assigned a paper about the impact of online learning in higher education. You would first construct an account of the origins and multiple forms of online learning and assess research findings about its use and effectiveness. If you've done that well, you'll probably come up with a well considered opinion that wouldn't be obvious to readers who haven't looked at the issue in depth. Maybe you'll want to argue that online learning is a threat to the academic community. Or perhaps you'll want to make the case that online learning opens up pathways to college degrees that traditional campus-based learning does not. In the course of developing your central, argumentative point, you'll come to recognize its larger context; in this example, you may claim that online learning can serve to better integrate higher education with the rest of society, as online learners bring their educational and career experiences together. To outline this example:

- *First story*: Online learning is becoming more prevalent and takes many different forms.
- *Second story*: While most observers see it as a *transformation* of higher education, online learning is better thought of an *extension* of higher education in that it reaches learners who aren't disposed to participate in traditional campus-based education.
- *Third story*: Online learning appears to be a promising way to better integrate higher education with other institutions in society, as online learners integrate their educational experiences with the other realms of their life, promoting the freer flow of ideas between the academy and the rest of society.

Here's another example of a three-story thesis:[5]

- *First story*: Edith Wharton did not consider herself a modernist writer, and she didn't write like her modernist contemporaries.
- *Second story*: However, in her work we can see her grappling with both the questions and literary forms that fascinated modernist writers of her era. While not an avowed modernist, she did engage with modernist themes and questions.
- *Third story*: Thus, it is more revealing to think of modernism as a conversation rather than a category or practice.

Here's one more example:

- *First story*: Scientists disagree about the likely impact in the U.S. of the light brown apple moth (LBAM), an agricultural pest native to Australia.

- *Second story*: Research findings to date suggest that the decision to spray pheromones over the skies of several southern Californian counties to combat the LBAM was poorly thought out.
- *Third story*: Together, the scientific ambiguities and the controversial response strengthen the claim that industrial-style approaches to pest management are inherently unsustainable.

A thesis statement that stops at the first story isn't usually considered a thesis. A two-story thesis is usually considered competent, though some two-story theses are more intriguing and ambitious than others. A thoughtfully crafted and well informed three-story thesis puts the author on a smooth path toward an excellent paper.

The concept of a three-story thesis framework was the most helpful piece of information I gained from the writing component of DCC 100. The first time I utilized it in a college paper, my professor included "good thesis" and "excellent introduction" in her notes and graded it significantly higher than my previous papers. You can expect similar results if you dig deeper to form three-story theses. More importantly, doing so will make the actual writing of your paper more straightforward as well. Arguing something specific makes the structure of your paper much easier to design.

Peter Farrell

Effective Thesis Statements

As mentioned before, a thesis statement is the controlling idea of your essay. It is the main idea that all of the other sentences in the essay relate to. After gathering information about your topic, you need to figure out what you want to say about it.

An effective thesis statement has two major characteristics.

1. An effective thesis statement makes a point about a topic. For this reason, it must do more than state a fact or announce what you plan to write about.

Statement of fact: The military recruits students in high schools.

Announcement: In this essay, I would like to discuss what's wrong with military recruitment in high schools.

List thesis: We should not allow the military to recruit in high schools because recruiters violate privacy, manipulate naïve young people, and target low-income youth.

Effective thesis: We should end the abusive and discriminatory practice of military recruitment in high schools.

A statement of fact is not an effective thesis statement because it does not take a position, giving you nothing to develop in your essay. Likewise, an announcement of what you plan to write about in your essay does not take a position on the issue, leaving you with nothing to develop. A good thesis statement makes a claim that is arguable.

2. The most effective thesis statements do not list your main points but unite your main points into a larger, central idea. The list thesis above looks strong, but notice how the effective thesis connects the three points with the words "abusive" and "discriminatory." Now we know how the three points relate to each other; they are more than just a list.

To turn three or four "reasons" or topic sentences into a thesis, consider what they have in common and what your overall point is.

Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.

  Weak thesis statement: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.

- 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 use sex to sell their products.

- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.

  Weak thesis statement: The life of Abraham Lincoln was long and challenging.

Exercise 3

Read the following thesis statements. On a separate piece of paper, identify each as weak or strong. For those that are weak, list the reasons why. Then revise the weak statements so that they conform to the requirements of a strong thesis.

1. The subject of this paper is my experience with ferrets as pets.
2. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
3. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet who lived in Baltimore during the nineteenth century.
4. In this essay, I will give you lots of reasons why slot machines should not be legalized in Baltimore.
5. Despite his promises during his campaign, President Kennedy took few executive measures to support civil rights legislation.
6. Because many children's toys have potential safety hazards that could lead to injury, it is clear that not all children's toys are safe.
7. My experience with young children has taught me that I want to be a disciplinary parent because I believe that a child without discipline can be a parent's worst nightmare.

Writing at Work

Often in your career, you will need to ask your manager for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your manager know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Remember from Chapter 4 that your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

Tip

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus their research and gain more direction in their writing.

2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke*. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions. (See Chapter 4.6 "Prewriting Strategies" for more information on the 5WH questions.) By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

3. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.

Revised thesis: Kansas City cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered “enough”?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results

Exercise 4

In an earlier section you determined your purpose for writing and your audience. You then completed a free writing exercise about an event you recently experienced and chose a general topic to write about. Using that general topic, you then narrowed it down by answering the 5WH questions. After you answered these questions, you chose one of the three methods of prewriting and gathered possible supporting points for your working thesis statement.

Now, on a separate sheet of paper, write down your working thesis statement. Identify any weaknesses in this sentence and revise the statement to reflect the elements of a strong thesis statement. Make sure it is specific, precise, arguable, demonstrable, forceful, and confident.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

In your career you may have to write a project proposal that focuses on a particular problem in your company, such as reinforcing the tardiness policy. The proposal would aim to fix the problem; using a thesis statement would clearly state the boundaries of the problem and tell the goals of the project. After writing the proposal, you may find that the thesis needs revision to reflect exactly what is expressed in the body. Using the techniques from this chapter would apply to revising that thesis.

Video

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 6.1.1

Purdue OWL: Thesis Statements. **Authored by:** OWL Purdue. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Contributors

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from "Five Ways of Looking at a Thesis." **Authored by:** Erik Simpson. **Provided by:** LumenLearning. **License:** *CC BY: Attribution*
- Adapted from Formulating a Thesis. **Authored by:** Andrea Scott. **Provided by:** Princeton University. **Project:** WritingCommons. **License:** *CC BY-NC-ND:*
- Adapted from Writing in College. **Authored** by Amy Guptill. **License:** CC-NC-SA 4.0

This page most recently updated on June 8, 2020.

This page titled 6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 5.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6.2: Topic Sentences



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Now that you have identified common purposes for writing, learned how to select appropriate content for a particular audience, and written a working thesis (at least) you can think about the structure of a paragraph in greater detail. Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content, or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, then the final product will not hold together very well.

A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

1. **Topic sentence.** The topic sentence is the main idea of the paragraph.
2. **Body.** The body is composed of the supporting sentences that develop the main point.
3. **Conclusion.** The conclusion is the final sentence that summarizes the main point.

The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay and guides the reader by sign-posting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

Topic Sentences

In academic writing, readers expect each paragraph to have a sentence or two that captures its main point. They're often called "topic sentences" or "main ideas." Don't be fooled by the phrase "topic sentence" though. It makes it seem like sentence's job is simply to announce the topic of the paragraph. Rather think about the topic sentence for the paragraph in the same way you think about the thesis statement for the essay as a whole (see "Thesis Statements"). Sometimes topic sentence will also include a transition from the previous paragraph, but not always. A topic sentence should never simply be a transition.

Consider these two examples: [2]

Version A: *Now we turn to the epidemiological evidence.*

Version B: *The epidemiological evidence provides compelling support for the hypothesis emerging from etiological studies.*

Both versions convey a topic; it's pretty easy to predict that the paragraph will be about epidemiological evidence, but only the second version establishes an argumentative point and puts it in context. The paragraph doesn't just describe the epidemiological evidence; it shows how epidemiology is telling the same story as etiology. Similarly, while Version A doesn't relate to anything in particular, Version B immediately suggests that the prior paragraph addresses the biological pathway (i.e. etiology) of a disease

and that the new paragraph will bolster the emerging hypothesis with a different kind of evidence. As a reader, it's easy to keep track of how the paragraph about cells and chemicals and such relates to the paragraph about populations in different places.

By clearly establishing an essential point within its analytic context, a well written topic sentence gives both you and your reader a firm grasp of how each point relates. For example, compare these two sets of topic sentences, each introducing a sequential paragraph[3]:

Set A:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the cause of the disease was unclear. …

The cause of AIDS is HIV.

There are skeptics who question whether HIV is the cause.

Set B:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the cause of the disease was unclear, leading to a broad range of scientific speculation.

By 1986 HIV had been isolated and found to correlate almost exactly with the incidence of AIDS.

HIV skeptics, on the other hand, sought to discredit claims based on epidemiology by emphasizing that the pathogenesis of HIV was still unknown.

Set A isn't wrong per se; it just illustrates a lost opportunity to show the important connections among points. Both versions portray a process unfolding over time: initial uncertainty followed by a breakthrough discovery and then controversy. Even with the same substantive points, a person reading Version A would have to work harder to see how the material in the paragraphs connects. Readers experience Version B as clearer and more engaging.

Thinking of topic sentences as sequential points in an argument reminds one that a key sentence doesn't have to always be a single declarative one. Sometimes you need two sentences together to achieve the work of a topic sentence, and sometimes a question or quotation does a better job than a declarative sentence in clarifying a logical sequence, which brings us to Set C.

Set C:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic the cause was unclear. Virologists, bacteriologists, immunologists, and epidemiologists all pursued different leads, reflecting their particular areas of expertise.

If drug use, lifestyle, and "immune overload" didn't cause AIDS, what did?

*"I've asked questions they apparently can't answer," claimed retrovirologist **Peter Duesberg**[4] who became an oft-quoted skeptical voice in media accounts of AIDS research in the mid-1980s.*

Set C is based on the same three sequential points as Sets A and B: (1) the cause of AIDS was initially unclear (2) HIV was accepted as the cause (3) lone dissenters questioned the claims. However, sets B and C have much more meaning and momentum, and set C, depending on the nature of the argument, features more precise and lively stylistic choices. Opening the second paragraph with a question (that then gets answered) carries forth the sense of befuddlement that researchers initially experienced and helps to convey why the discovery of HIV was a hugely important turning point. Using the self-glorifying Duesberg quote to launch the third paragraph makes the point about lingering skepticism while also introducing a portrait of a leading figure among the skeptics. While Set B is effective as well, Set C illustrates some of the more lively choices available to academic writers.

A last thing to note about topic sentences is that academic readers expect them to be at the beginning of the paragraph.[5] That helps readers comprehend your argument. To see how, try this: find an academic piece (such as a textbook or scholarly article) that strikes you as well written and go through part of it reading just the first sentence of each paragraph. You should be able to easily follow the sequence of logic. When you're writing for professors, it is especially effective to put your key sentences first because they usually convey your own original thinking, which, as you've read here, is exactly what your instructors are looking for in your work. It's a very good sign when your paragraphs are typically composed of a telling key sentence followed by evidence and explanation.

Writing at Work

In the work world, people can be very busy and may not have time to read all the details of a proposal you might make. For this reason, in business writing, people want to know your point up front and then, if they want to look at your reasoning or support, they will read further. Just as in academic writing, in business writing, the reader should be able to read the first sentence of each paragraph and follow your logical thinking and reasoning.

Knowing this convention of academic writing can help you both read and write more effectively. When you're reading a complicated academic piece for the first time, you might want to go through reading only the first sentence or two of each paragraph to get the overall outline of the argument. Then you can go back and read all of it with a clearer picture of how each of the details fit in.[6] And when you're writing, you may also find it useful to write the first sentence of each paragraph (instead of a topic-based outline) to map out a thorough argument before getting immersed in sentence-level wordsmithing. For example, compare these two scaffolds. Which one would launch you into a smoother drafting process?:[7]

Version A (Topic Outline):

I. Granovetter's "Strength of weak ties"

A. Definition

B. Example—getting jobs

II. Creativity in social networks

A. Explanation

B. Richard Florida's argument

III. Implications

A. For urban planners

B. For institutions of higher education

Version B (Key-Sentence Sketch):

The importance of networking for both career development and social change is well known. Granovetter (1973) explains that weak ties—that is, ties among acquaintances—are often more useful in job hunting because they connect job-seekers to a broader range of people and workplaces. ...

Subsequent research in network analysis has shown that weak ties can promote creativity by bringing ideas together from different social realms. ...

Richard Florida (2002) argues that cities would do well to facilitate weak ties in order to recruit members of the "creative class" and spur economic development. ...

Florida's argument can inspire a powerful new approach to strategic planning within colleges and universities as well. ...

As you can see, emphasizing key sentences in both the process and product of academic writing is one way to ensure that your efforts stay focused on developing your argument and communicating your own original thinking in a clear, logical way.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Topic versus Controlling Idea

Topic sentences contain both a main idea (the subject, or topic that the writer is discussing) and a controlling idea (the writer's specific stance on that subject). Just as a thesis statement includes an idea that controls a document's focus, a topic sentence must also contain a controlling idea to direct the paragraph. Different writers may use the same main idea but can steer their paragraph in a number of different directions according to their stance on the subject. Read the following examples.

- Marijuana is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.
- The anti-nausea properties in marijuana are a lifeline for many cancer patients.
- Legalizing marijuana would create a higher demand for Class A and Class B drugs.

Although the topic—marijuana—is the same in all three topic sentences, the controlling idea differs depending on the writer's viewpoint.

Exercise 1

Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following topic sentences.

1. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health.
2. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today's workplace.
3. Raising the legal driving age to twenty-one would decrease road traffic accidents.
4. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial success.
5. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.

Characteristics of a Good Topic Sentence

Five characteristics define a good topic sentence:

1. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.

   Weak example. People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job. (The paragraph is about a specific incident that involved firefighters; therefore, this topic sentence is too general.)

   Stronger example. During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty. (This topic sentence is more specific and indicates that the paragraph will contain information about a particular incident involving Unit 3B.)

2. A good topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea or opinion.

   Weak example. In this paragraph, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals. (This topic sentence provides a main idea, but it does not present a controlling idea.)

   Stronger example. The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern. (This topic sentence presents the writer's opinion on the subject of rising suicide rates among young professionals.)

3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.

Weak example. In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types. (This topic sentence includes a topic and a controlling idea, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.)

Stronger example. Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline. (This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.)

4. A good topic sentence does not include supporting details.

   Weak example. Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year. (This topic sentence includes a supporting detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.)

   Stronger example. Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons. (This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.)

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary.

   Weak example. The military deserves better equipment. (This topic sentence includes a topic and a controlling idea, but the language is bland and unexciting.)

   Stronger example. The appalling lack of resources provided to the military is outrageous and requires our immediate attention. (This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as *appalling* and *immediate* better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.)

Exercise 2

Choose the most effective topic sentence from the following sentence pairs.

1. a. This paper will discuss the likelihood of the Democrats winning the next election.

   b. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Democrats need to listen to public opinion.

2. a. The unrealistic demands of multi-national corporations are crippling workers' ability to achieve the American Dream.

   b. Multi-national corporations are crippling the economy because their workers are unable to balance work and personal lives.

3. a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances.

   b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.

4. a. Heavy metal is outdated and radio stations should stop playing it.

   b. Here is why radio stations should stop playing heavy metal.

Exercise 3

Using the tips on developing effective topic sentences in this section, create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Remember to include a controlling idea as well as a topic. Write your responses on your own sheet of paper.

1. An endangered species

   _____

2. The cost of fuel

   _____

3. The legal drinking age

   _____

4. A controversial film or novel

   _____

Writing at Work

When creating a workplace document, use the "top-down" approach—keep the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph so that readers immediately understand the gist of the message. This method saves busy colleagues precious time and effort trying to figure out the main points and relevant details.

Headings are another helpful tool. In a text-heavy document, break up each section with individual headings. These serve as useful navigation aids, enabling colleagues to skim through the document and locate paragraphs that are relevant to them.

Implied Topic Sentences

Some well-organized paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph. Read the following example:

> Heaving herself up the stairs, Luella had to pause for breath several times. She let out a wheeze as she sat down heavily in the wooden rocking chair. Tao approached her cautiously, as if she might crumble at the slightest touch. He studied her face, like parchment, stretched across the bones so finely he could almost see right through the skin to the decaying muscle underneath. Luella smiled a toothless grin.

Although no single sentence in this paragraph states the main idea, the entire paragraph focuses on one concept—that Luella is extremely old. The topic sentence is thus implied rather than stated. This technique is often used in descriptive or narrative writing. Implied topic sentences work well if the writer has a firm idea of what he or she intends to say in the paragraph and sticks to it. However, a paragraph loses its effectiveness if an implied topic sentence is too subtle or the writer loses focus.

Tip

Avoid using implied topic sentences in an informational document. Readers often lose patience if they are unable to quickly grasp what the writer is trying to say. The clearest and most efficient way to communicate in an informational document is to position the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

Exercise 4

Identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence in the following paragraph.

The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a miniscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from Writing in College. **Authored by:** Amy Guptill. **Provided by:** Milne Publishing. **License:** CC-NC-SA 4.0

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED CONTENT

- "How to Write a Topic Sentence." **Authored by:** Scribbr. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

This page most recently updated on June 23, 2020.

This page titled 6.2: Topic Sentences is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 5.2: Topic Sentences by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6.3: Writing the Essay Draft

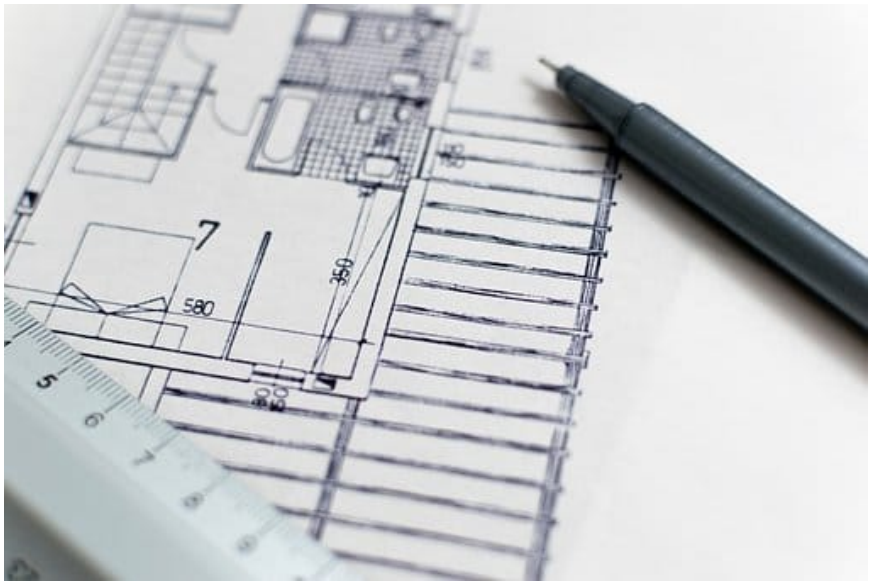


Figure: Image from Pixabay

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

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

Getting Started

Your objective here is to draft the body paragraphs of your essay. Although in college you generally want to move beyond the five-paragraph essay you probably learned in high school, we will review the basics. A five-paragraph essay contains an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. If you are more comfortable starting on paper than on the computer, you can start on paper and then type it before you revise. You can also use a voice recorder to get yourself started, dictating a paragraph or two to get you thinking. In this lesson, Andi does all their work on the computer, but you may use pen and paper or the computer to write a rough draft.

Making the Writing Process Work for You

What makes viewing writing as a process so beneficial to writers is that it encourages alternative strategies and processes to the standard step-by-step view of writing while motivating you to develop your best ideas. For instance, the following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in your writing process:

- **Begin writing with the part you know the most about.** You can start with the third paragraph in your outline if ideas come easily to mind. You can start with the second paragraph or the first paragraph, too. Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support. Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs that are between one-half and three-fourth of a page, double spaced.
- **Write one paragraph at a time and then stop.** As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.
- **Take short breaks to refresh your mind.** This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multi-page report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. But do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend

too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write. One tip that writer Stephen King suggests in his book, *On Writing,* is to stop in the middle of a paragraph so you can keep going with what's already in your head at your next sitting without sitting and staring at the screen.
- **Be reasonable with your goals.** If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.
- **Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write.** These aspects of writing are just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

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

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

Tip

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

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 1

Using the topic for the essay that you outlined in Section 4.7, describe your purpose and your audience as specifically as you can. Use your own sheet of paper to record your responses. Then keep these responses near you during future stages of the writing process.

My purpose: _____

_____

_____

My audience: _____

_____

_____

Setting Goals for Your First Draft

A draft is a complete version of a piece of writing, but it is not the final version. The step in the writing process after drafting, as

you may remember, is revising. During revising, you will have the opportunity to make changes to your first draft before you put the finishing touches on it during the editing and proofreading stage. A first draft gives you a working version that you can later improve.

Writing at Work

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

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

The collaborative software, or document management systems, that groups use to work on common projects is sometimes called groupware or workgroup support systems. New, improved programs are continually being developed.

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

Tip

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

Discovering the Basic Elements of a First Draft

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

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

These elements follow the standard five-paragraph essay format, which you probably first encountered in high school. This basic format--introduction, body with multiple paragraphs, and conclusion--is valid for most essays you will write in college, even much longer ones. For now, however, Andi focuses on writing the three body paragraphs from their outline. Section 5.4, "Introduction and Conclusion Paragraphs" covers writing introductions and conclusions, and you will read Andi's introduction and conclusion there.

The Role of Topic Sentences

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

Tip

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

The topic sentence is generally the first or final sentence in a paragraph. It's possible that it can appear in the middle, but that can be confusing for a reader. Many times it appears as the second sentence in a paragraph is a transition sentence precedes it. The assignment's audience and purpose will often determine where a topic sentence belongs.

Choosing where to position the topic sentence depends not only on your audience and purpose but also on whether you are including counter-arguments. The placement of a topic sentence may vary from paragraph to paragraph depending on the purpose of that particular paragraph and the relation between that purpose and the audience. Please see Section 2.6, "Rhetorical Analysis," and Section 6.1, "Strategies for Developing Paragraphs."

Tip

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

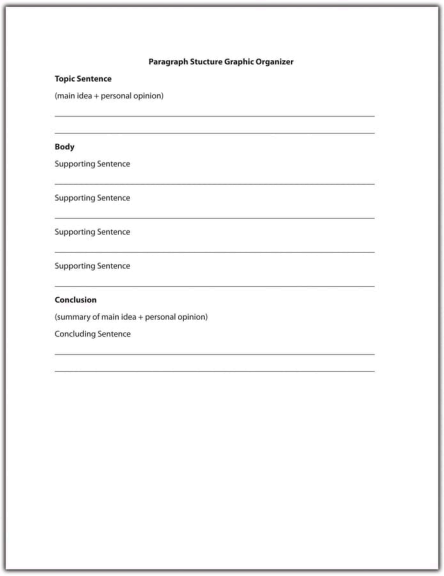
Paragraphs

Learning how to develop a good topic sentence is the first step toward writing a solid paragraph. Once you have composed your topic sentence, you have a guideline for the rest of the paragraph. To complete the paragraph, a writer must support the topic sentence with additional information and summarize the main point with a concluding sentence. This section identifies the three major structural parts of a paragraph and covers how to develop a paragraph using transitional words and phrases.

Identifying Parts of a Paragraph

An effective paragraph contains three main parts: a topic sentence, the body, and the concluding sentence. A topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph. This chapter has already discussed its purpose—to express a main idea combined with the writer's attitude about the subject. The body of the paragraph usually follows, containing supporting details. Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words. Figure 5.3.1 shows one graphic organizer for paragraph structure.

Figure 5.3.1



Let's look at a fairly casual example. Read the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

> After reading the new TV Guide this week, I had just one thought—why are we still being bombarded with reality shows? This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favorites, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. *Prisoner* follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season, but if any of them are reading this blog—stop it! We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

The first sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the word *bombarded*.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject (reality shows) and then discuss specific examples (the reality show *Prisoner*). Most academic essays contain the topic sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph.

Now take a look at the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

> Last year, a cat traveled 130 miles to reach its family, which had moved to another state and had left their pet behind. Even though it had never been to their new home, the cat was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighborhood can predict when its person is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.

This is an inductive paragraph. It begins with details that lead to the point, or main idea. The last sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals' senses are better than humans'). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence.

This technique is frequently used in persuasive writing. The writer produces detailed examples as evidence to back up his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph. Read the following example. The topic sentence is

underlined for you.

> For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises. It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually got my anxiety under control. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It's amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the topic sentence expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how he used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic. You might need to break apart two ideas and develop them separately into two different paragraphs.

The paragraph is the main structural component of an essay as well as other forms of writing. Each paragraph of an essay adds another related main idea to support the writer's thesis, or controlling idea. Each related main idea is supported and developed with facts, examples, and other details that explain it. By exploring and refining one main idea at a time, writers build a strong case for their thesis. For more specific help on developing body paragraphs, please see Section 6.1, "Developing Body Paragraphs."

Paragraph Length

How long should a paragraph be?

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

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

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

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

> **Exercise 2**
>
> To build your sense of appropriate paragraph length, use the Internet to find examples of the following items. Copy them into a file, identify your sources, and present them to your instructor with your annotations, or notes.
>
> - A news article written in short paragraphs. Take notes on, or annotate, your selection with your observations about the effect of combining paragraphs that develop the same topic idea. Explain how effective those paragraphs would be.

- A long paragraph from a scholarly work that you identify through an academic search engine. Annotate it with your observations about the author's paragraphing style.

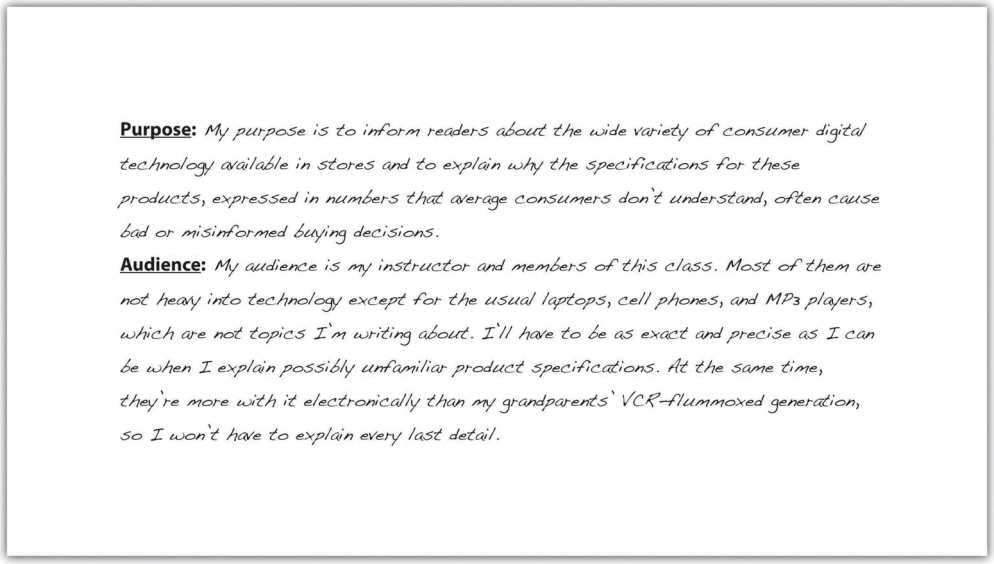
Starting Your First Draft

Now we are finally ready to look over Andi's shoulder as they begin to write their essay about digital technology and the confusing choices that consumers face. Follow along with your own outline, with its thesis statement and topic sentences, and the notes you wrote earlier in this lesson on your purpose and audience. Reviewing these will put both you and Andi in the proper mind-set to start.

The following is Mariah's thesis statement:

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

Here are the notes that Andi wrote to themselves to characterize their purpose and audience.

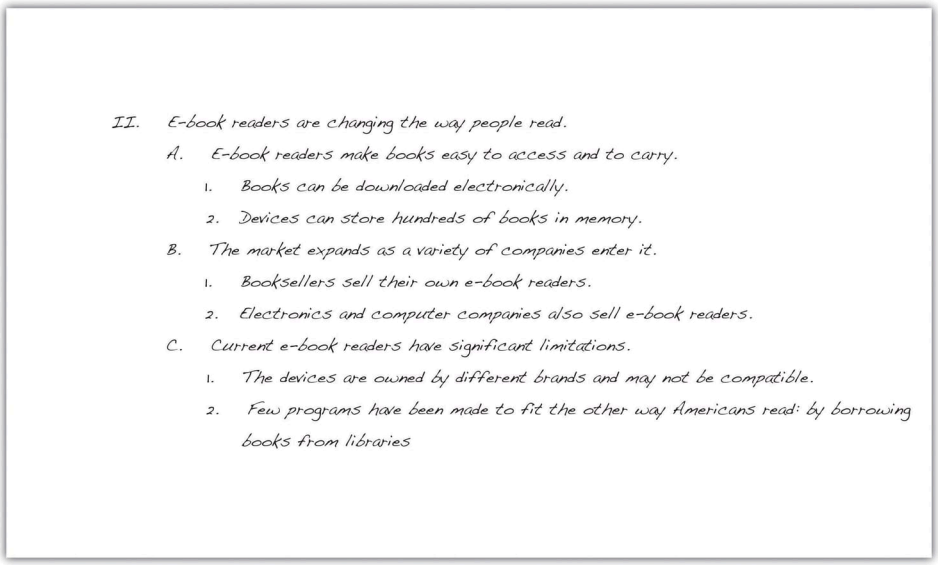


Purpose: My purpose is to inform readers about the wide variety of consumer digital technology available in stores and to explain why the specifications for these products, expressed in numbers that average consumers don't understand, often cause bad or misinformed buying decisions.

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

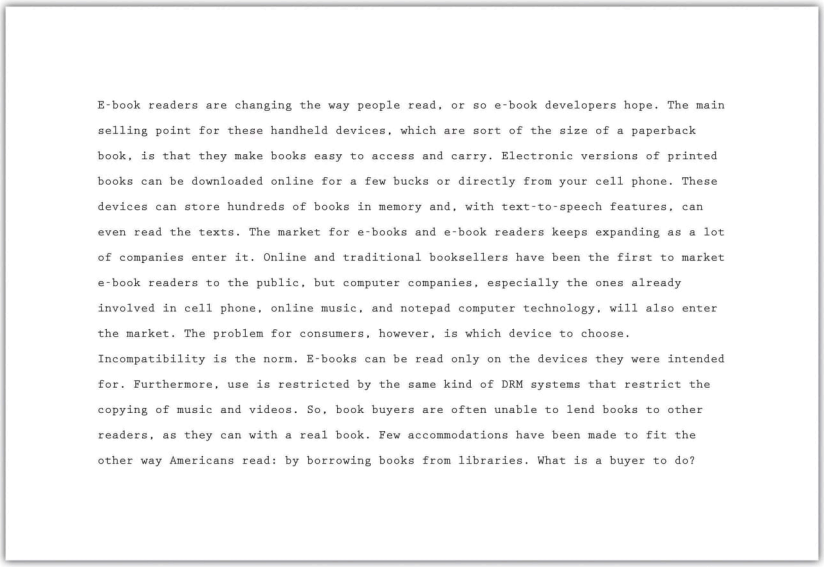
Figure: Andi chose to begin by writing a quick introduction based on their thesis statement, knowing they would improve it during the revision process. Right now, this will just give them a starting point.

Andi then looked at their key sentence outline because it includes the topic sentences. The following is the portion of their outline for the first body paragraph. The Roman numeral II identifies the topic sentence for the paragraph, capital letters indicate supporting details, and Arabic numerals label subpoints.



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

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



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

Tip

If you write your first draft on the computer, consider creating a new file folder for each course with a set of subfolders inside the course folders for each assignment you are given. Label the folders clearly with the course names, and label each assignment folder and word processing document with a title that you will easily recognize. The assignment name is a good choice for the document. Then use that subfolder to store all the drafts you create. When you start each new draft, do not just write over the last one. Instead, save the draft with a new tag after the title—draft 1, draft 2, and so on—so that you will have a complete history of drafts in case your instructor wishes you to submit them. Also, it can be a good idea to use a program, such as Google docs, that stores your files in the cloud. That way, you will still have access to your documents in case something happens to your computer. However, because these many times overwrite your previous work, and the internet or WiFi could have problems, it's also good to save each draft with a separate number on it both in the cloud and on your personal computer.

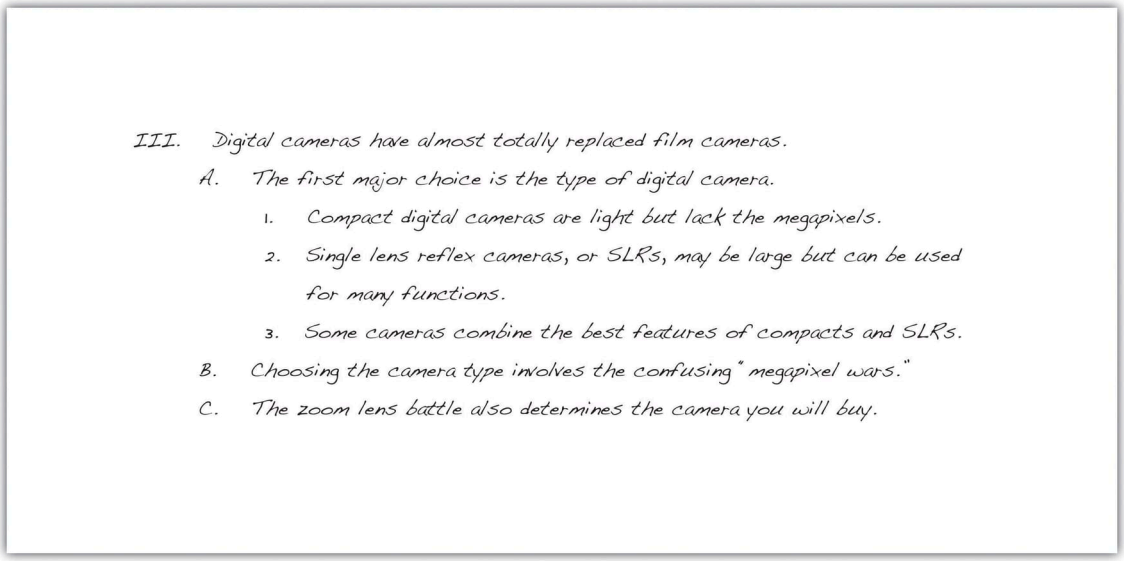
In your documents, observe any formatting requirements (such as MLA formatting) for margins, headers, placement of page numbers, and other layout matters—that your instructor requires.

Continuing the First Draft

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

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

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



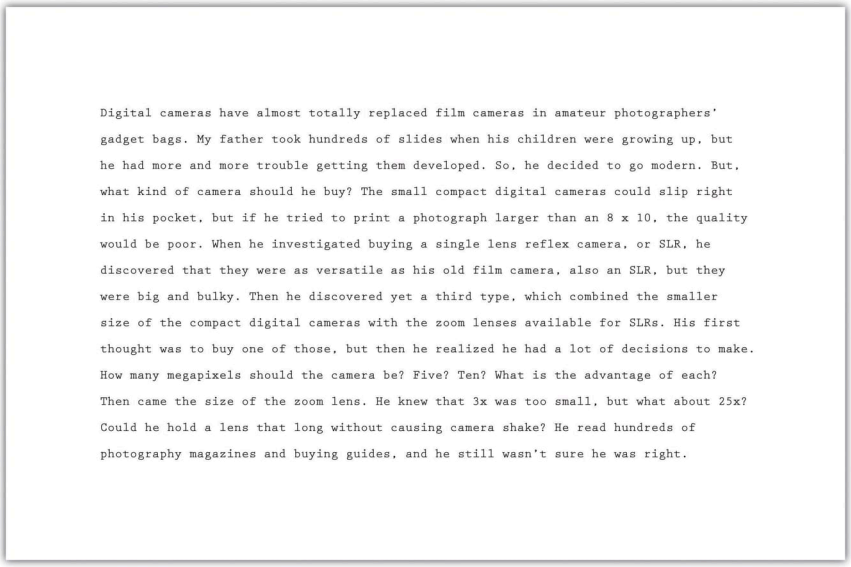
III. Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras.

A. The first major choice is the type of digital camera.

1. Compact digital cameras are light but lack the megapixels.
2. Single lens reflex cameras, or SLRs, may be large but can be used for many functions.
3. Some cameras combine the best features of compacts and SLRs.

B. Choosing the camera type involves the confusing "megapixel wars."

C. The zoom lens battle also determines the camera you will buy.



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

Figure:

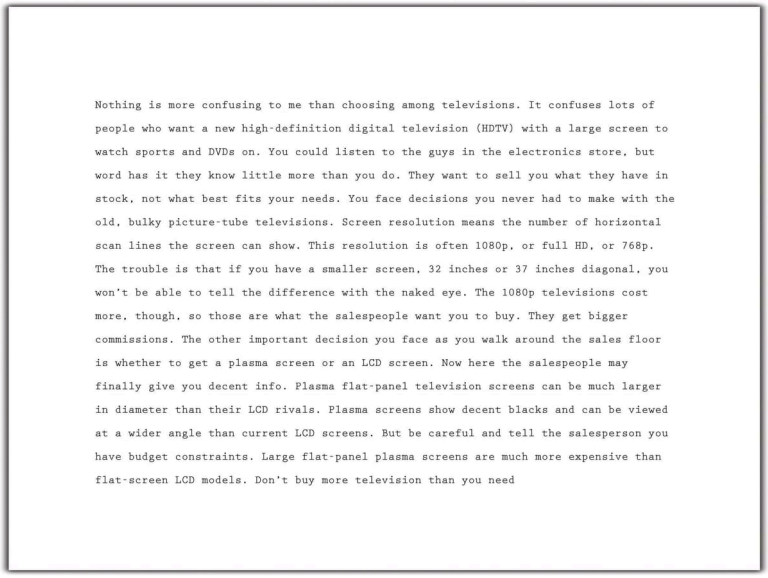
Andi then began the third and final body paragraph using Roman numeral IV from her outline.

IV. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.

A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?

B. In the screen-size wars, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?

C. Does every home really need a media center?



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

Figure:

Exercise 3

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

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

Writing a Title

A writer's best choice for a title is one that alludes to the main point of the entire essay. Do not make your title the type of assignment your teacher assigned. Like the headline in a newspaper or the big, bold title in a magazine, an essay's title gives the audience a first peek at the content. If readers like the title, they are likely to keep reading.

After carefully crafting each paragraph of their essay, based on the outline, Andi finished the draft and even included a brief concluding paragraph. They then decided, as the final touch for the writing session, to add an engaging title.

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

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

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.

This page most recently updated on June 4, 2020.

This page titled 6.3: Writing the Essay Draft is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 5.3: Writing the Essay Draft by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Picture your introduction as a storefront window: You have a certain amount of space to attract your customers (readers) to your goods (subject) and bring them inside your store (discussion). Once you have enticed them with something intriguing, you then point them in a specific direction and try to make the sale (convince them to accept your thesis).

Your introduction is an invitation to your readers to consider what you have to say and then to follow your train of thought as you expand upon your thesis statement.

An introduction serves the following purposes:

- Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
- Introduces the general topic of the essay
- Relates the topic to the reader
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs

First impressions are crucial and can leave lasting effects in your reader's mind, which is why the introduction is so important to your essay. If your introductory paragraph is dull or disjointed, your reader probably will not have much interest in continuing with the essay.

Attracting Interest in Your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction should begin with an engaging statement devised to provoke your readers' interest. It should also relate to your stance on the topic. In the next few sentences, introduce your reader to the topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move deeper into your introduction, you gradually narrow the focus, moving closer to your thesis. Moving smoothly and logically from your introductory remarks to your thesis statement can be achieved using a funnel technique, as illustrated in the following diagram.

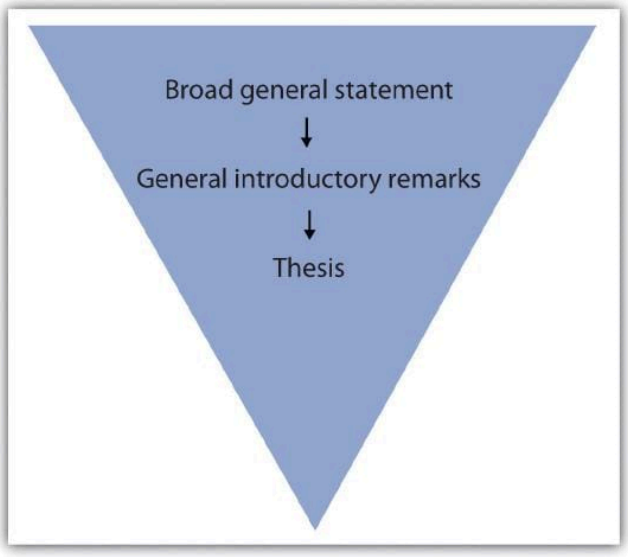


Figure: 9.1: Funnel Techniquefrom @api.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, jot down a few general remarks that you can make about the topic for which you formed a thesis in Section 5.1, "Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement."

Immediately capturing your readers' interest increases the chances of having them read what you are about to discuss. You can garner curiosity for your essay in a number of ways. Try to get your readers personally involved by doing any of the following:

- Appealing to their emotions
- Using logic
- Beginning with a provocative question or opinion
- Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
- Raising a question or series of questions
- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
- Opening with a striking image
- Including a personal anecdote

Some other ideas are:

- If the topic is controversial, you can include the current state of the controversy. If there is a lot of history to the topic, you can summarize the history.
- If you are writing a personal essay, you can begin with a brief personal anecdote.
- If you are writing an essay that is focused on one or two works (of literature or nonfiction), you can introduce those works with the title(s), author(s), and brief information about those works.
- Describe a brief event that you think illustrates the overall point you want to make with your essay.
- State an interesting fact that others may not know.
- State a shocking but relevant statistic.
- Compare what people generally think to what the reality is.

The Role of Introductions

Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. Usually when students sit down to respond to an assignment, they have at least some sense of what they want to say in the body of the paper. They might have chosen a few examples or have an idea that will help them answer the main question of your assignment: these sections, therefore, are not as hard to write. But these middle parts of the paper can't just come out of thin air at the reader; they need to be introduced and

concluded in a way that makes sense to the reader.

The introduction and conclusion act as bridges that transport readers from their own lives into the "place" of the writer's analysis. If the readers pick up a paper about education in the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, for example, they need a transition to help them leave behind the world of California, YouTube, e-mail, etc. and to help them temporarily enter the world of nineteenth-century American slavery. By providing an introduction that helps readers make a transition between their own world and the issues in the paper, writers give their readers the tools they need to get into the topic and care about what they are reading. (See this handout on **conclusions**.)

The trick about how general to begin is to think about your audience. Write a first sentence that everyone can both to your topic and they can relate to personally. Now, how you present that topic – be it a question, a humorous statement, an interesting statistic or a shocking fact – depends on what you think is appropriate for your audience.



Image by **Helena Lopes** from **Pexels**

Why Bother Writing a Good Introduction?

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. The opening paragraph of a paper will provide readers with their initial impressions of the argument, the writing style, and the overall quality of work. A vague, disorganized, error-filled, off-the-wall, or boring introduction will probably create a negative impression. On the other hand, a concise, engaging, and well-written introduction will start your readers off thinking highly of the writer, his analytical skills, the writing, and the paper overall.

Your introduction is an important road map for the rest of your paper. The introduction conveys a lot of information to the readers. They are introduced to the topic, why it is important, and how the topic will be discussed and developed. It also introduces your tone and stance about the topic. In most academic disciplines, the introduction should contain a thesis that will assert the main argument. It should also, ideally, give the reader a sense of the kinds of information used to make that argument and the general organization of the paragraphs and pages that will follow. After reading the introduction, readers should not have any major surprises in store when they read the main body of the paper.

Ideally, your introduction will make your readers want to read your paper. The introduction should capture the readers' interest, making them want to read the rest of the paper. Opening with a compelling story, a fascinating quotation, an interesting question, or a stirring example can get readers to see why this topic matters and serve as an invitation for them to join an interesting intellectual conversation.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Guidelines: Writing Effective Introductions

1. Start by thinking about the question (or questions) you are trying to answer. Your entire essay will be a response to this question, and your introduction is the first step toward that end. Your direct answer to the assigned question will be your thesis, and your thesis will be included in your introduction, so it is a good idea to use the question as a jumping off point. Imagine that you are assigned the following question:

Education has long been considered a major force for American social change, righting the wrongs of our society. Drawing on the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, discuss the relationship between education and slavery in 19th-century America. Consider the following: How did white control of education reinforce slavery? How did Douglass and other enslaved African Americans view education while they endured slavery? And what role did education play in the acquisition of freedom? Most importantly, consider the degree to which education was or was not a major force for social change with regard to slavery.

You will probably refer back to your assignment extensively as you prepare your complete essay, and the prompt itself can also give you some clues about how to approach the introduction. Notice that it starts with a broad statement, that education has been considered a major force for social change, and then narrows to focus on specific questions from the book. One strategy might be to use a similar model in your own introduction —start off with a big picture sentence or two about the power of education as a force for change as a way of getting your reader interested and then focus in on the details of your argument about Douglass. Of course, a different approach could also be very successful, but looking at the way the professor set up the question can sometimes give you some ideas for how you might answer it.

2. Decide how general or broad your opening should be. Keep in mind that even a "big picture" opening needs to be clearly related to your topic; an opening sentence that said "Human beings, more than any other creatures on earth, are capable of learning" would be too broad for our sample assignment about slavery and education. If you have ever used Google Maps or similar programs, that experience can provide a helpful way of thinking about how broad your opening should be. The question you are asking determines how "broad" your view should be. In the sample assignment above, the questions are probably at the "state" or "city" level of generality. But the introductory sentence about human beings is mismatched—it's definitely at the "global" level. When writing, you need to place your ideas in context—but that context doesn't generally have to be as big as the whole galaxy!

3. Try writing your introduction last. You may think that you have to write your introduction first, but that isn't necessarily true, and it isn't always the most effective way to craft a good introduction. You may find that you don't know what you are going to argue at the beginning of the writing process, and only through the experience of writing your paper do you discover your main argument. It is perfectly fine to start out thinking that you want to argue a particular point, but wind up arguing something slightly or even dramatically different by the time you've written most of the paper. The writing process can be an important way to organize your ideas, think through complicated issues, refine your thoughts, and develop a sophisticated argument. However, an introduction written at the beginning of that discovery process will not necessarily reflect what you wind up with at the end. You will need to revise your paper to make sure that the introduction, all of the evidence, and the conclusion reflect the argument you intend. Sometimes it's easiest to just write up all of your evidence first and then write the introduction last—that way you can be sure that the introduction will match the body of the paper and don't run out of time to revise your introduction.

4. Don't be afraid to write a tentative introduction first and then change it later. Some people find that they need to write some kind of introduction in order to get the writing process started. That's fine, but if you are one of those people, be sure to return to your initial introduction later and rewrite if necessary.

5. Open with an attention grabber. Sometimes, especially if the topic of your paper is somewhat dry or technical, opening with something catchy can help. Consider these options:

- an intriguing example (for example, the mistress who initially teaches Douglass but then ceases her instruction as she learns more about slavery)
- a provocative quotation (Douglass writes that "education and slavery were incompatible with each other")
- a puzzling scenario (Frederick Douglass says of slaves that "[N]othing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of a most frightful bondage, under which they have been groaning for centuries!" Douglass clearly asserts that slave owners went to great lengths to destroy the mental capacities of slaves, yet his own life story proves that these efforts could be unsuccessful.)
- a vivid and perhaps unexpected anecdote (for example, "Learning about slavery in the American history course at Frederick Douglass High School, students studied the work slaves did, the impact of slavery on their families, and the rules that governed their lives. We didn't discuss education, however, until one student, Mary, raised her hand and asked, 'But when did they go to school?' That modern high school students could not conceive of an American childhood devoid of formal education speaks volumes about the centrality of education to American youth today and also suggests the significance of the deprivation of education in past generations.")
- a thought-provoking question (given all of the freedoms that were denied enslaved individuals in the American South, why does Frederick Douglass focus his attentions so squarely on education and literacy?)

6. Pay special attention to your first sentence. Start off on the right foot with your readers by making sure that the first sentence actually says something useful and that it does so in an interesting and error-free way.

7. Be straightforward and confident. Avoid statements like "In this paper, I will argue that Frederick Douglass valued education." While this sentence points toward your main argument, it isn't especially interesting. It might be more effective to say what you mean in a declarative sentence. It is much more convincing to tell us that "Frederick Douglass valued education" than to tell us that you are going to say that he did. Assert your main argument confidently. After all, you can't expect your reader to believe it if it doesn't sound like you believe it!

How to Evaluate Your Introduction?

Ask a friend to read it and then tell you what he or she expects the paper will discuss, what kinds of evidence the paper will use, and what the tone of the paper will have. If your friend is able to predict the rest of your paper accurately and wants to keep reading, you probably have a good introduction.

Guidelines: Avoiding Less Effective Introductions

1. The place holder introduction. When you don't have much to say on a given topic, it is easy to create this kind of introduction. Essentially, this kind of weaker introduction contains several sentences that are vague and don't really say much. They exist just to take up the "introduction space" in your paper. If you had something more effective to say, you would probably say it, but in the meantime this paragraph is just a place holder. This may what you write just to get yourself writing, but be sure to go back and revise it.

Example: Slavery was one of the greatest tragedies in American history. There were many different aspects of slavery. Each created different kinds of problems for enslaved people.

2. The restated question introduction. Restating the question can sometimes be an effective strategy, but it can be easy to stop at JUST restating the question instead of offering a more specific, interesting introduction to your paper. The professor or teaching assistant wrote your questions and will be reading ten to seventy essays in response to them—thye do not need to read a whole paragraph that simply restates the question. Try to do something more interesting.

Example: Indeed, education has long been considered a major force for American social change, righting the wrongs of our society. The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass discusses the relationship between education and slavery in 19th century America, showing how white control of education reinforced slavery and how Douglass and other enslaved African Americans viewed education while they endured. Moreover, the book discusses the role that education played in the acquisition of freedom. Education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.

3. The Dictionary introduction. This introduction begins by giving the dictionary definition of one or more of the words in the assigned question. This introduction strategy is on the right track—if you write one of these, you may be trying to establish the important terms of the discussion, and this move builds a bridge to the reader by offering a common, agreed-upon definition for a key idea. You may also be looking for an authority that will lend credibility to your paper. However, anyone can look a word up in the

dictionary and copy down what it says—it may be far more interesting for you (and your reader) if you develop your own definition of the term in the specific context of your class and assignment, or if you use a definition from one of the sources you've been reading for class. Also recognize that the dictionary is also not a particularly authoritative work—it doesn't take into account the context of your course and doesn't offer particularly detailed information. If you feel that you must seek out an authority, try to find one that is very relevant and specific. Perhaps a quotation from a source reading might prove better? Dictionary introductions are also ineffective simply because they are so overused. Many teachers will see twenty or more papers that begin in this way, greatly decreasing the dramatic impact that any one of those papers will have.

Example: Webster's dictionary defines slavery as "the state of being a slave," as "the practice of owning slaves," and as "a condition of hard work and subjection."

4. The "dawn of man" introduction. This kind of introduction generally makes broad, sweeping statements about the relevance of this topic since the beginning of time. It is usually very general (similar to the place holder introduction) and fails to connect to the thesis. You may write this kind of introduction when you don't have much to say—which is precisely why it is ineffective.

Example: Since the dawn of man, slavery has been a problem in human history.

5. The book report introduction. This introduction is what you had to do for your elementary school book reports. It gives the name and author of the book you are writing about, tells what the book is about, and offers other basic facts about the book. You might resort to this sort of introduction when you are trying to fill space because it's a familiar, comfortable format. It is ineffective because it offers details that your reader already knows and that are irrelevant to the thesis.

Example: Frederick Douglass wrote his autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, in the 1840s. It was published in 1986 by Penguin Books. In it, he tells the story of his life.

Tip

Remember that your diction, or word choice, while always important, is most crucial in your introductory paragraph. Boring diction could extinguish any desire a person might have to read through your discussion. Choose words that create images or express action. For more information on diction, or word choice, see Chapter 11, "Clarity, Conciseness, and Style."

See a student's introduction below with the thesis statement underlined. What do you think of it?

Play Atari on a General Electric brand television set? Maybe watch Dynasty? Or read old newspaper articles on microfiche at the library? Thirty-five years ago, the average college student did not have many options when it came to entertainment in the form of technology. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, and the digital age has digital technology, consumers are bombarded with endless options for how they do most everything--from buying and reading books to taking and developing photographs. In a society that is obsessed with digital means of entertainment, it is easy for the average person to become baffled. Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusing.

Tip

If you have trouble coming up with a provocative statement for your opening, it is a good idea to use a relevant, attention-grabbing quote about your topic. Use a search engine to find statements made by historical or significant figures about your subject.

Writing at Work

In your job field, you may be required to write a speech for an event, such as an awards banquet or a dedication ceremony. The introduction of a speech is similar to an essay because you have a limited amount of space to attract your audience's attention. Using the same techniques, such as a provocative quote or an interesting statistic, is an effective way to engage your listeners. Using the funnel approach also introduces your audience to your topic and then presents your main idea in a logical manner.

Exercise 2

Reread each sentence in Andi's introductory paragraph. Indicate which techniques they used and comment on how each sentence is designed to attract the readers' interest.



Image by **Ann H** from **Pexels**

Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach your conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade. But 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 to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle your readers and raise doubts about the entire essay, just like a book with an ambiguous ending. However, if you have worked hard to write the introduction and body, your conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

Tip

Many times, writers find that they write a stronger main idea at the beginning of a conclusion on their first draft than they wrote initially. Sometimes this main idea would make a better thesis than what you may have originally had.

The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

Keep in mind that the ideas in your conclusion must conform to the rest of your essay. In order to tie these components together, restate your thesis at the beginning of your conclusion in other words. This helps you assemble, in an orderly fashion, all the information you have explained in the body. Rephrasing your thesis reminds your readers of the major arguments you have been trying to prove and also indicates that your essay is drawing to a close. A strong conclusion also reviews your main points in general and emphasizes the importance of the topic. It may also look to the future regarding your topic.

Conclusions are almost opposite in structure from introductions. Conclusions generally start off with your main point (a reworded thesis) and then become more general. Many times, in addition to making a final statement about your main ideas, a conclusion will "look to the future" by discussing how the author hopes this topic will be treated in the future. Other times, a conclusion includes a solution if the essay discusses a problem, or what additional study needs to be done about the topic (especially in research papers). It can also discuss how what your essay is about is relevant in other parts of the world or domains of study.

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

Tips:

- When closing your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Relying on statements such as *in conclusion*, *it is clear that*, *as you can see*, or *in summation* is unnecessary and can be considered trite because the reader can obviously see that it's the end of your essay.
- It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in your conclusion:
  - Introducing new material
  - Contradicting your thesis
  - Changing your thesis
  - Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in your conclusion has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph.

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

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

Exercise 36.4.3

On a separate sheet of a paper, restate your thesis from Exercise 2 of this section and then make some general concluding remarks. Next, compose a final emphatic statement. Finally, incorporate what you have written into a strong conclusion paragraph for your essay.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers

Andi incorporates some of these pointers into their conclusion by paraphrasing their thesis statement in the first sentence.

> In a society fixated on the latest and smartest digital technology, a consumer can easily become confused by the countless options and specifications. The ever-changing state of digital technology challenges consumers with its updates and add-ons and expanding markets and incompatible formats and restrictions–a fact that is complicated by salesmen who want to sell them anything. In a world that is increasingly driven by instant gratification, it's easy for people to buy the first thing they see. The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

Tip

Make sure your essay is balanced by not having an excessively long or short introduction or conclusion. Check that they match each other in length as closely as possible, and try to mirror the formula you used in each. Structural parallelism strengthens the message of your essay.

Writing at Work

On the job you may sometimes give oral presentations based on research you have conducted. A concluding statement to an oral report contains the same elements as a written conclusion. You should wrap up your presentation by restating the

purpose of the presentation, reviewing its main points, and emphasizing the importance of the material you presented. A strong conclusion will leave a lasting impression on your audience.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0
- Introductions. **Provided by:** UNC Writing Center. **License:** CC BY-NC-ND

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED CONTENT

"Writing Introductions and Conclusions in an Essay." **Authored by:** Karen Hamilton. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

This page most recently updated on June 23, 2020.

This page titled 6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 5.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6.5: Key Takeaways

- A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself. It should be specific, precise, forceful, confident, and is able to be demonstrated.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.
- Topic sentences express the main idea of a paragraph combined with the writer's attitude or opinion about the topic, using engaging vocabulary.
- Topic sentence placement depends on the interaction between the purpose of the paragraph, the content, and the audience. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a body paragraph.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.
- Always be aware of your purpose for writing and the needs of your audience. Cater to those needs in every sensible way.
- Remember to include all the key structural parts of an essay: a thesis statement that is part of your introductory paragraph, three or more body paragraphs as described in your outline, and a concluding paragraph. Then add an engaging title to draw in readers.
- Use your topic outline or your sentence outline to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas.
- Generally speaking, write your introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.
- A strong opening captures your readers' interest and introduces them to your topic before you present your thesis statement.
- The funnel technique for writing the introduction begins with generalities and gradually narrows your focus until you present your thesis.
- The conclusion should remain true to your thesis statement. It is best to avoid changing your tone or your main idea and avoid introducing any new material.
- Closing with a final emphatic statement provides closure for your readers and makes your essay more memorable.

This page titled 6.5: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 5.5: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7: BODY PARAGRAPHS

7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs
7.2: Types of Support
7.3: Working with Sources- Part I
7.4: Working with Sources- Part II
7.5: Creating Coherence
7.6: Key Takeaways

This page titled 7: Body Paragraphs is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Developing Paragraphs

If your thesis gives the reader a roadmap to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement. You need to add elaboration and explanation to flesh out the points listed in your outline. Your support (quotes, paraphrases, etc.) will need to answer questions such as "How does my quote support my topic sentence?" Elaboration makes up a large amount of your paragraph, at least two-thirds and is very important to have in order to have a good essay. The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

Select Primary Support for Your Thesis

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

Tip

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Support

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

- **Be specific.** The main supporting points for your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. These types of examples give

your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your 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.** Support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you need to choose the best support in your body paragraphs. This can be a judgment call, but if you develop your thesis and outline by working with your sources first, this should be easier. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.
- **Be detailed.** Remember that the body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

Select the Most Effective Primary Support for a Thesis Statement

Remember, in college, you are not limited to just three main subtopics that support your thesis statement. Depending on your assignment, you may examine a topic from many angles and have quite a few topic sentences that related to your thesis. In some cases, you may need to select which subtopics most support your thesis and remove some others. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

Exercise 1

Refer to the previous exercise and select three of your most compelling reasons to support the thesis statement. Remember that the points you choose must be specific and relevant to the thesis. The statements you choose will be your primary support points, and you will later incorporate them into the topic sentences for the body paragraphs. Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

1. **Facts.** Facts, such as statistics, are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, facts still need explanation. For example, the sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it will require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument. Always be sure you gather your facts from credible sources.
2. **Judgments.** Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic. Use judgments from experts in the field as they are the more credible sources for the topic.
3. **Testimony.** Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who directly observed an instance of what you are writing about; testimony adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.
4. **Personal observation.** Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child’s social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

WRITING AT WORK

In any job where you devise a plan, you will need to support the steps that you lay out. This is an area in which you would incorporate primary support into your writing. Choosing only the most specific and relevant information to expand upon the steps will ensure that your plan appears well-thought-out and precise.

TIP

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following credible sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field. Please see section 10.5 " Evaluating and Working with Sources."

Draft Supporting Detail Sentences for Each Topic Sentence

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the the topic sentence, which is underlined.

J.D. Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, “You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live.” His short story “A Perfect Day for a Bananafish” details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released from an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short story, “For Esmé – with Love and Squalor,” is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger’s only novel, The Catcher in the Rye, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

Exercise 2 7.1.1

Using the three topic sentences you composed for the outline you created in Chapter 5, draft at least three supporting details for each point.

Thesis statement: _____

Primary supporting point 1: _____

Supporting details: _____

Primary supporting point 2: _____

Supporting details: _____

Primary supporting point 3: _____

Supporting details: _____

Tips

- You have the option of writing your topic sentences in one of three ways. You can state it at the beginning of the body paragraph, or at the end of the paragraph, or you do not have to write it at all. This is called an implied topic sentence. An implied topic sentence lets readers form the main idea for themselves. For beginning writers, it is best to not use implied topic sentences because it makes it harder to focus your writing. Your instructor may also want to be able to clearly identify the sentences that support your thesis.
- Print out the first draft of your essay and use a highlighter to mark your topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately present your paragraphs, as well as accurately reflect your thesis. If your topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it to more accurately match the rest of the paragraph.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 7.1.1

Authored by: GoReadWriteNow. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Adding Explanation and Elaboration in your Body Paragraphs

In addition to supporting details, college level paragraphs add quite a bit of explanation and elaboration in body paragraphs. Development of explanation and elaboration is one of the big differences between high school and college-level writing. Rather than just appearing in one paragraph all by itself -- possibly in a conclusion -- explanation and elaboration should appear through your essay. Some sentence stems you can use to help you develop your explanation and elaboration appear in the following list.

Sentence Stems for Elaboration

- X matters because _____.
- X is important because _____.
- X is crucial in terms of today's concern over _____ because _____.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
- These points have important consequences for the broader discussion about _____.
- The discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.
- These conclusions have significant implications for _____.
- X should in fact concern anyone who cares about _____.

PIE Paragraph Development for Body Paragraphs

One strategy for developing paragraphs fully can be memorized by the acronym PIE. The acronym makes it easy to remember the elements needed to fully develop a paragraph in an academic essay. PIE stands for:

Point – (also known as the topic sentence). It is the main idea of your paragraph. It:

- Must be a complete sentence
- Should answer the question "why" or "how"
- Must relate to the thesis
- Must relate to the text you are reading and writing about
- You may need to revise it once you have fully developed your paragraph.

Information -- (quotes, paraphrases, data, and occasionally personal experience). It is the evidence with which you are working. Information includes:

- Support for your point
- Ideas from your reading that you want to discuss and explain further
- Information from a text that you are arguing against
- Two to three pieces of "information" per paragraph (generally)

Note

Never end a paragraph with information!

Explanation/elaboration -- The information that connects you inforamtion to your point, explains and discusses your informaiton and ideas, and connects the paragraph to your thesis.

In a standard deductive paragraph, one sentence of "E" connects your first piece of information to your topic sentence.

Aim for four sentences of explanation after each chunk of "I" in your paragraph.

Questions to ask yourself to help develop your E:

- Why is this important?
- What is the effect of this?
- How does this happen?
- How is the author's opinion different from your opinion or another author's opinion?
- Are there any logical fallacies or emotional appeals in the writer's claim? (If you are arguing against what the writer is saying)
- What is the problem or benefit of thinking about something this way?

In reality, you don't just want just a point, a chunk of information, and explanation. Rather you want to intersperse the information and explanation between the the various reasons that support the topic sentence. Thus, the **real structure of a PIE paragraph** looks something like this:

P (topic sentence)

E (explanation connects I to the P)

I (information)

E (explanation of I – minimum 2 – 3 sentences; connection of last piece of I to next piece of I – 1 sentence)

I (information)

E (explanation of E – minimum 2 – 3 sentences; connection of last piece of I to point of whole paragraph)

****Note: You are not limited to this amount of information or elaboration, but if you develop it well, it should probably be enough for one paragraph.**

Exercise 37.1.1

Identify whether each sentence in the following paragraph is P, I, or E by writing a P, I, or E next to each sentence.

Schools should not prevent students from obtaining lunches even though the administrative records or money is not in place. The effects of doing so are clear in an article that recently appeared on *Vox*. According to the article, during a recent government shutdown "6,300 low-income kids in six states couldn't attend their federally funded Head Start preschools," so the children couldn't receive the meals they would have normally eaten there (Fernandez Campbell). These children may not get anything to eat, their parents may not eat to ensure their kids do, or it comes out of some other essential area

of the parents' very limited budget. This out-of-touch arguing only makes low-income families' lives more difficult. Local governments or charitable organizations should ensure these centers stay open even if the federal government doesn't because the effect on children is detrimental mentally and physically. Even if parents can stay home during the outage, children are in no mood to learn from them if they are hungry, and parents are probably not in the mood to teach when they don't know where their children's next meal is coming from. It's even worse when local school districts themselves don't serve children's lunch meals. According to an article in the *Democrat &* Chronicle, school cashiers routinely refuse to serve food to students if their paperwork isn't in proper order (Murphy). Lunch shaming – when school districts would not serve subsidized lunch to students because either the paperwork wasn't processed or the parents hadn't uploaded their part of the payment online – causes many problems for students. Children aren't in control of what the adults in a district or their parents do, and they should not have to pay a price with their learning. Students can't focus in school if they haven't eaten enough. Because they are uncomfortable and hungry, they are more likely to act out and have discipline problems and they are less likely to learn the lessons of the day. This does not seem to be in line with the mission of schools or in the best interest of students. School districts need to find a better way to manage this and other social situations in order to improve the learning environment.

The following video expands on the idea of elaborating your ideas.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 7.1.1

Insightful Analysis. **Authored by:** GoReadWriteNow. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube

Contributors

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page most recently updated on June 4, 2020.

This page titled 7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.2: Types of Support

Types of Support



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

The types of support you develop and include in an essay will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you're attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position you might rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. If you are writing an essay based on your observations, you might rely on those observations along with examples and reasons. If you are writing a research essay, you might include more quotations, reasons, and facts. Realize, though, that all types of support are usable in all types of essays, and that you often will have many or all of these types of support within one paragraph. The types of support, depending on the purpose of your essay, can include one or more of the following:

- **Reasons**
  - **Example:** The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.
- **Facts**
  - **Example:** Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.
- **Statistics**
  - **Example:** Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.(citation would be included here)
- **Quotations**
  - **Example:** "We will not allow this situation to continue," stated Senator Johns (citation would be included here).
- **Examples**
  - **Example:** Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.
- **Personal Observations**
  - **Example:** I have known other workers at my current workplace who have been indirectly dismissed through changes in job duties and other tactics that are directed at making them want to retire, or at least leave their current position.
- **Interviews**
  - **Example:** In an interview accessed online, Bill Gates expressed his optimism that privacy and government access of information will be balanced – that it's not an either/or situation.

Here's an example of one body paragraph that uses many types of support:

> **(Topic sentence)** There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. **(Supporting sentence 1: statistic)** First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. **(Supporting sentence 2: fact)** Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. **(Supporting sentence 3: reason)** Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. **(Supporting sentence 4: example)** Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. **(Supporting sentence 5: quotation)** "It's the cheapest car I've ever had," she said. "The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I've owned." **(Concluding sentence)** Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Although it's really useful to understand that there are different types of support, realize that as writers develop support, they

don’t necessarily think in terms of “I need a fact here” or “I need an observation there.” It’s often best to simply write your ideas down in the first stage of developing your support. Conscious consideration of different types of support occurs as you continue to work with and review your support, in terms of your writing purpose and audience.

For example, a research essay that offers only statistics and facts may become boring to your audience if not interspersed with your own interpretations and observations and reasons. A personal observation essay may not get your thesis point across to your audience well if it doesn’t include multiple, specific examples. Draft your support first, and then go back to the draft to develop it further, the second time with your purpose, audience, and types of support more consciously in mind.

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about the topic in order to understand it better, before writing about it.

Finding the Right Kind of Support

To find information for your supporting sentences, you might consider using one of the following sources. Most of these can probably be found in your school's library.

- Reference book
- Encyclopedia
- Website
- Biography/autobiography
- Map
- Dictionary
- Credibly newspaper/magazine
- Interview
- Survey
- Previous experience
- Personal research

To read more about sources and research, see Section 10.4, "Strategies for Gathering Information," and Section 10.5, "Evaluating and Working with Sources."

Tip

When searching for information on the Internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. websites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more reliable than websites ending in .com or .org. Wikis and blogs are not generally reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies and bias.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

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

- **Be specific.** The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. Examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, convey the necessary information, and 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 your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may want to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.
- **Be detailed.** Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. Develop the discussion and detail in the body paragraphs. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

Tip

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals (periodicals that address topics in a specialized field).

This brief video reinforces the idea of how support develops and is presented in an essay.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 7.2.1

Supporting Details. Authored by: Mastering the Fundamentals of College Reading and Writing. License: All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube license.

Exercise 1 7.2.1

Below you are provided with an audience, purpose, and a topic sentence you want to support. Write down what types of support you would use in this situation to convince your audience.

Audience: A friend

Purpose: Convince them to wear a mask when you go out for a hike together.

Topic Sentence: Masks are key to prevent the spread of COVID 19.

Specific types of support:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 27.2.1

Below you are provided with an audience, purpose, and a topic sentence you want to support. Write down what types of support you would use in this situation to convince your audience.

Audience: Your manager

Purpose: Convince them to let you take time off during finals.

Topic Sentence: If I can't get extra time off, I may not be able to pass my class.

Specific types of support:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Exercise 37.2.1

Below you are provided with an audience, purpose, and a topic sentence you want to support. Write down what types of support you would use in this situation to convince your audience.

Audience: General public in college (as for an essay)

Purpose: Engage younger people in the democratic process.

Topic Sentence: The voting age should be lowered to 16 in local elections.

Specific types of support:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0
- Adapted from College Writing. **Authored by:** Susan Oaks. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page most recently updated on June 4, 2020.

Answers

Exercise 1 7.2.1

Collaboration: Compare your answers with a classmate.

Exercise 27.2.1

Collaboration: Compare your answers with a classmate.

Exercise 37.2.1

Collaboration: Compare your answers with a classmate.

This page titled 7.2: Types of Support is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.2: Types of Support by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.3: Working with Sources- Part I

They Say/I Say Approach To Sources

Recall from prior chapters that writing academic papers is about joining a conversation. You're contributing your own original thinking to some complex problem, be it interpretive, theoretical, or practical. Citing sources helps situate your ideas within that ongoing conversation. Sometimes you're citing a research finding that provides strong evidence for your point; at other times you're summarizing someone else's ideas in order to explain how your own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation. Graff and Birkenstein[1] encourage you to think about writing with sources is a "They Say/I Say" process. You first report what "they" say ("they" being published authors, prevalent ideas in society at large, or maybe participants in some kind of political or social debate). Then you respond by explaining what you think: Do you agree? Disagree? A little of both?

This "They Say/I Say" approach can help you find balance in your use of sources. On one extreme, some students think that they aren't allowed to make any claims without citing one or more expert authors saying the same thing. When their instructors encourage them to bring more original thinking into their writing, they're confused about how to do it. On the other extreme, some students tend to describe, more or less accurately, what sources say about a topic but then go on to state opinions that seem unrelated to the claims they just summarized. For example, a student writer may draw on expert sources to explain how the prevention and early detection of cancer has saved lives[2] but then argue for more funding for curing advanced cancer without making any explicit link to the points about prevention and screening. On one extreme, the sources are allowed to crowd out original thinking; on the other, they have seemingly no impact on the author's conclusions.

How can you know when you're avoiding both of these extremes? In other words, what kinds of thesis ("I Say") can count as an original claim and still be grounded in the sources ("They Say")? Here are five common strategies:

1. *Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a larger summary argument*. You might find that none of the sources you're working with specifically claim that early 20th century British literature was preoccupied with changing gender roles but that, together, their findings all point to that broader conclusion.
2. *Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a claim about their implications*. You might review papers that explore various factors shaping voting behavior to argue that a particular voting-reform proposal will likely have positive impacts.
3. *Identify underlying areas of agreement*. You may argue that the literature on cancer and the literature on violence both describe the unrecognized importance of prevention and early intervention in order to claim that insights about one set of problems may be useful for the other.
4. *Identify underlying areas of disagreement*. You may find that the controversies surrounding educational reform—and its debates about accountability, curricula, school funding—ultimately stem from different assumptions about the role of schools in society.
5. *Identify unanswered questions*. Perhaps you review studies of the genetic and behavioral contributors to diabetes in order to highlight unknown factors and argue for more in-depth research on the role of the environment.

There are certainly other ways authors use sources to build theses, but these examples illustrate how original thinking in academic writing involves making connections with and between a strategically chosen set of sources.

Incorporating Sources

Here's a passage of academic writing (an excerpt, not a complete paper) that illustrates several ways that sources can figure into a "They Say/I Say" approach[3]:

> Willingham (2011) draws on cognitive science to explain that students must be able to regulate their emotions in order to learn. Emotional self-regulation enables students to ignore distractions and channel their attention and behaviors in appropriate ways. Other research findings confirm that anxiety interferes with learning and academic performance because it makes distractions harder to resist (Perkins and Graham-Bermann, 2012; Putwain and Best, 2011). Other cognitive scientists point out that deep learning is itself stressful because it requires people to think hard about complex, unfamiliar material instead of relying on cognitive short-cuts.

> Kahneman (2011) describes this difference in terms of two systems for thinking: one fast and one slow. Fast thinking is based on assumptions and habits and doesn't require a lot of effort. For example, driving a familiar route or a routine grocery-shopping trip are not usually intellectually taxing activities. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is what we do when we encounter novel problems and situations. It's effortful, and it usually feels tedious and confusing. It is emotionally challenging as well because we are, by definition, incompetent while we're doing it, which provokes some anxiety. Solving a tough problem is rewarding, but the path itself is often unpleasant.
>
> These insights from cognitive science enable us to critically assess the claims made on both sides of the education reform debate. On one hand, they cast doubt on the claims of education reformers that measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education. For example, the Center for Education Reform promotes "the implementation of strong, data-driven, performance-based accountability systems that ensure teachers are rewarded, retained and advanced based on how they perform in adding value to the students who they teach, measured predominantly by student achievement" (http://www.edreform.com/issues/teacher-quality/#what-we-believe). The research that Willingham (2011) and Kahneman (2011) describe suggests that frequent high-stakes testing may actually work against learning by introducing greater anxiety into the school environment.
> At the same time, opponents of education reform should acknowledge that these research findings should prompt us to take a fresh look at how we educate our children. While Stan Karp of Rethinking Schools is correct when he argues that "data-driven formulas [based on standardized testing] lack both statistical credibility and a basic understanding of the human motivations and relationships that make good schooling possible" (www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/26_03/26_03_karp.shtm), it doesn't necessarily follow that all education reform proposals lack merit. Challenging standards, together with specific training in emotional self-regulation, will likely enable more students to succeed.[4]

In that example, the ideas of Willingham and Kahneman are summarized approvingly, bolstered with additional research findings, and then applied to a new realm: the current debate surrounding education reform. Voices in that debate were portrayed as accurately as possible, sometimes with representative quotes. Most importantly, all references were tied directly to the author's own interpretative point, which relies on the quoted claims.

Student Quotation:

I think the most important lesson for me to learn about sources was that the best way to use them is to create a new point. What I mean by this is instead of using them only to back up your points, create your own conclusion from what your sources say. As a psychology major, I look at a lot of data from researchers who have created a conclusion from a meta-analysis (a combination of many studies about the same thing). So that's how I like to think of using sources, I will look at many articles about the same subject and then come up with my own opinion. After using your sources, it is very important to cite them correctly. Personally, I want to be a respected and trustworthy scholar. However, if any of my papers were to be found without proper citations, all of my hard work would be for nothing and people would be wary about the rest of my work.

Aly Button

As you can see, there are times when you should quote or paraphrase sources that you don't agree with or do not find particularly compelling. They may convey ideas and opinions that help explain and justify your own argument. Similarly, when you cite sources that you agree with, you should choose quotes or paraphrases that serve as building blocks within your own argument. Regardless of the role each source plays in your writing, you certainly don't need to find whole sentences or passages that express your thinking. Rather, focus on what each of those sources is claiming, why, and how exactly their claims relate to your own points.

The remainder of this chapter explains some key principles for incorporating sources, principles which follow from the general point that academic writing is about entering an ongoing conversation.

Principle 1: Listen to your Sources

Have you ever had the maddening experience of arguing with someone who twisted your words to make it seem like you were saying something you weren't? Novice writers sometimes inadvertently misrepresent their sources when they quote very minor points from an article or even positions that the authors of an article disagree with. It often happens when students approach their sources with the goal of finding snippets that align with their own opinion. For example, the passage above contains the phrase "measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education." An inexperienced writer might include that quote in a paper without making it clear that the author(s) of the source actually dispute that very claim. Doing

so is not intentionally fraudulent, but it reveals that the paper-writer isn't really thinking about and responding to claims and arguments made by others. In that way, it harms his or her credibility.

Academic journal articles are especially likely to be misrepresented by student writers because their literature review sections often summarize a number of contrasting viewpoints. For example, sociologists Jennifer C. Lee and Jeremy Staff wrote a paper in which they note that high-schoolers who spend more hours at a job are more likely to drop out of school.[5] However, Lee and Staff's analysis finds that working more hours doesn't actually make a student more likely to drop out. Instead, the students who express less interest in school are both more likely to work a lot of hours *and* more likely to drop out. In short, Lee and Staff argue that disaffection with school causes students to drop-out, not working at a job. In reviewing prior research about the impact of work on dropping out, Lee and Staff write "Paid work, especially when it is considered intensive, reduces grade point averages, time spent on homework, educational aspirations, and the likelihood of completing high school"[6]. If you included that quote without explaining how it fits into Lee and Staff's actual argument, you would be misrepresenting that source.

Principle 2: Provide Context

Another error beginners often make is to drop in a quote without any context. If you simply quote, "Students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham 24), your reader is left wondering who Willingham is, why he or she is included here, and where this statement fits into his or her larger work. The whole point of incorporating sources is to situate your own insights in the conversation. As part of that, you should provide some kind of context the first time you use that source. Some examples:

> Willingham, a cognitive scientist, claims that ...
>
> Research in cognitive science has found that ... (Willingham, 2011).
>
> Willingham argues that "Students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham 24). Drawing on findings in cognitive science, he explains "..."

As the second example above shows, providing a context doesn't mean writing a brief biography of every author in your bibliography—it just means including some signal about why that source is included in your text.

Even more baffling to your reader is when quoted material does not fit into the flow of the text. For example, a novice student might write,

Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. "We conclude that intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (Lee and Staff 171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

The reader is thinking, who is this sudden, ghostly "we"? Why should this source be believed? If you find that passages with quotes in your draft are awkward to read out loud, that's a sign that you need to contextualize the quote more effectively. Here's a version that puts the quote in context:

Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. Lee and Staff's carefully designed study found that "intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

In this latter example, it's now clear that Lee and Staff are scholars and that their empirical study is being used as evidence for this argumentative point. Using a source in this way invites the reader to check out Lee and Staff's work for themselves if they doubt this claim.

Many writing instructors encourage their students to contextualize their use of sources by making a "quotation sandwich"; that is, introduce the quote in some way and then follow it up with your own words. If you've made a bad habit of dropping in unintroduced quotes, the quotation sandwich idea may help you improve your skills, but in general you don't need to approach every quote or paraphrase as a three-part structure to have well integrated sources. You should, however, avoid ending a paragraph with a quotation. If you're struggling to figure out what to write after a quote or close paraphrase, it may be that you haven't yet figured out what role the quote is playing in your own analysis. If that happens to you a lot, try writing the whole first draft in your own words and then incorporate material from sources as you revise with "They Say/I Say" in mind.

Principle 3: Use Sources Efficiently

Some student writers are in a rut of only quoting whole sentences. Some others get overly enamored of extended block quotes and the scholarly look they give to the page.[7] (A block quote is an indented paragraph of quoted text.) These aren't the worst sins of academic writing, but they get in the way of one of the key principles of writing with sources: shaping quotes and paraphrases efficiently. Efficiency follows from the second principle, because when you fully incorporate sources into your own explicit argument, you zero in on the phrases, passages, and ideas that are relevant to your points. It's a very good sign for your paper when most quotes are short (key terms, phrases, or parts of sentences) and the longer quotes (whole sentences and passages) are clearly justified by the discussion in which they're embedded. Every bit of every quote should feel indispensable to the paper. An overabundance of long quotes usually means that your own argument is undeveloped. The most glowing quotes will not hide that fact from your professor.

Also, some student writers forget that quoting is not the only way to incorporate sources. Paraphasing and summarizing are sophisticated skills that are often more appropriate to use than direct quoting. In fact, in science writing especially, quotes are rarely used. The first two paragraphs of the example passage above do not include any quotations, even though they are both clearly focused on presenting the work of others. Student writers may avoid paraphrasing out of fear of plagiarizing, and it's true that a poorly executed paraphrase will make it seem like the student writer is fraudulently claiming the wordsmithing work of others as his or her own. Sticking to direct quotes seems safer. However, it is worth your time to master paraphasing because it often helps you be more clear and concise, drawing out only those elements that are relevant to the thread of your analysis.

For example, here's a passage from a hypothetical paper with a block quote that is fully relevant to the argument but, nevertheless, inefficient:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman concludes our brains are prone to error:[8]
>
> System 1 registers the cognitive ease with which it processes information, but it does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable. Intuitive answers come to mind quickly and confidently, whether they originate from skills or from heuristics. There is no simple way for System 2 to distinguish between a skilled and a heuristic response. Its only recourse is to slow down and attempt to construct an answer on its own, which it is reluctant to do because it is indolent. Many suggestions of System 1 are casually endorsed with minimal checking, as in the bat-and-ball problem.
>
> While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Even a passage that is important to reference and is well contextualized in the flow of the paper will be inefficient if it introduces terms and ideas that aren't central to the analysis within the paper. Imagine, for example, that other parts of this hypothetical paper use Kahneman's other terms for System 1 (fast thinking) and System 2 (slow thinking); the sudden encounter of "System 1" and "System 2" would be confusing and tedious for your reader. Similarly, the terms "heuristics" and "bat-and-ball problem" might be unfamiliar to your reader. Their presence in the block quote just muddies the waters. In this case, a paraphrase is a much better choice. Here's an example passage that uses a paraphrase to establish the same points more clearly and efficiently:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments.[9] We have the capacity to stop and examine our assumptions, Kahneman points out, but we often want to avoid that hard work. As a result, we tend to accept our quick, intuitive responses. While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests that the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Not only is the paraphrased version shorter (97 words versus 151), it is clearer and more efficient because it highlights the key ideas, avoiding specific terms and examples that aren't used in the rest of the paper. If other parts of your paper did refer to Kahneman's System 1 and System 2, then you might choose to include some quoted phrases to make use of some of Kahneman's great language. Perhaps something like this:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments.[10] System 1, Kahneman explains, "does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable." [11] System 2 can stop and examine these assumptions, but it usually wants to avoid

> that hard work. As a result, our quick, intuitive responses are "casually endorsed with minimal checking." [12] While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Whether you choose a long quote, short quote, paraphrase or summary depends on the role that the source in playing in your analysis. The trick is to make deliberate, thoughtful decisions about how to incorporate ideas and words from others.

Paraphrasing, summarizing, and the mechanical conventions of quoting take a lot of practice to master. Numerous other resources explain these practices clearly and succinctly. Bookmark some good sources and refer to them as needed. If you suspect that you're in a quoting rut, try out some new ways of incorporating sources.

Principle 4: Choose Precise Verbs of Attribution

It's time to get beyond the all-purpose "says." And please don't look up "says" in the thesaurus and substitute verbs like "proclaim" (unless there was actually a proclamation) or "pronounce" (unless there was actually a pronouncement). Here's a list of 15 useful alternatives:[13]

- Claims
- Asserts
- Relates
- Recounts
- Complains
- Reasons
- Proposes
- Suggests (if the author is speculating or hypothesizing)
- Contests (disagrees)
- Concludes
- Shows
- Argues
- Explains
- Indicates
- Points out
- Offers

More precise choices like these carry a lot more information than "says", enabling you to relate more with fewer words. For one thing, they can quickly convey what kind of idea you're citing: a speculative one ("postulates")? A conclusive one ("determines")? A controversial one ("counters")? You can further show how you're incorporating these sources into your own narrative. For example, if you write that an author "claims" something, you're presenting yourself as fairly neutral about that claim. If you instead write that the author "shows" something, then you signal to your reader that you find that evidence more convincing. "Suggests" on the other hand is a much weaker endorsement. Saying more with less makes your writing much more engaging.

Student Quotation

Sources are your best friend. They either help you reaffirm your thesis or offer a differing opinion that you can challenge in your paper. The biggest thing to worry about, when it comes to sources, is citing. However, there are a multitude of resources to help you cite properly. My personal favorite is called Knightcite.com. You just pick the type of resource, fill in the information on it and voila, you have a perfectly cited resource!

Kaethe Leonard

Conclusion

Like so many things in adult life, writing in college is often both more liberating and burdensome than writing in high school and before. On the one hand, students have expressed that their high-school experiences made it seem that their own opinions didn't matter in academic writing, and that they can't make any claims that aren't exactly paralleled by a pedigreed quotation. Writing

papers based on their own insights and opinions can seem freeing in contrast. At the same time, a college student attending full time may be expected to have original and well considered ideas about pre-Columbian Latin American history, congressional redistricting, sports in society, post-colonial literatures, and nano-technology, all in about two weeks. Under these conditions, it's easy to see why some would long for the days when simple, competent reporting did the job. You probably won't have an authentic intellectual engagement with every college writing assignment, but approaching your written work as an opportunity to dialog with the material can help you find the momentum you need to succeed with this work.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources. **Authored by:** Amy Guptil. **License:** CC-BY-SA

This page most recently updated on June 4, 2020.

This page titled 7.3: Working with Sources- Part I is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.3: Working with Sources- Part I by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.4: Working with Sources- Part II

How to Incorporate Quotations into Sentences

Basic Quotations

The basic way to write a support sentence with a quote is to introduce the quote with a "signal phrase" and follow it with the appropriate citation (see the following example).

Sentences with quotations have three parts:

1. **Signal phrase** (who said it): Joe said / According to Joe

2. **Quotation** (what was said): “Kawabunga!”

3. **Citation** (where it was said): (36).

Exercise 37.4.1

In the following examples, identify the signal phrase, the quotation, and the citation:

1. Professor Finkelman said, “College is a glorious adventure for those with the bravery to attempt it” (68).
2. The report clearly indicated that we were not meeting our sales quota when it stated, “Revenues for next quarter must be revised downwards” (12).
3. According to the article “Students Who Fold Clothes,” “Part-time work can offer students the best of both worlds” (Chartrand 11).

Citation and Documentation

Citations are done in the same way, whether you are quoting or paraphrasing. The author (or the organization if there is no author, or the title of the article if there is no author or organization) should be somewhere either in the signal phrase or the citation. This author, organization, or title should match the entry in the Works Cited page so your reaer can easily find the source if needed.

Purpose of Citation

The purpose of citation is not just to avoid breaking plagiarism "rules." Rather, it's an academic convention that acknowledges the other authors in the conversation into which you are entering. Imagine going into a group of people you don't know and not acknowledging them and just starting to talk. You would probably be asked (maybe rudely) to leave. But if you enter that conversation by acknowledging what others are saying and then adding in your piece, the group is more likely to accept our presence. Citation is kind of like that without some of the same inter-personal issues. In addition, citation provides a service to your reader. They may find something you quoted or paraphrased intriguing and want to know more. You citation tells them where to look it up. It's possible your audience may want to fact-check you. Citations allow that too. They show you are transparent and forthcoming with your sources, which provides you with more credibility.

What to Include in Citations -- Frequently Asked Questions

Do you need to include the author in the citation, and what if there isn't an author?

- If you’ve already introduced the author in the signal phrase, you only need to include the page number in parentheses.

  Example: Ms. Tang says, "This student works best under fairly steady supervision" (77).

- If you have not already included the author's last name in the signal phrase, put the author's last name in the parentheses before the page number.

  Example: According to the article "Balancing College and Cash," "Flexible part-time work can offer students the best of both worlds, but it increases their time-management stress" (Al-Nouri 11).

- If there is no author, and you don't mention the article name in the signal phrase, include it in parentheses.

  Example: According to prisoners and nonprofit organizations, "Rikers' Island prison is a hell hole" (*The Prison from Hell* 3A).

Do I always need to put a page number in parentheses?

Most of the time. If your source is a webpage and has no page numbers, you do not need to include a page number. However, .pdfs online or downloaded from a journal that do have page numbers should include the page number from the .pdf. Almost all printed sources have page numbers.

Where do I put the period?

- If no information is needed in parentheses (i.e., a webpage and you mention the author in the signal phrases), include the period inside the close quotation mark.

  Example: According to Muldoon's blog, "erosion has become a serious problem in the North Sea islands."

- If you do include a citation in parentheses, place a period only after the close parentheses.

  Example: She implores, "We must do something about this" (Muldoon).

(At this point, if your reader wants to know more, they will look up the full bibliographic entry, listed under "Muldoon," on the Works Cited page.)

What if my quote includes a question or exclamation mark at the end?

If your quote includes a question or exclamation mark at the end, include that mark inside the close quotation mark. If your quote is going to have a citation at the end, place a period after the close parentheses. If you do not need to place a citation at the end, you do not need to include any period.

Example: Josie said, "I can't believe what you're telling me!"

Quotation Basics: Why and How to Use Them

Reasons to use quotes:

To give credit to the author (and avoid plagiarism!)

To prove or support your points

To keep the author's interesting word choice

To provide the source for your reader.

How to use use quotes:

- Choose them *AFTER* you have decided what your is.
- Choose them *BECAUSE* they support your point.

OR

- Choose them to help you create your point.
- Put them in the middle of the paragraph, not as a topic sentence or to conclude.
- Follow every quote with an explanation of how it supports your point.

Table 6.4.1 explains how to incorporate quotations into your writing.

Table 6.4.1

How to put quotations into your writing:
1. **Introduce** the quote and who said or wrote it.
2. Incorporate the quote **into a complete sentence** to support your point (the quotation does not have to be a complete sentence though; you can incorporate part of a quoted sentence into your own sentence).
3. **Cite** the **author** and the **page number**.
4. **Analyze** the quote (maybe paraphrase first) and its relevance to your point.

Strategy: PICA (Point, Introduce, Cite, Analyze)

***P**oint*

***I**ntroduce*

***C**ite*

***A**nalyze*

The following example demonstrates how to use this strategy in a body paragraph.

Example

Your point: Students should not just assume they need a four-year degree degree to get to where they want to be.

Introduce: Ben Strickland, senior at the University of Oklahoma, believes in taking a break from the education system to develop a plan. He states, “the truth is this: there is much to be gained by spending time other ways than rigorously studying. College is hardly the only source of education in life. And while you take a break and see the world, college will still be here when you get back-- and, who knows, you might just find a purpose”

Cite: (Robinson 185).

Analyze: It is difficult to do well in school if one doesn’t see the point. If people enjoy and can afford to use school to explore their options, they should, but some fields don’t require a Bachelor’s Degree, and some people prefer to find their interests outside of college.

Exercise 47.4.1

Read a student’s body paragraph below.

- *Where the writer makes their own point, put a **P**.*
- *Where the writer introduces the quote, put an **I**.*
- *Where the writer cites the quote, put a **C**.*

- *Where the writer analyzes the quote, put an **A**.*

Example 1:

Answer available at the end of this section.

What you just read was a paragraph that used two quotes to support its main point, that Malcolm X and Luis Rodriguez both struggled to develop confidence in their ability to write.

As you can see, the quotes are **sandwiched** between the student writer's own words.

Introducing a Quote: Part I

How to incorporate a quote into a grammatically correct sentence:

Use ONE of the following methods:

First method:

- According to Tanzina Vega, "...."

Second method:

- Tanzina Vega, journalist, writes "...."
- Tanzina Vega argues that "..."

First Method

According to Schwartz, "Most of all, we want work that is meaningful — that makes a difference to other people and thus ennobles us in at least some small way" (1).

Second Method

- Carnavale et al **write,** "Our projections suggest that the economy will create 55 million new job openings over the next decade, and 65 percent, or 37 million, of these new job vacancies will require some postsecondary education and training (1).
- Holloway **adds that** "in 2014, Americans outworked several expected other countries, among them Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland and Austria, all countries that (coincidentally, I'm so sure) rank higher than us on the most recent World Happiness survey" (1).

Exercise 57.4.1

Observe:

What kind of punctuation comes before the quote? _____

What kind comes after? _____

In the second method, what tense is the verb in? _____

Practice both methods to introduce a quote you will use in your essay:

First method:

Second method:

Incorrect Incorporation of Quotations

Mixing the two above methods:

> According Kali Holloway claims that, "..."

Using strange sentence structure

> In the article by Carnevale et al, it states that...

(Who is "it"? Articles can't "state" things; only writers or speakers can!)

Using the word "quote"

> Robinson quotes, "..."

(Quoting is what you are doing by repeating his words; he is not quoting, but writing.)

Exercise 67.4.1

Correct the three incorrect examples from above

Naming the source as you introduce the quote is also an option the first time you use a source (only). But don't do this to much because it can interrupt the flow of you thought or make the sentence too long to digest.

Examples:

- In "Race, Ethnicity, and the American Labor Market" Roberta Spalter-Roth and Terri Ann Lowenthal **note** that the "Creation of 'ethnic niches' in certain occupations or industries also affects both the desirability and availability of jobs" (5).
- Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson, in their report, *Pathways to Prosperity*, **argue that** "When young adults fail to successfully complete a post-secondary degree or credential, it is increasingly difficult for them to find an alternative pathway to success through the labor market" (4).
- In his memoir, *It Calls You Back*, Luis Rodriguez **recounts**, "My writing became an obsession. I wrote whenever I had the chance in the midst of all the drama, with rotating shifts and even sixteen-hour days at the mill" (95).

Exercise 77.4.1

Observe

What kind of punctuation or formatting is used with article titles? _____

What kind of punctuation or formatting is used with longer texts like books? _____

What kind of punctuation surrounds the name of each text? _____

What is the subject of each sentence above? 1. _____

2. _____ 3. _____

What verb is each subject "doing"? 1. _____

2. _____ 3. _____

What conclusions can you draw about correct quoting from your observations of subjects and verbs? _____

_____

NOTE: The writer or speaker is usually the subject of a sentence that contains a quote. The verb is usually a present tense action verb like: *writes, states, argues, claims,* etc.

Exercise 87.4.1

Incorporate one of the quotes for your essay correctly using the PICA method and the tips above:

State the POINT your quote supports:

INTRODUCE the quote, its writer or speaker, and the text it comes from:

Insert the quote and CITE it correctly:

ANALYZE its relevance to your point:

Exercise 97.4.1

Find the errors in the citations below and rewrite them correctly: Remember to ask yourself: Who is writing what?

1. As it quotes in Finding Your Element by Ken Robinson, “attitude can be everything” (Robinson 146).

2. According to Mike Rose states, tasks like the diagnosis that a plumber has to make while feeling around blindly inside a wall “don’t typically appear on IQ tests but are manifestations of intelligence” (Rose).

3. In *Finding Your Element* by Ken Robinson it is stated that, “because they have such a narrow view of ability, school systems usually promote a very wide idea of disability” (Robinson 46).

Contributors

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

This page most recently updated on June 8, 2020.

Answers

Exercise 47.4.1

____ Early in their lives, both Malcolm X and Luis Rodriguez were ashamed of their writing skills.

____ Malcolm X wrote and rewrote his letters to his religious mentor, Elijah Muhammad. He describes, “At least twenty-five times I must have written that first one-page letter to him, over and over. I was trying to make it both legible and understandable. I practically couldn’t read my handwriting myself; it shames even to remember it”

____ (X 172).

____ Malcolm X rewrote his letter so many times because his handwriting and his vocabulary embarrassed him (even when he thought about it, years later).

Example 2:

____ Like Malcolm X, Rodriguez had a similar feeling about writing.

____ When his teacher first reads his poetry, Luis says, “Yeah, sure-They are no good, ____ right?” (Rodriguez 218).

____ Rodriguez just assumed his teacher thought his poems were terrible, before she said anything. Even though he had talent, his feelings of shame prevented him from recognizing it. Both writers persisted through their shame and self-doubt to be able to make use of their gifts.

This page titled 7.4: Working with Sources- Part II is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.4: Working with Sources- Part II by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.5: Creating Coherence



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Cohesion and Coherence

With a key sentence established, the next task is to shape the body of your paragraph to be both cohesive and coherent. As Williams and Bizup[8] explain, cohesion is about the "sense of flow" (how each sentence fits with the next), while coherence is about the "sense of the whole".[9] Some students worry too much about "flow" and spend a lot of time on sentence-level issues to promote it. We encourage you to focus on underlying structure. For the most part, a text reads smoothly when it conveys a thoughtful and well organized argument or analysis. Focus first and most on your ideas, on crafting an ambitious analysis. The most useful guides advise you to first focus on getting your ideas on paper and then revising for organization and wordsmithing later, refining the analysis as you go. Therefore, we will discuss creating cohesion and coherent paragraphs here as if you already have some rough text written and are in the process of smoothing out your prose to clarify your argument for both your reader and yourself. Deal with cohesion and coherence during the editing--not the drafting--process.

Cohesion refers to the flow from sentence to sentence. For example, compare these passages about how cliques form:

Version A (Which We Rewrote):

> Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. If an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other, according to balance theory (1363).[10] Bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties, Granovetter argues (1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. If two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. Only weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the "friends of friends" can connect people in different cliques.

Version B (The Original By Giuffre):

> Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. In brief, balance theory tells us that if an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other (1363). Granovetter argues that because of this, bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties (1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. This is because if two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. The only way, therefore, that people in different cliques can be connected

> is through weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the "friends of friends." [11]

Version A has the exact same information as version B, but it is harder to read because it is less cohesive. In version B, however, each sentence begins with old information and bridges to new information. Here's Version B again with the relevant parts emboldened:

> Granovetter begins by looking at **balance theory.** In brief, **balance theory** tells us that if an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be **tied** to each other (1363). Granovetter argues that because of this, bridge **ties** between cliques are always **weak ties** (1364). **Weak ties** may not necessarily be **bridges**, but Granovetter argues that **bridges** will be weak. **This is because** if two actors share a **strong tie**, they will draw in their other **strong relations** and will eventually form a **clique**. The only way, therefore, that people in **different cliques** can be connected is through **weak ties** that do not have the strength to draw together all the "friends of friends."

The first sentence establishes the key idea of balance theory. The next sentence begins with balance theory and ends with social ties, which is the focus of the third sentence. The concept of weak ties connects the third and fourth sentences and concept of cliques the fifth and sixth sentences. In Version A, in contrast, the first sentence focuses on balance theory, but then the second sentence makes a new point about social ties *before* telling the reader that the point comes from balance theory. The reader has to take in a lot of unfamiliar information before learning how it fits in with familiar concepts. Version A is coherent, but the lack of cohesion makes it tedious to read.

The lesson is this: if you or others perceive a passage you've written to be awkward or choppy, even though the topic is consistent, try rewriting it to ensure that each sentence begins with a familiar term or concept. If your points don't naturally daisy-chain together like the examples given here, consider numbering them. For example, you may choose to write, "Proponents of the legislation point to four major benefits." Then you could discuss four loosely related ideas without leaving your reader wondering how they relate.

While cohesion is about the sense of flow; coherence is about the sense of the whole. For example, here's a passage that is cohesive (from sentence to sentence) but lacks coherence:

> Your social networks and your location within them shape the kinds and amount of information that you have access to. Information is distinct from data, in that information makes some kind of generalization about a person, thing, or population. Defensible generalizations about society can be either probabilities (i.e., statistics) or patterns (often from qualitative analysis). Such probabilities and patterns can be temporal, spatial, or simultaneous.

Each sentence in the above passage starts with a familiar idea and progresses to a new one, but it lacks coherence—a sense of being about one thing. Good writers often write passages like that when they're free-writing or using the drafting stage to cast a wide net for ideas. A writer weighing the power and limits of social network analysis may free-write something like that example and, from there, develop a more specific plan for summarizing key insights about social networks and then discussing them with reference to the core tenets of social science. As a draft, an incoherent paragraph often points to a productive line of reasoning; one just has to continue thinking it through in order to identify a clear argumentative purpose for each paragraph. With its purpose defined, each paragraph, then, becomes a lot easier to write. Coherent paragraphs aren't just about style; they are a sign of a thoughtful, well developed analysis.

The Wind-Up

Some guides advise you to end each paragraph with a specific concluding sentence, in a sense, to treat each paragraph as a kind of mini-essay. But that's not a widely held convention. Most well written academic pieces don't adhere to that structure. The last sentence of the paragraph should certainly be in your own words (as in, not a quote), but as long as the paragraph succeeds in carrying out the task that it has been assigned by its key sentence, you don't need to worry about whether that last sentence has an air of conclusiveness. For example, consider these paragraphs about the cold fusion controversy of the 1980s that appeared in a best-selling textbook[12]:

> The experiment seemed straightforward and there were plenty of scientists willing to try it. Many did. It was wonderful to have a simple laboratory experiment on fusion to try after the decades of embarrassing attempts to control hot fusion. This effort required multi-billion dollar machines whose every success seemed to be capped with an unanticipated failure. 'Cold fusion' seemed to provide, as Martin Fleischmann said during the course of that famous Utah press conference, 'another route'—the route of little science.

In that example, the first and last sentences in the paragraph are somewhat symmetrical: the authors introduce the idea of accessible science, contrast it with big science, and bring it back to the phrase “little science.” Here’s an example from the same chapter of the same book that does not have any particular symmetry[13]:

> The struggle between proponents and critics in a scientific controversy is always a struggle for credibility. When scientists make claims which are literally ‘incredible’, as in the cold fusion case, they face an uphill struggle. The problem Pons and Fleischmann had to overcome was that they had credibility as electrochemists but not as nuclear physicists. And it was nuclear physics where their work was likely to have its main impact.

The last sentence of the paragraph doesn’t mirror the first, but the paragraph still works just fine. In fact, it serves as a transition into what is likely the focus of the next paragraph. In general, every sentence of academic writing should add some unique content. Don’t trouble yourself with having the last sentence in every paragraph serve as a mini-conclusion. Instead, worry about developing each point sufficiently and making your logical sequence clear.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 7.5.1

Cohesion & Coherence: College Writing 3.9. **Authored by:** English for Busy Students. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Creating Coherence with Transitions

To ensure continuity within a paragraph a writer must use key terms and also make use of other techniques such as transitions. Transitions ensure that the reader understands what each sentence says and indicate how the sentences and paragraphs are logically related to each other and the “story.” Transitions should be placed at the beginning of a sentence for strongest continuity, usually set off by a comma.

If transitions are missing, the logical relationship between sentences can be unclear and may even be nonexistent. Don't assume your reader knows the relationship between the sentence. The importance of adding transitions is shown in the **following example**:

To determine the effects of lack of lunch on children’s school performance, we examined grades and income measures. We found they were negatively correlated. _____, lack of food makes learning in school more difficult.

The logical relationship between the first and second sentence of this example is not immediately obvious to the reader. Possible transitions that one could fill in between these two sentences include the following:

- To determine the effects of lack of lunch on children’s school performance, we examined grades and income measures. We found they were negatively correlated. **In addition**, lack of food makes learning in school more difficult.
- To determine the effects of lack of lunch on children’s school performance, we examined grades and income measures. We found they were negatively correlated. **Therefore**, lack of food makes learning in school more difficult.
- To determine the effects of lack of lunch on children’s school performance, we examined grades and income measures. We found they were negatively correlated. **On the other hand**, lack of food makes learning in school more difficult.

When the transition is missing between these two sentences, most readers may guess that the intended relationship is “in addition,” when it really is "therefore." But readers should not have to guess. Sometimes readers can come to a very different conclusion than you intend!

Here is another example:

> We determined sensitivity to allergens in children who have pets. We measured children's histamine levels and logged whether they had pets or not.

In the above example, the logical relationship between the first and second sentences is also not clear because a transition is missing. Once the transition is added in, the relationship between the two sentences becomes obvious.

*Revised example*h

> We determined sensitivity to allergens in children who have pets. **To do this,** we measured children's histamine levels and logged whether they had pets or not.

Use transitions to link ideas, but do not overuse them. Certain transitions are outdated or are used in British, but not American, English, such as: hitherto, whilst, and henceforth.

Table 6.5.1 - Common Transitional Words and Phrases

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

Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay		
finally	last	in conclusion
most of all	least of all	last of all
All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas Inside Paragraphs		
admittedly	at this point	certainly
granted	it is true	generally speaking
in general	in this situation	no doubt
no one denies	obviously	of course
to be sure	undoubtedly	unquestionably
Transitions that Introduce Examples		
for instance	for example	
Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps		
first, second, third	generally, furthermore, finally	in the first place, also, last
in the first place, furthermore, finally	in the first place, likewise, lastly	

Transitions to Use with Supporting & Concluding Sentences

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use transitional words and phrases. A transition is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

> There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependence on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. “It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I’ve owned.” Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

Each of the underlined words is a transition word. Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer’s ideas by showing that they have another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include *third*, *also*, and *furthermore*.

The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas). Other transition words of consequence include *as a result*, *so that*, *since*, or *for this reason*.

The following chart provides some useful transition words to connect supporting sentences and concluding sentences.

Table 6.5.2 - Useful Transitional Words and Phrases

For Supporting Sentences					
above all	but	for instance	in particular	moreover	subsequently
also	conversely	furthermore	later on	nevertheless	therefore
aside from	correspondingly	however	likewise	on one hand	to begin with
at the same time	for example	in addition	meanwhile	on the contrary	
For Concluding Sentences					
after all	all things considered	in brief	in summary	on the whole	to sum up

all in all	finally	in conclusion	on balance	thus	

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from Writing in College. **Authored by:** Amy Guptil. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from The Perfect Paragraph in "Guide to Writing." **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY-NC-SA

This page last updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 7.5: Creating Coherence is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.5: Creating Coherence by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.6: Key Takeaways

- Remember to include all the key structural parts of an essay: a thesis statement that is part of your introductory paragraph, three or more body paragraphs as described in your outline, and a concluding paragraph. Then add an engaging title to draw in readersAlways be aware of your purpose for writing and the needs of your audience. Cater to those needs in every sensible way.
- A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself. It should be specific, precise, forceful, confident, and able to be demonstrated.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.
- Topic sentences express the main idea of a paragraph combined with the writer's attitude or opinion about the topic, using engaging vocabulary.
- Topic sentence placement depends on the interaction between the purpose of the paragraph, the content, and the audience. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Use your topic outline or your sentence outline to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas
- Generally speaking, write your introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.
- A strong opening captures your readers' interest and introduces them to your topic before you present your thesis statement.
- The funnel technique for writing the introduction begins with generalities and gradually narrows your focus until you present your thesis.
- The conclusion should remain true to your thesis statement. It is best to avoid changing your tone or your main idea, and avoid introducing any new material.
- Closing with a final emphatic statement provides closure for your readers and makes your essay more memorable.
- Cohesion means how one sentence moves to the next; a sentence should begin with given information and conclude with new information.
- Cohesion can be created with a combination of words related to the topic and transition words.
- Coherence basically means whether a paragraph stays on topic.

This page titled 7.6: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.6: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8: REVISING AND EDITING

8.1: Revising and Editing
8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture
8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas
8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format
8.5: Proofreading
8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words
8.7: Key Takeaways

This page titled 8: Revising and Editing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

8.1: Revising and Editing



Figure: Image by Pixabay

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

Understanding the Purpose of Revising and Editing

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

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

Tip

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

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

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

What is Revision?

Revising is looking for ways to make your ideas clearer, stronger, and more convincing. When revising, you might add, cut, move, or change whole sentences or paragraphs. Revising is far more than just editing because, editing is correcting grammar, style, usage, and punctuation. Revising is really a re-**vision** of your entire essay: ideas, organization, development, grammar, and mechanics. You can follow the steps outlined below while revising.

So, how do you revise? There's one main thing to keep in mind when revising: revise from "big" to "small." There are three main parts to revision which we will be covering in this section which follow the illustration below:

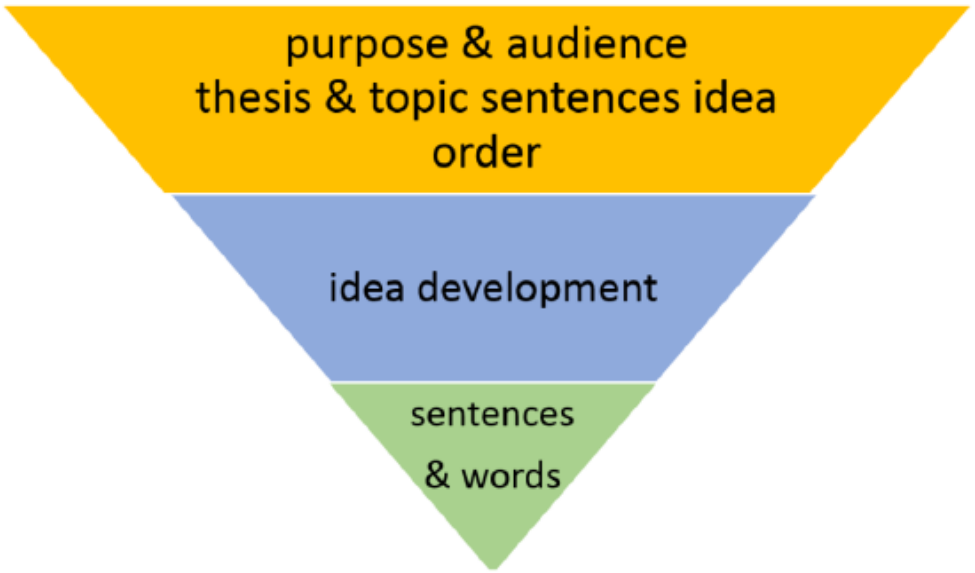


Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Revision Check-list

Directions: Print out a clean copy of the essay you plan to revise. Follow the steps below, marking your revision notes on this clean copy. Your instructor may want you to turn in this draft with revision notes.

Part I: Global Revisions

1. **Revise for unity:** When you revise for unity, you are revising to make sure all of your points are related to your main point—they unite to support your main point. Sometimes it is easy to drift away from your main point, so you want to check each paragraph closely to make sure it is working to prove your thesis. Look for topic sentences that support your thesis. Then examine each paragraph, making sure every single sentence in the paragraph is working to support the topic sentence.

2. **Revise for support, detail, and analysis**: Your support is your primary evidence, your quotes. Your detail is usually included in your explanation portion of your PIE paragraph that helps clarify the relationship of the support to the topic sentence, and your analysis is where you have explained the quote to make it clear to the reader how it supports your point. When revising, you want to make sure you have enough support, detail, and analysis to fully develop your point. Remember that you want to assume your reader is educated, but not necessarily abreast of the topics you are discussing. Mark on your page where you can include more support or better support. Identify how the two quotes relate to each other.

3. **Revise for coherence:** When revising for coherence, you are checking to make sure that all of the support connects to make

a clear, well-developed argument. Coherence is the glue that connects all of the parts together and allows the reader to easily follow the argument. The best way to improve coherence is to add transitions. Transitions are words, phrases, and sentences that connect ideas so that writing moves smoothly from one point to another. Transitions can be used to connect sentences within a paragraph, as well as to connect one paragraph to another.

Part II: Local Revisions—Sentences structure, grammar, syntax, and word choice

Directions: After you have complete all of the global revisions, follow these steps to revise for local issues in your writing.

1. Once you have marked all the grammar errors in your sentences, read through your essay again. This time look for places where you can combine sentences so that your sentence lengths are varied.

2. Read through your essay again, looking for places where you can make the sentence clearer or more concise by using more descriptive language. (Sometimes, if you find the right word, you can say something in one word that originally took you four words.)

3. Now you want to check all of your quotes. Check to make sure you have quoted the text exactly, that you have cited your sources properly, and that you have punctuated your citation correctly.

4. Start with the last sentence of your essay. Read through your entire essay from bottom to top **out loud**, looking at the sentence structure, grammar, and language.

5. If there is a particular grammar issue that you know you struggle with, read through your entire essay once just looking for that one error in your sentences. (Try not to get distracted. Staying focused on one error will really help you catch that particular error.) If you struggle with multiple errors, give each error one full read through from bottom to top.

6. Check your formatting one more time. Have you followed MLA style: 1” margins, double-spaced (even on the first page where you have your name block), page numbers with last name starting on the first page.

Creating Unity and Coherence

Follow your outline closely. That gives a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. Sometimes, when writers are rushed, are tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may suffer. Their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may be adding information that is not needed to develop the main idea.

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

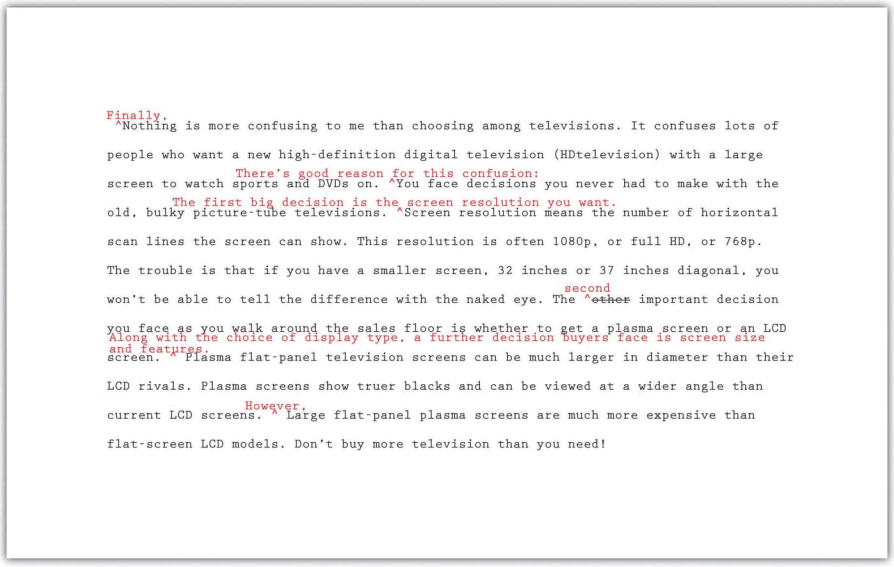
Tip

Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes. (This is also a good time to give your draft to another person to see if they are confused anywhere.)

Tip

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

Below is an example of a page of Andi's edited essay. They chose to make the changes on paper so they could get a good view of how the whole paper flows together. It is easier to do this on a printed paper than on the computer screen.



Finally,
^Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of

people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDtelevision) with a large

There's good reason for this confusion:
screen to watch sports and DVDs on. ^You face decisions you never had to make with the

The first big decision is the screen resolution you want.
old, bulky picture-tube televisions. ^Screen resolution means the number of horizontal

scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p.

The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you

second
won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The ^~~other~~ important decision

you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD
Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size
and features.
screen. ^ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their

LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than

However,
current LCD screens. ^ Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than

flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need!

Exercise 1

Answer the following questions about Andi's revised paragraph.

A. 1. Do you agree with the transitions and other changes that Mariah made to the paragraph? Which would you keep and which were unnecessary? Explain.
2. What transition words or phrases did Andi add to her paragraph? Why did she choose each one?
3. What effect does adding additional sentences have on the coherence of the paragraph? Explain. When you read both versions aloud, which version has a more logical flow of ideas? Explain.

B. Now return to the first draft of the essay you wrote and revise it for coherence. Add transition words and phrases where they are needed, and make any other changes that are needed to improve the flow and connection between ideas.

Being Clear and Concise

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

If you have a tendency to write too much, you will need to look out for unnecessary words. If you have a tendency to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language. More information about style and word choice can also be found in Chapter 11, "Clarity, Conciseness, and Style."

Identifying Wordiness

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

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

  Revised: The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Exercise 2

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

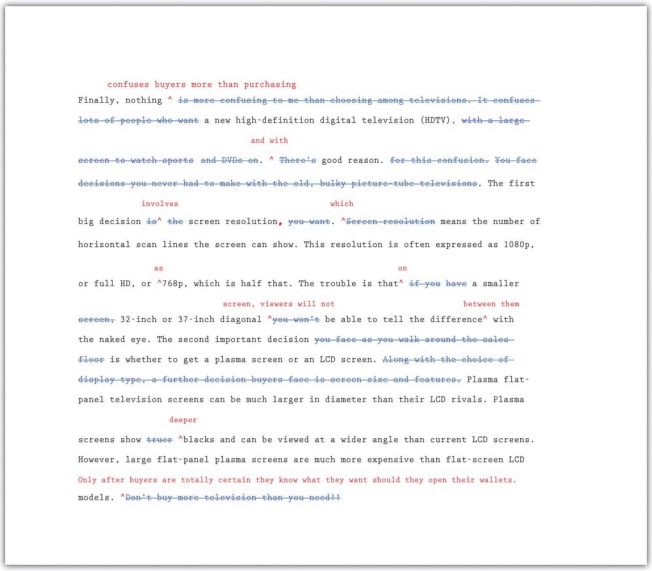
Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most college essays should be written in formal English suitable for an academic situation. Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate. For more information about word choice and academic style, see Chapter 11.

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

and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Now read the revisions Andi made to make her third paragraph clearer and more concise. They had already incorporated the changes for improving unity and coherence.



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

Exercise 3

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

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

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

Completing a Peer Review

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

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

Reading Your Own Drafts

Writers tend to read over their own papers pretty quickly, with the knowledge of what they are trying to argue already in their minds. Reading in this way can cause you to skip over gaps in your written argument because the gap-filler is in your head. A problem occurs when your reader falls into these gaps. Your reader wants you to make the necessary connections from one thought or sentence to the next. When you don't, the reader can become confused or frustrated. Think about when you read something and you struggle to find the most important points or what the writer is trying to say. Isn't that annoying? Doesn't it make you want to quit reading and surf the web or call a friend?

Reading aloud

If you go to a tutoring session, you will probably hear the tutor say, “We always read papers out loud—would you like to read yours, or would you like to hear me read it?” Reading aloud has many benefits. Most people have far more experience listening to and speaking English than they do reading and editing it on the printed page. When reading your draft out loud or listening to someone else read it, your brain gets the information in a new way, and you may notice things that you didn’t see before.

As listeners, we need the order of ideas in a paper to make sense. We can’t flip back and forth from page to page to try to figure out what is going on or find information we need. When you hear your paper read out loud, you may recognize that you need to re-order the information in it or realize that there are gaps in your explanation. Listeners also need transitions to help us get from one main idea to the next. When you hear your paper, you may recognize places where you have moved from one topic to another too abruptly.

You may also hear errors in your sentences. Sometimes we leave out a word, mess things up as we copy and paste text, or make a grammatical mistake. These kinds of errors can be hard to see on the page, but sentences that contain them are very likely to sound wrong. For native speakers of English (and some non-native speakers, too), reading out loud is one of the most powerful proofreading techniques around.

Sometimes sentences aren’t grammatically incorrect, but they are still awkward in some way—too long, too convoluted, too repetitive. Problems like these are often easily heard. Hearing your paper can also help you get a sense of whether the tone is right. Does it sound too formal? Too chatty or casual? What kind of impression will your voice in this paper make on a reader? Sometimes hearing your words helps you get a more objective sense of the impression you are creating—listening puts in you in something more like the position your reader will be in as he/she moves through your text.

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

This feels a little silly.

Reading aloud (or listening to your writing being read) takes some getting used to, but give it a try. You may be surprised at how much it can speed up your revision process!

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 8.1.1

Three-step revision process. **Authored by:** pattheprofessor. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Peer Review Comments

Once you have a draft, get a person you trust to read your rough draft, and then ask them to talk to you about what they did and didn’t understand. (Now is not the time to talk about proofreading stuff, so make sure they ignore those issues for the time being). You will likely get one of the following responses or a combination of them:

If your listener/reader has tons of questions about what you are saying, then you probably need to explain more. Let’s say you are writing a paper on piranhas, and your reader says, “What’s a piranha? Why do I need to know about them? How would I identify

one?" Those are vital questions that you clearly need to answer in your paper. You need more detail and elaboration.

If your reader seems confused, you probably need to explain more clearly. So if he says, "Are there piranhas in the lakes around here?" you may not need to give more examples, but rather focus on making sure your examples and points are clear.

If your reader looks bored and can repeat back to you more details than she needs to know to get your point, you probably explained too much. Excessive detail can also be confusing, because it can bog the reader down and keep her from focusing on your main points. You want your reader to say, "So it seems like your paper is saying that piranhas are misunderstood creatures that are essential to South American ecosystems," not, "Uh... piranhas are important?" or, "Well, I know you said piranhas don't usually attack people, and they're usually around 10 inches long, and some people keep them in aquariums as pets, and dolphins are one of their predators, and...a bunch of other stuff, I guess?"

Sometimes it's not the amount of explanation that matters, but the word choice and tone you adopt. Your word choice and tone need to match your audience's expectations. For example, imagine you are researching piranhas; you find an article in National Geographic and another one in an academic journal for scientists. How would you expect the two articles to sound? National Geographic is written for a popular audience; you might expect it to have sentences like "The piranha generally lives in shallow rivers and streams in South America." The scientific journal, on the other hand, might use much more technical language because it's written for an audience of specialists. A sentence like "*Serrasalmus piraya* lives in fresh and brackish intercoastal and proto-arboreal sub-tropical regions between the 45th and 38th parallels" might not be out of place in the journal. Generally, you want your reader to know enough material to understand the points you are making. It's like the old forest/trees metaphor. If you give the reader nothing but trees, she won't see the forest (your thesis, the reason for your paper). If you give her a big forest and no trees, she won't know how you got to the forest (she might say, "Your point is fine, but you haven't proven it to me"). You want the reader to say, "Nice forest, and those trees really help me to see it."

Questions for Peer Review

Title of essay: _____

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Peer reviewer's name: _____

1. This essay is about_____.
2. Your main points in this essay are_____.
3. What I most liked about this essay is_____.
4. These three points struck me as your strongest:

    a. Point: _____

    Why: _____

    b. Point: _____

    Why: _____

    c. Point: _____

    Why: _____

5. These places in your essay are not clear to me:

    a. Where: _____

    Needs improvement because_____

    b. Where: _____

Needs improvement because _____

c. Where: _____

Needs improvement because _____

6. The one additional change you could make that would improve this essay significantly is _____.

Here is an additional, more specific peer review resource that you may use.

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 4

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

Using Feedback Objectively

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

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

Using Feedback from Multiple Sources

You might receive feedback from more than one reader. In this situation, you may receive feedback from some readers who do not understand the assignment or who lack your involvement with and enthusiasm for it.

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

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

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

Exercise 5

Work with two partners. Go back to Exercises 3 in this lesson and compare your responses to Activity A, about Andi's paragraph, with your partners'. Recall Andi's purpose for writing, and their audience. Then, working individually, discuss where you agree and where you disagree about revision needs.

Proofreading, Editing, and Presentation

In Peer Review, the focus is on the larger content and structural issues, but when you have revised those parts of your paper, it is also important to edit and proofread for sentence structure, grammar, and formatting.

PROOFREADING QUESTIONS

Sentence Structure

Do all of your sentences make sense?

Are they connected with coordinators (FANBOYS) and subordinators to clarify meaning?

Transitions

Have you used additional transition words to help the reader understand how your sentences relate to each other?

Grammar

Have you made sure you implemented what the class has practiced, and what you need to work on?

Vocabulary

Have you used some of the words (especially verbs) you have learned?

Are they used correctly?

Formatting

Have you formatted your paper according to MLA rules?

Is the essay in a folder?

Have you turned in everything your instructor has asked you to turn in? Typically, this may include (from top to bottom

- The final draft
- Feedback Sheet
- Peer Review sheet
- Rough draft
- Outline
- Brainstorm

Formatting

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

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

Reflection

Exercise 6

Use this list to think about the question: **What went well while writing your essay and what gave you trouble?**

HOCs (Higher Order Concerns)

- Understanding the reading
- Summarizing the issue (for the introduction)
- Coming up with the thesis
- Sorting and organizing the information
- Deciding on the topics of the body paragraphs
- Organizing the body paragraphs
  - Writing the topic sentences
  - Including information (details)
  - Incorporating quotations
  - Explaining or interpreting those details
  - Summing up (concluding) the paragraphs
- Writing the conclusion

LOCs (Later Order Concerns)

- Writing clear sentences
- Using subordinators and coordinators (FANBOYS)
- Using transitions to connect ideas
- Checking grammar _____
- Proofreading for spelling and typos
- Formatting (MLA)

Write 1.5 pages (using separate paragraphs) and answer the question at the top of the page.

Also, if something gave you trouble, how did you work on it? Or, what will you do to work on it next time?

The following video offers a quick overview of the revision process, moving from “big” concepts to “small” sentence and language items.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 8.1.1

Reading Aloud -- UNC Writing Center. **Authored by:** UNC Writing Center. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Contributors

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0

- Adapted from Revision Overview in College Writing. **Authored by:** Susan Oaks. **Provided by:** Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **Project:** College Writing. **License:** *CC BY-NC:*
- From Accelerated English. **Authored by:** Ashley Paul. **Provided by:** Libretext. **License:** CC-BY-SA

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 8.1: Revising and Editing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.1: Revising and Editing by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Higher Order Concerns for Revision

Regardless of writers' levels of experience or areas of expertise, many struggle with revision, a component of the writing process that encompasses everything from transformative changes in content and argumentation to minor corrections in grammar and punctuation. Perhaps because revision involves so many forms of modification, it is the focus of most scientific writing guides and handbooks. Revision can be daunting; how does one progress from initial drafts (called "rough drafts" for good reason) to a polished piece of scholarly writing?

Developing a process for revision can help writers produce thoughtful, polished texts and grow their written communication skills. Consider, then, a systematic approach to revision, including strategies to employ at every step of the process.

A System for Approaching Revision



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Generally, revision should be approached in a top-down manner by addressing **higher-order concerns (HOCs)** before moving on to **lower-order concerns (LOCs)**. In writing studies, the term “higher order” is used to denote major or global issues such as thesis, argumentation, and organization, whereas “lower order” is used to denote minor or local issues such as grammar and mechanics.[1] The more analytical work of revising HOCs often has ramifications for the entire piece. Perhaps in refining the argument, a writer will realize that the discussion section does not fully consider the study’s implications. Or, a writer will try a new organizational scheme and find that a paragraph no longer fits and should be cut. Such revisions may have far-reaching implications for the text.

Dedicating time to tweaking wording or correcting grammatical errors is unproductive if the sentence will be changed or deleted. Focusing on HOCs before LOCs allows writers to revise more effectively and efficiently.

Revision Strategies

Bearing in mind the general system of revising from HOCs to LOCs, you can employ several revision strategies.

- **Begin by evaluating how your argument addresses your rhetorical situation**—that is, the specific context surrounding your writing, including the audience, exigence, and constraints.[2]
  - For example, you may write an article describing a new treatment. If the target journal’s audience comes from a variety of disciplines, you may need to include substantial background explanation, consider the implications for practitioners and scholars in multiple fields, and define technical terms. By contrast, if you are addressing a highly specialized audience, you may be able to dispense with many of the background explanations and definitions because of your shared knowledge base. You may consider the implications only for specialists, as they are your primary audience. Because this sort of revision affects the entire text, beginning by analyzing your rhetorical situation is effective.
- **Analyze your thesis or main argument for clarity**.
- **Evaluate the global organization of your text by writing a reverse outline**. Unlike traditional outlines, which are written before drafting, reverse outlines reflect the content of written drafts.
  - In a separate document or in your text’s margins, record the main idea of each paragraph. Then, consider whether the order of your ideas is logical. This method also will help you identify ideas that are out of place or digressive. You may also evaluate organization by printing the text and cutting it up so that each paragraph appears on a separate piece of paper. You may then easily reorder the paragraphs to test different organizational schemes.

Reverse Outlines

Reverse outlines are a great way to see how your actual essay has deviated from your original outline, and also see if the "new"

outline is rigorous with its thesis statements, topic sentences, and supporting details all tying in together.

Process:

Set your draft aside for a while (at least a day) so you can approach revision processes with a fresh mind. First, re-read your draft and consider the draft in the context of your purpose and audience. If the draft doesn't "fit" your writing purpose or audience, you will need to do some major re-thinking and revision.

Then, still on the level of big ideas, consider your thesis and topic sentences to make sure they are thesis and topic sentences, and that they relate to one another. Ask and answer the following questions:

- As a reader, can I clearly identify a thesis and topic sentences?
- Do I actually have a thesis with a topic and an angle/argument/assertion about that topic?
- Do all of my topic sentences and their units of support also have topics and angles, and do my topic sentences relate



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

One method that may help you answer these questions is to annotate your draft and do a reverse outline. Annotation involves noting the main ideas in each section of the essay. Number your paragraphs in the essay. Then make a numbered list and write the main idea of each paragraph, in the order in which the ideas actually occur in your draft, and analyze your list. Questions to ask yourself when analyzing your reverse outline include:

- Are the ideas organized into categories or groups that make sense?
- Is the order of ideas (topic sentences and units of support) logical, given the thesis?
- Are there paragraphs that should be shifted to other locations, because they really relate to different topic sentences and units of support?
- Is there an overall introduction-body-conclusion structure?
- Does the introduction appropriately introduce the topic of the essay, interest a reader, and offer the main idea?
- Does the conclusion re-state the main idea?

The following video explains how to do a reverse outline:

Rachael Cayley's blog entry on Reverse Outlines, mentioned at the end of the video, is a useful resource for information on doing "big" revisions.

The reverse outline mentioned above is also known as a **post-draft outline**. Guidance for how to complete one for an entire essay draft, as well as for an individual problematic paragraph, are found in this presentation.

Editing: Reverse Outline. **Authored by:** Academic Skills, The University of Melbourne. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Revising for Flow of Information. **Authored by:** Susan Oaks in College Writing. **Provided by:** Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **License:** CC BY-NC
- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.

- Adapted from Higher Order Concerns for Writing in Guide to Writing. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC-BY

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas

Revision Stage 2: Idea Development



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Reverse outlining (from stage 1 of revision) not only helps you with idea structure; it can also help you analyze idea development to determine whether you have the right amount of writing at various places in your essay. If you see multiple main ideas in one paragraph, for example, you may not have given each idea enough development.

As you revise for idea development, make sure you have at least a paragraph–and often more–for each topic sentence idea. Make sure that you have developed your paragraphs and units of support with examples and details appropriate to your purpose and audience. For example, consider the following two paragraphs. What characterizes the well-developed one, which leaves you, as a reader, more satisfied that you have a fuller understanding?

> Traveling to Tokyo was a revelation, especially when compared with traveling to New York City. While New Yorkers are actually polite as a group, New York is dirtier and transportation is less timely. And it's definitely not quiet! On the other hand, Tokyo is ultra-modern in terms of transportation and services. Things run on time. For a large city, it's clean, quiet, and the citizens are polite.
>
> Traveling to Tokyo was a revelation, especially when compared with traveling to New York City. First of all, Tokyo is ultra-modern in terms of transportation and services. Coming into the airport, we had the option of shipping our bags to our destination, thus avoiding the hassle of hauling luggage and allowing us to take inexpensive public transportation to our hotel. The airport train runs frequently, quickly, and on time; it actually leaves when it's supposed to leave. In the airport as well as in other train stations, there's often a white-gloved and uniformed "conductor" on the station platform to help travelers get to the right track, stand in the right place to board the train, and signal to the train conductor that all travelers have boarded so that the train can depart on time. To board, passengers line up quietly and politely, so that boarding can occur quickly. Within the train, passengers are quiet – a microcosm of what to expect in all public spaces, on the street, in restaurants, in museums, and more. People do not talk loudly or play loud music. Sounds indicating the upcoming station stop are gentle chimes. On the other hand, New York offers a blend of new and old in terms of transportation and services. While the relatively new airport train runs efficiently, there are no special luggage services or persons designated to help travelers. The airport train links to a subway system to get into the heart of New York City, and subway cars are often old, in keeping with the age of the system itself. Boarding may be a challenge if there are a lot of people; no one lines up, but you're still expected to get onto the train quickly. On board, you may experience a blend of sounds ranging from talking to music. Whatever you hear, there's usually no attempt to mute or soften the sound. Stations are announced with loud bells and announcements, a precursor of the sound level you can expect on New York City streets. Yet despite their differences, each city has a special appeal. While Tokyo seems to focus on creating a pleasant public experience, New York is sheer kinetic energy.

Even though the more developed paragraph is relatively long, and might be successfully broken into multiple paragraphs within a unit of support, it includes the following characteristics that make it well-developed:

- clear topic sentence that indicates a comparison of the two cities

- follow-through on the order of the comparison indicated in the topic sentence (whereas the less developed paragraph switches that order)
- multiple examples and details for the points about transportation, sound, and timeliness
- concluding sentence that summarizes and also moves a reader to an additional insight

As noted in the text *The Word on College Reading and Writing*, “here are some tips on what to strive for and what to avoid when it comes to supporting details.” [1]

Good support	**Weak Support**
• Is relevant and focused (sticks to the point). • Is well developed. • Provides sufficient detail. • Is vivid and descriptive. • Is well organized. • Is coherent and consistent. • Highlights key terms and ideas.	• Lacks a clear connection to the point that it’s meant to support. • Lacks development. • Lacks detail or gives too much detail. • Is vague and imprecise. • Lacks organization. • Seems disjointed (ideas don’t clearly relate to each other). • Lacks emphasis of key terms and ideas.

Although the following video focuses on illustrative writing, the concepts offered about idea development can be applied to essay writing for any purpose, including logical argument, research writing, and essays using different patterns of development. The video provides examples of sparsely-developed and well-developed paragraphs, using examples and details:

Writing an Illustrative Paragraph or Essay. **Authored by:** Center for elearning. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Note: Some content in the video “Writing an Illustrative Paragraph or Essay” is presented visually. You may **listen to this video with audio description**.

Revising for Flow of Information

In the first revision stage, revising for idea structure, purpose, and audience, you look at the overall logical order of information to determine if the topic sentences and units of support are in a logical order, given the argument in the thesis. Check to see if you’ve used transition words effectively to show the linkage from one topic sentence and unit of support to the next. This is revising for flow of information on a macro level.

However, you also should revise for flow of information on a micro or paragraph level. Flow on the paragraph level deals with how easily one sentence moves into the next for your reader. The previous page on Revising for Style introduced the concept of “sentence fluency” or flow (see also "Cohesion"); here are examples of good and bad flow in paragraphs, from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles’ writing guides website. Can you tell which paragraph has better flow of information?

1. “Costa Rica is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The southern part of Costa Rica is characterized by dense rain forests, which contain some of the world’s most unusual wildlife. Hoping to get a bird’s eye view of these animals, tourists take zip lining tours through the top canopy of the rain forest. Located in Central America, it borders Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. Some of the interesting creatures found in these forests include tree frogs, white-faced monkeys, and sloths.”
2. “Costa Rica is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Located in Central America, it borders Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. The southern part of Costa Rica is characterized by dense rain forests, which contain some of the world’s most unusual wildlife. Some of the interesting creatures found in these forests include tree frogs, white-faced monkeys, and sloths. Hoping to get a bird’s eye view of these animals, tourists take zip lining tours through the top canopy of the rain forest.” [1]

Paragraph 2 has a better flow. It starts with Costa Rica’s general location, and then moves to a particular location within Costa Rica. The second sentence ends by mentioning “unusual wildlife,” which is a more general lead-in to the third sentence in which the author specifies the wildlife. The fourth sentence links to the third by mentioning “these animals” again, before it moves to talking about tourists.

In contrast, Paragraph 1 hops around from wildlife to tourists to general location to specific wildlife. While the information is the

same, the flow of this paragraph makes it more difficult to read and digest the information.

So, much of the way to revise for flow on the paragraph level is to consider the order and linking of your sentences. However, flow on the paragraph level also deals with sentence structure and how easily the sentences "sound" and can be read.

Here's an example from Daniel's essay in progress. Can you tell which paragraph has the better flow of information?

1. Yet if you look at these arguments one by one, you can see that these skills may be addressed online, albeit in a slightly different way. Public speaking can be taught online because, first of all, online speakers may very well be able to see their audience's reaction and adjust their tone and message accordingly. Skype, Zoom, and other technologies offer real-time, audio and visual experiences that link speaker and audience. Although they are dispersed and not in the same room, the speaker can still see what's going on with other participants and can see from their attitudes and expressions whether they are engaged and whether tone or content needs to be altered. Even in asynchronous environments, audience response may be so immediate that the speaker can respond in almost-real time (think of Rosanne's posts, quick audience reaction on Twitter, and her quick responses). The environment may not be exactly the same as a room with everyone in it, but the skills of observation, situation analysis, and adjustment can still be taught and learned online.
2. Online speakers can learn speaking skills in a slightly different way. Online speakers can see their audience's reaction. Online speakers can use Skype and Zoom. They also have other technologies to see speech attendees. They can see attitudes and expressions. Online speakers can respond in almost-real time. They can learn how to observe. They can learn how to analyze the situation in real time. They can learn to adjust their tone and message accordingly, based on their observations and analyses.

In this example, although the information is almost the same, Paragraph 1 has the best flow. Paragraph 2 is "choppy," because Daiel, at a very initial writing stage, used the same subject-verb sentence structure for all of the sentences in the paragraph. Try to vary your sentence patterns, as well as use transition words, to create an easy flow.



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

As you revise for flow of information within paragraphs, review the following:

- sentence order
- transition use
- sentence structure

Creating Unity

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

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

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

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

Exercise 1

A. Answer the following two questions about Andi's paragraph:
1. Do you agree with Andi's decision to make the deletions? Did they cut too much, too little, or just enough? Explain.
2. Is the explanation of what screen resolution means a digression? Or is it audience friendly and essential to understanding the paragraph? Explain.

B. Now start to revise the first draft of an essay you have written. Reread it to find any statements that affect the unity of your writing. Decide how best to revise.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Tip

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

Writing at Work

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

Contributors and Attributions

- Revision Stage 2: Idea Development. **Authored by**: Susan Oaks. **Provided by**: Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **Project**: College Writing. **License**: ***CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial***
- The Paragraph Body: Supporting Your Ideas. **Authored by**: Monique Babin, Carol Burnell, Susan Pesznecker, Nicole Rosevear, Jaime Wood. **Located at**: **Project**: The Word on College Reading and Writing. **License**: ***CC BY-NC***

This page most recently update on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format

Revision Stage 3: Sentences, Words, Format



Figure: from Amazon AWS

The third and final stage of revision deals with sentence structure, grammar, word choice, spelling, and all aspects of language use and format. Although many beginning writers equate the concept of revision wholly with language use, know that revising for these issues should be the final stage in revision, *after* you have reviewed and verified your thesis, topic sentences, and idea order and development.

Revision stage 3 is often called proofreading which, again, should be the very last step in revising an essay. Really, however, it should be called "editing" because reviewing for word choice and sentence structure should happen before proofreading, which is simply checking for mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and formatting. Once you move to stage 3, it's time to consider lower-order concerns related to sentence structure, punctuation, and language use. Lower-order concerns are issues that don't *necessarily* interrupt understanding of the writing by themselves.

Higher-Order Concerns Revision Stages 1 & 2	**Lower-Order Concerns** Revision Stage 3
Audience	Grammar
Thesis Sentence	Sentence Structure
Topic Sentences	Punctuation
Organization of Ideas	Spelling
Development of Ideas (& citation as needed)	Citation Format

Are Higher-Order Concerns More Important than Lower-Order Concerns?

No, not necessarily. Higher-order concerns tend to interrupt a reader's understanding of the writing, and that's why they need to be addressed first. However, if a lower-order concern becomes a major obstacle, then it naturally becomes a higher priority. For example, consider an essay that uses semi-colons incorrectly, each and every time, where there should be commas. Consider how many times in writing you actually use commas (a lot!). Your reader may start to focus on the error more than the content of your ideas, in the way that a driver and her passengers start to count the potholes they hit on a stretch of road desperately in need of repair. The purpose of proofreading to find and correct lower-order concerns in order to make the road smooth, so that your readers, like the driver, can concentrate on the content of the journey, and not the bumps in the road.

To address lower-order concerns, consider individual sentences in terms of grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. Also consider conventions of citation format, if you have used sources. Ask and answer the following questions:

- Are the sentences grammatically correct?
- Is the sentence structure clear and varied?
- Is language used clearly, in a way appropriate to your reading audience?
- Is the punctuation correct?
- Is the documentation format correct, if the essay uses sources?

Many language items can be revised by isolating and examining different elements of your written text. Read the text sentence by sentence, looking for grammatical and punctuation errors to correct and asking yourself if your sentence structure and word choice are as clear as possible. Remember, a sentence may be grammatically correct and still confuse readers. If you notice a pattern—say, a tendency to misplace modifiers or use unnecessary commas—read the paper looking only for that error so that you can find and correct it throughout. Also realize that spell-checks, even though their useful, do not always replace a close reading for errors. [*The error in the previous sentence is intentional, to prove the point. Can you find it?*]

Revising for Format

Although format is the least important aspect of revising, it's still important that your essay be readable and use certain conventions, such as the following:

- Use 10-12 point size, depending on the font.
- Choose a simple, easy-to-read font (e.g., Calibri, Arial, Times New Roman).
- Use 1-inch margins.
- Check with your instructor about spacing and layout preferences. If you single-space, then left-justify all paragraphs and leave a space between paragraphs; if you double-space, then indent the first line of each paragraph 5 spaces (by using the "Tab" key).
- Put your name and the date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of the essay.
- Put your last name and page number in the upper right-hand corner of each page of the essay.
- If you're writing a research essay, make sure to use correct citation format.

Revising for Style

The final stage of revising is often focused solely on "correctness": making sure that all the details are right, and that language is used according to the rules. However, revision stage 3 also offers a great opportunity to focus on your style, and allows you to craft the final product that best represents your unique perspective. Note that conscious work with style may help create more sophisticated writing (see "Clarity, Conciseness, and Style").



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

A writer's style is what sets his or her writing apart. Style is the way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific context,

purpose, content, and audience. Word choice, sentence structure, and the writer's voice all contribute to the style of a piece of writing. How a writer chooses words and structures sentences to achieve a certain effect creates a certain style in the writing. When Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls," he arranged his words to convey a sense of urgency and desperation. Had he written "These are bad times," it's likely he wouldn't have made such an impact.

Style is often considered and discussed within the context of literature. Novelists such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are well known for their distinctive literary styles. But journalists, scientists, historians, and mathematicians also may have distinctive writing styles. Style depends on both the writer and the context of the writing (the purpose and intended audience). For example, the first-person narrative style of a popular magazine such as *National Geographic* is quite different from the objective, third-person, expository style of a research journal such as *Scientific American* because, although the purpose of each publication is to inform, they are informing different audiences in different contexts.

Not Just Right and Wrong

Style is not a matter of right and wrong but of what is appropriate for a particular purpose, setting, and audience. Consider the following two passages, which were written by the same author on the same topic with the same main idea, yet have very different styles:

> "Experiments show that *Heliconius* butterflies are less likely to ovipost on host plants that possess eggs or egg-like structures. These egg mimics are an unambiguous example of a plant trait evolved in response to a host-restricted group of insect herbivores."
>
> "*Heliconius* butterflies lay their eggs on Passiflora vines. In defense, the vines seem to have evolved fake eggs that make it look to the butterflies as if eggs have already been laid on them." (Example from Myers, G. (1992). Writing biology: Texts in the social construction of scientific knowledge. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p. 150.)

What changed was the audience. The first passage was written for a professional journal read by other biologists, so the style is authoritative and impersonal, using technical terminology suited to a professional audience. The second passage, written for a popular science magazine, uses a more dramatic style, setting up a conflict between the butterflies and the vines, and using familiar words to help readers from non-scientific backgrounds visualize the scientific concept being described. Each style is appropriate for its particular audience.

Elements of Style

Many elements of writing contribute to an author's style, but three of the most important are word choice, sentence fluency, and voice.

Word choice



Figure: from Amazon AWS.

Most writers strive to be concise and precise, weeding out unnecessary words and choosing the exact word to convey meaning.

Precise words—active verbs, concrete nouns, specific adjectives—help the reader visualize the sentence. No matter what style is appropriate, formal or informal, serious or humorous, clarity and precision are goals to strive for in terms of style. (For specific practice with this, see "Clarity, Conciseness, and Style.")

When you consider word choice, ask yourself if your words convey your main ideas clearly, and if you are you using language that can be understood by your reading audience (most likely an adult, general audience, such as people who read blogs and newspapers).

After you revise for clarity and precision of language, also look at the tone that your words create. Are you intentionally informal, formal, humorous, straightforward? Is your tone appropriate for the context of your writing: your purpose and audience? Are there breeches in tone that are jarring, such as very informal or slang phrases or a sarcastic comment in what is otherwise a piece of writing with a straightforward, professional tone?

Also consider enlivening your word choice. Not every word in an essay can be a “special” word, nor should it be. But if your writing in an area feels a little flat, the injection of a livelier word can have strong rhetorical and emotional impact on your reader. Think of these words as jewels in the right setting. Often swapping out “to be” verbs (e.g., is, was, were, etc.) with more action-packed verbs has immediate, positive impact. Also look for words such as “things,” “very,” or “many,” which you can replace with more precise terminology.

Exercise 1

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

Sentence fluency

Sentence fluency is the flow and rhythm of phrases and sentences. Writers use a variety of sentences with different lengths and rhythms to achieve different effects. They use parallel structures within sentences and paragraphs to reflect parallel ideas, but also know how to avoid monotony by varying their sentence structures. For example, a writer may consciously use a very short sentence in a paragraph to emphasize and draw attention to a particular idea.

When you revise for sentence fluency, consider the patterns of your sentences. Are they all direct subject-verb statements? Or are the sentences varied in pattern? Sentence length variety is an asset to your readers, as it helps maintain their interest. If you find a paragraph or two of your essay that uses many sentences of approximately the same length close together, work in those paragraphs on combining some short sentences or on breaking some long sentences apart.

Also ask yourself if any sentences are wordy, using too many words and phrases in places where much shorter phrases can be used? (e.g., phrases such as “concerning the matter of,” “the reason for,” and “it is a fact that,” or too many “of” or “to” phrases). There is nothing wrong with using repetitive sentence patterns or too many words as a starting point in a draft; the advantage of writing over speaking is that you can return to your sentences and words, rethink them, and revise them for more concise and precise style.

Voice

Voice is an essential element of style that reveals the writer’s personality. A writer’s voice can be impersonal or chatty, authoritative or reflective, objective or passionate, serious or funny. As you consider style when you revise, identify an adjective that you think best describes your voice and ask yourself if this is appropriate for your writing context, purpose, and audience.

How can you consider style consciously?

One method is to read an essay draft out loud, preferably to another person. Better yet, have another person read your draft to you. Note how that person interprets your words. Do they come across as you originally meant them to? If not, revise.

Another method is to simply ignore your essay draft for a few days, and then read it carefully as though you were reading another writer’s work for the first time. Planning some time between drafting and revising helps with all stages of the revising process, including style.

Flow - UNC Writing Center. **Authored by:** UNC Writing Center. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Contributors

- Revising for Style. **Authored by**: Susan Oaks. **Provided by**: Empire State College, SUNY OER Services. **Project**: College Writing. **License**: ***CC BY-NC-SA***

This page most recently updated June 5, 2020.

This page titled 8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.5: Proofreading



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Proofreading: The Final Step

When proofreading, you examine the surface features of your text, such as spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation. You also make sure you use the proper format when creating your finished assignment, including in-text citations and the Works Cited (bibliography) page.

Tip

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

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 8.5.1

How to Proofread Tutorial: 10 Proofreading Techniques They Didn't Teach You in School. **Authored by:** David Taylor. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

The Importance of Spelling

Word-processing programs usually have a spell-checker, but you should still carefully check for misspellings in your words. This is because automatic spell-checkers may not always understand the **context** of a word, so if a word you used is actually another valid word, a spell-check program won't mark the word as a misspelling.

Misspelling a word might seem like a minor mistake, but it can reflect very poorly on a writer. It suggests one of two things: either the writer does not care enough about his work to proofread it, or he does not know his topic well enough to properly spell words related to it. Either way, spelling errors will make a reader less likely to trust a writer's authority.

The best way to ensure that a paper has no spelling errors is to look for them during the proofreading stage of the writing process. Being familiar with the most common errors will help you find (and fix) them during the writing and proofreading stage.

Sometimes a writer just doesn't know how to spell the word she wants to use. This may be because the word is technical jargon or comes from a language other than her own. Other times, it may be a proper name that she has not encountered before. Anytime you want to use a word but are unsure of how to spell it, do not guess. Instead, check a dictionary or other reference work to find its proper spelling.

Common Spelling Errors

Phonetic Errors

Phonetics is a field that studies the sounds of a language. However, English phonetics can be tricky: In English, the pronunciation of a word does not always relate to the way it is spelled. This can make spelling a challenge. Here are some common phonetic irregularities:

- A word can sound like it could be spelled multiple ways. For example: "concede" and "conceed" are the same phonetically, but only "concede" is the proper spelling.
- A word has silent letters that the writer may forget to include. T the "a" in "realize" is barely audible, but you need it to spell the word correctly.
- A word has double letters that the writer may forget to include. "Accommodate," for example, is frequently misspelled as "acommodate" or "accomodate."
- The writer may use double letters when they are not needed. The word "amend" has only one "m," but it is commonly misspelled with two.

Sometimes, words just aren't spelled the way they sound. "Right," for example, does not resemble its phonetic spelling whatsoever. Try to become familiar with words that have unusual or non-phonetic spellings so you can be on the lookout for them in your writing. But again, the best way to avoid these misspellings is to consult a dictionary whenever you're unsure of the correct spelling. Another thing to do is to keep a list for yourself of the words you know you have trouble with. Look for those words in particular when you proofread.

Homophones

"Bread" and "bred" sound the same but are spelled differently, and they mean completely different things. Two words with different meanings but the same pronunciation are called homophones. If you don't know which homophone is the right one to use, look both up in the dictionary to see which meaning (and spelling) you want. Common homophones include:

- right, rite, wright, and write
- read (most tenses of the verb) and reed
- read (past, past participle) and red
- rose (flower) and rose (past tense of rise)
- carat, caret, and carrot

- to, two, and too
- there, their, and they're
- its and it's

Typographical Errors

Some spelling errors are caused by the writer accidentally typing the wrong thing. Common typos include:

- Omitting letters from a word (typing "brthday" instead of "birthday," for example)
- Adding extra letters (typing "birthdayy")
- Transposing two letters in a word (typing "brithday")
- Spacing words improperly (such as "myb irthday" instead of "my birthday")

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

Checklist

Proofreading Your Writing

Grammar

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

Sentence Structure

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

Punctuation

- Does every sentence end with the correct end punctuation?
- Can I justify the use of every exclamation point?
- Have I used apostrophes correctly to write all singular and plural possessive forms?
- Have I used quotation marks correctly?
- Have I used commas correctly when joining sentence parts together?
- Have I used commas where periods should be?

Mechanics and Usage

- Can I find any spelling errors? How can I correct them?
- Have I used capital letters where they are needed and not capitalized where it's not needed?
- Have I written abbreviations, where allowed, correctly?

- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as *to*/*too*/*two*?

Tips

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

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

How Can Technology Help?

You don't necessarily need to recruit a friend to read to you. There are a number of text-to-speech software applications and web-based services that will help you get your computer, smartphone, tablet, or e-book reader to read your paper out loud to you. One advantage of this approach is that an automated reader will definitely not cover up any errors for you! You can also control where it starts and stops, speed it up or slow it down, and have it re-read the same paragraph as many times as you want.

If you decide to experiment with this approach, there are many free text readers available. MS Word has a text-to-speech feature built in. Recent Android and iOS phones also have text-to-speech capabilities, which you can find under accessibility settings. You may also find text-to-speech software among your Windows or Mac computer's accessibility features.

If you decide you want to acquire specialized software, "text to speech," "TTS," and "text reader" are search terms that can help you find what is available.

Here are some differences to keep in mind as you choose the best reader for you:

- **Voice quality and selection:** how many voices can you choose from, and how natural do they sound?
- **Controls:** can you determine the speed and pitch of the speaker, where the reading starts and stops, etc.? Is there a pause button?
- **Applicability:** can you convert your text file into an audio file, download it, and listen to it on your phone or music player?
- **Text handling:** does the software highlight each word as it is read (which may be especially helpful for non-native English speakers and students with with learning differences)? Do you need to copy text and paste it into a new window, or can the program work directly within an application (like Word or Powerpoint), or does it just read the text on your screen?
- **Speed:** how many pages of text or words can be converted to voice at once? How quickly does the conversion happen?
- **Type of program:** do you need an active internet connection to use the program, or can you run it without internet access once it has been installed?

While synthetic voices continue to improve, they will likely not sound completely natural to you. But you may find that if you choose a favorite voice, you can get used to its intonation and pacing over time.

Proofreading Advice

The following video features two student tutors from the Writing and Reading Center at Fresno City College. In addition to great guidance about proofreading strategies, they also offer insights about what to expect when working with Writing Center tutors.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Video 8.5.1

Proofreading Tip #5: Read Your Papers Aloud BACKWARDS. **Authored by:** FCC Tutors. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.
- Adapted from The Importance of Spelling in Guide to Writing. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC-BY-SA.

This page was most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 8.5: Proofreading is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.5: Proofreading by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words



Figure: Image by Pixabay

How to Say Nothing in 500 Words By Paul McHenry Roberts

**Note: This essay was written in the 1950s. The basics of good writing, however, haven't changed.

It's Friday afternoon, and you have almost survived another week of classes. You are just looking forward dreamily to the weekend when the English instructor says: "For Monday you will turn in a five hundred word composition on college football." Well, that puts a good hole in the weekend. You don't have any strong views on college football one way or the other. You get rather excited during the season and go to all the home games and find it rather more fun than not. On the other hand, the class has been reading Robert Hutchins in the anthology and perhaps Shaw's "EightyYard Run," and from the class discussion you have got the idea that the instructor thinks college football is for the birds. You are no fool. You can figure out what side to take. After dinner you get out the portable typewriter that you got for high school graduation. You might as well get it over with and enjoy Saturday and Sunday. Five hundred words is about two doublespaced pages with normal margins. You put in a sheet of paper, think up a title, and you're off:

WHY COLLEGE FOOTBALL SHOULD BE ABOLISHED

College football should be abolished because it's bad for the school and also for the players. The players are so busy practicing that they don't have any time for their studies. This, you feel, is a mighty good start. The only trouble is that it's only thirty-two words. You still have four hundred and sixty-eight to go, and you've pretty well exhausted the subject. It comes to you that you do your best thinking in the morning, so you put away the typewriter and go to the movies. But the next morning you have to do your washing and some math problems, and in the afternoon you go to the game. The English instructor turns up too, and you wonder if you've taken the right side after all. Saturday night you have a date, and Sunday morning you have to go to church. (You can't let English assignments interfere with your religion.) What with one thing and another, it's ten o'clock Sunday night before you get out the typewriter again. You make a pot of coffee and start to fill out your views on college football. Put a little meat on the bones.

WHY COLLEGE FOOTBALL SHOULD BE ABOLISHED

> In my opinion, it seems to me that college football should be abolished. The reason why I think this to be true is because I feel that football is bad for the colleges in nearly every respect. As Robert Hutchins says in his article in our anthology in which he discusses college football, it would be better if the colleges had race horses and had races with one another, because then the horses would not have to attend classes. I firmly agree with Mr. Hutchins on this point, and I am sure that many other students would agree too. One reason why it seems to me that college football is bad is that it has become too commercial. In the olden times when people played football just for the fun of it, maybe college football was all right,

> but they do not play college football just for the fun of it now as they used to in the old days. Nowadays college football is what you might call a big business. Maybe this is not true at all schools, and I don't think it is especially true here at State, but certainly this is the case at most colleges and universities in America nowadays, as Mr. Hutchins points out in his very interesting article. Actually the coaches and alumni go around to the high schools and offer the high school stars large salaries to come to their colleges and play football for them. There was one case where a high school star was offered a convertible if he would play football for a certain college. Another reason for abolishing college football is that it is bad for the players. They do not have time to get a college education, because they are so busy playing football. A football player has to practice every afternoon from three to six and then he is so tired that he can't concentrate on his studies. He just feels like dropping off to sleep after dinner, and then the next day he goes to his classes without having studied and maybe he fails the test. (Good ripe stuff so far, but you're still a hundred and fifty-one words from home. One more push.) Also I think college football is bad for the colleges and the universities because not very many students get to participate in it. Out of a college of ten thousand students only seventy-five or a hundred play football, if that many. Football is what you might call a spectator sport. That means that most people go to watch it but do not play it themselves. (Four hundred and fifteen. Well, you still have the conclusion, and when you retype it, you can make the margins a little wider.) These are the reasons why I agree with Mr. Hutchins that college football should be abolished in American colleges and universities.

On Monday you turn it in, moderately hopeful, and on Friday it comes back marked “weak in content” and sporting a big “D.” This essay is exaggerated a little, not much. The English instructor will recognize it as reasonably typical of what an assignment on college football will bring in. He knows that nearly half of the class will contrive in five hundred words to say that college football is too commercial and bad for the players. Most of the other half will inform him that college football builds character and prepares one for life and brings prestige to the school. As he reads paper after paper all saying the same thing in almost the same words, all bloodless, five hundred words dripping out of nothing, he wonders how he allowed himself to get trapped into teaching English when he might have had a happy and interesting life as an electrician or a confidence man. Well, you may ask, what can you do about it? The subject is one on which you have few convictions and little information. Can you be expected to make a dull subject interesting? As a matter of fact, this is precisely what you are expected to do. This is the writer's essential task. All subjects, except sex, are dull until somebody makes them interesting. The writer's job is to find the argument, the approach, the angle, the wording that will take the reader with him. This is seldom easy, and it is particularly hard in subjects that have been much discussed: College Football, Fraternities, Popular Music, Is Chivalry Dead?, and the like. You will feel that there is nothing you can do with such subjects except repeat the old bromides. But there are some things you can do which will make your papers, if not throbbingly alive, at least less insufferably tedious than they might otherwise be.

Avoid the Obvious Content

Say the assignment is college football. Say that you've decided to be against it. Begin by putting down the arguments that come to your mind: it is too commercial, it takes the students' minds off their studies, it is hard on the players, it makes the university a kind of circus instead of an intellectual center, for most schools it is financially ruinous. Can you think of any more arguments, just off hand? All right. Now when you write your paper, make sure that you don' t use any of the material on this list. If these are the points that leap to your mind, they will leap to everyone else's too, and whether you get a “C” or a “D” may depend on whether the instructor reads your paper early when he is fresh and tolerant or late, when the sentence “In my opinion, college football has become too commercial,” inexorably repeated, has bought him to the brink of lunacy. Be against college football for some reason or reasons of your own. If they are keen and perceptive ones, that's splendid. But even if they are trivial or foolish or indefensible, you are still ahead so long as they are not everybody else's reasons too. Be against it because the colleges don't spend enough money on it to make it worthwhile, because it is bad for the characters of the spectators, because the players are forced to attend classes, because the football stars hog all the beautiful women, because it competes with baseball and is therefore unAmerican and possibly Communist-inspired. There are lots of more or less unused reasons for being against college football. Sometimes it is a good idea to sum up and dispose of the trite and conventional points before going on to your own. This has the advantage of indicating to the reader that you are going to be neither trite nor conventional. Something like this: We are often told that college football should be abolished because it has become too commercial or because it is bad for the players. These arguments are no doubt very cogent, but they don't really go to the heart of the matter. Then you go to the heart of the matter.

Take the Less Usual Side

One rather simple way of getting into your paper is to take the side of the argument that most of the citizens will want to avoid. If the assignment is an essay on dogs, you can, if you choose, explain that dogs are faithful and lovable companions, intelligent, useful as guardians of the house and protectors of children, indispensable in police work — in short, when all is said and done, man's best friends. Or you can suggest that those big brown eyes conceal, more often than not, a vacuity of mind and an inconstancy of purpose; that the dogs you have known most intimately have been mangy, ill-tempered brutes, incapable of

instruction; and that only your nobility of mind and fear of arrest prevent you from kicking the flea-ridden animals when you pass them on the street. Naturally personal convictions will sometimes dictate your approach. If the assigned subject is “Is Methodism Rewarding to the Individual?” and you are a pious Methodist, you have really no choice. But few assigned subjects, if any, will fall in this category. Most of them will lie in broad areas of discussion with much to be said on both sides. They are intellectual exercises, and it is legitimate to argue now one way and now another, as debaters do in similar circumstances. Always take the side that looks to you hardest, least defensible. It will almost always turn out to be easier to write interestingly on that side. This general advice applies where you have a choice of subjects. If you are to choose among “The Value of Fraternities” and “My Favorite High School Teacher” and “What I Think About Beetles,” by all means plump for the beetles. By the time the instructor gets to your paper, he will be up to his ears in tedious tales about a French teacher at Bloombury High and assertions about how fraternities build character and prepare one for life. Your views on beetles, whatever they are, are bound to be a refreshing change. Don't worry too much about figuring out what the instructor thinks about the subject so that you can cuddle up with him. Chances are his views are no stronger than yours. If he does have convictions and you oppose him, his problem is to keep from grading you higher than you deserve in order to show he is not biased. This doesn't mean that you should always cantankerously dissent from what the instructor says; that gets tiresome too. And if the subject assigned is “My Pet Peeve,” do not begin, “My pet peeve is the English instructor who assigns papers on 'my pet peeve.”' This was still funny during the War of 1812, but it has sort of lost its edge since then. It is in general good manners to avoid personalities.

Slip Out of Abstraction

If you will study the essay on college football [near the beginning of this essay], you will perceive that one reason for its appalling dullness is that it never gets down to particulars. It is just a series of not very glittering generalities: “football is bad for the colleges,” “it has become too commercial,” “football is big business,” “it is bad for the players,” and so on. Such round phrases thudding against the reader's brain are unlikely to convince him, though they may well render him unconscious. If you want the reader to believe that college football is bad for the players, you have to do more than say so. You have to display the evil. Take your roommate, Alfred Simkins, the secondstring center. Picture poor old Alfy coming home from football practice every evening, bruised and aching, agonizingly tired, scarcely able to shovel the mashed potatoes into his mouth. Let us see him staggering up to the room, getting out his econ textbook, peering desperately at it with his good eye, falling asleep and failing the test in the morning. Let us share his unbearable tension as Saturday draws near. Will he fail, be demoted, lose his monthly allowance, be forced to return to the coal mines? And if he succeeds, what will be his reward? Perhaps a slight ripple of applause when the third-string center replaces him, a moment of elation in the locker room if the team wins, of despair if it loses. What will he look back on when he graduates from college? Toil and torn ligaments. And what will be his future? He is not good enough for pro football, and he is too obscure and weak in econ to succeed in stocks and bonds. College football is tearing the heart from Alfy Simkins and, when it finishes with him, will callously toss aside the shattered hulk. This is no doubt a weak enough argument for the abolition of college football, but it is a sight better than saying, in three or four variations, that college football (in your opinion) is bad for the players. Look at the work of any professional writer and notice how constantly he is moving from the generality, the abstract statement, to the concrete example, the facts and figures, the illustrations. If he is writing on juvenile delinquency, he does not just tell you that juveniles are (it seems to him) delinquent and that (in his opinion) something should be done about it. He shows you juveniles being delinquent, tearing up movie theatres in Buffalo, stabbing high school principals in Dallas, smoking marijuana in Palo Alto. And more than likely he is moving toward some specific remedy, not just a general wringing of the hands. It is no doubt possible to be too concrete, too illustrative or anecdotal, but few inexperienced writers err this way. For most the soundest advice is to be seeking always for the picture, to be always turning general remarks into seeable examples. Don't say, “Sororities teach girls the social graces.” Say, “Sorority life teaches a girl how to carry on a conversation while pouring tea, without sloshing the tea into the saucer.” Don't say, “I like certain kinds of popular music very much.” Say, “Whenever I hear Gerber Sprinklittle play 'Mississippi Man' on the trombone, my socks creep up my ankles.”

Get Rid of Obvious Padding

The student toiling away at his weekly English theme is too often tormented by a figure: five hundred words. How, he asks himself, is he to achieve this staggering total? Obviously by never using one word when he can somehow work in ten. He is therefore seldom content with a plain statement like “Fast driving is dangerous.” This has only four words in it. He takes thought, and the sentence becomes: In my opinion, fast driving is dangerous. Better, but he can do better still: In my opinion, fast driving would seem to be rather dangerous. If he is really adept, it may come out: In my humble opinion, though I do not claim to be an expert on this complicated subject, test driving, in most circumstances, would seem to be rather dangerous in many respects, or at least so it would seem to me. Thus four words have been turned into forty, and not an iota of content has been added. Now this is a way to go about reaching five hundred words, and if you are content with a “D” grade, it is as good a way as any. But if you aim higher, you must work differently. Instead of stuffing your sentences with straw, you must try steadily to get rid of the padding, to make your sentences lean and tough. If you are really working at it, your first draft will greatly exceed the required total, and then you

will work it down, thus: It is thought in some quarters that fraternities do not contribute as much as might be expected to campus life. Some people think that fraternities contribute little to campus life. The average doctor who practices in small towns or in the country must toil night and day to heal the sick. Most country doctors work long hours. When I was a little girl, I suffered from shyness and embarrassment in the presence of others. I was a shy little girl. It is absolutely necessary for the person employed as a marine fireman to give the matter of steam pressure his undivided attention at all times. The fireman has to keep his eye on the steam gauge. You may ask how you can arrive at five hundred words at this rate. Simple. You dig up more real content. Instead of taking a couple of obvious points off the surface of the topic and then circling warily around them for six paragraphs, you work in and explore, figure out the details. You illustrate. You say that fast driving is dangerous, and then you prove it. How long does it take to stop a car at forty and at eighty? How far can you see at night? What happens when a tire blows? What happens in a head-on collision at fifty miles an hour? Pretty soon your paper will be full of broken glass and blood and headless torsos, and reaching five hundred words will not really be a problem.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Call a Fool a Fool

Some of the padding in freshman themes is to be blamed not on anxiety about the word minimum but on excessive timidity. The student writes, “In my opinion, the principal of my high school acted in ways that I believe every unbiased person would have to call foolish.” This isn't exactly what he means. What he means is, “My high school principal was a fool.” If he was a fool, call him a fool. Hedging the thing about with “inmyopinion's” and “itseemstome's” and “asIseeit's” and “atleastfrommypointofview's” gains you nothing. Delete these phrases whenever they creep into your paper. The student's tendency to hedge stems from a modesty that in other circumstances would be commendable. He is, he realizes, young and inexperienced, and he half suspects that he is dopey and fuzzy-minded beyond the average. Probably only too true. But it doesn't help to announce your incompetence six times in every paragraph. Decide what you want to say and say it as vigorously as possible, without apology and in plain words. Linguistic diffidence can take various forms. One is what we call euphemism. This is the tendency to call a spade “a certain garden implement” or women's underwear “unmentionables.” It is stronger in some eras than others and in some people than others but it always operates more or less in subjects that are touchy or taboo: death, sex, madness, and so on. Thus we shrink from saying “He died last night” but say instead “passed away,” “left us,” “joined his Maker,” “went to his reward.” Or we try to take off the tension with a lighter cliché: “kicked the bucket,” “cashed in his chips,” “handed in his dinner pail.” We have found all sorts of ways to avoid saying mad: “mentally ill,” “touched,” “not quite right upstairs,” “feebleminded,” “innocent,” “simple,” “off his trolley,” “not in his right mind.” Even such a now plain word as insane began as a euphemism with the meaning “not healthy.” Modern science, particularly psychology, contributes many polysyllables in which we can wrap our thoughts and blunt their force. To many writers there is no such thing as a bad schoolboy. Schoolboys are maladjusted or unoriented or misunderstood or in the need of guidance or lacking in continued success toward satisfactory integration of the personality as a social unit, but they are never bad. Psychology no doubt makes us better men and women, more sympathetic and tolerant, but it doesn't make writing any easier. Had Shakespeare been confronted with psychology, “To be or not to be” might have come out, “To continue as a social unit or not to do so. That is the personality problem. Whether 'tis a better sign of integration at the conscious level to display a psychic tolerance toward the maladjustments and repressions induced by one's lack of orientation in one's environment or — ” But Hamlet would never have finished the soliloquy. Writing in the modern world, you cannot altogether avoid modern jargon. Nor,

in an effort to get away from euphemism, should you salt your paper with four-letter words. But you can do much if you will mount guard against those roundabout phrases, those echoing polysyllables that tend to slip into your writing to rob it of its crispness and force.

Beware of Pat Expressions

Other things being equal, avoid phrases like “other things being equal.” Those sentences that come to you whole, or in two or three doughy lumps, are sure to be bad sentences. They are no creation of yours but pieces of common thought floating in the community soup. Pat expressions are hard, often impossible, to avoid, because they come too easily to be noticed and seem too necessary to be dispensed with. No writer avoids them altogether, but good writers avoid them more often than poor writers. By “pat expressions” we mean such tags as “to all practical intents and purposes,” “the pure and simple truth,” “from where I sit,” “the time of his life,” “to the ends of the earth,” “in the twinkling of an eye,” “as sure as you're born,” “over my dead body,” “under cover of darkness,” “took the easy way out,” “when all is said and done,” “told him time and time again,” “parted the best of friends,” “stand up and be counted,” “gave him the best years of her life,” “worked her fingers to the bone.” Like other clichés, these expressions were once forceful. Now we should use them only when we can't possibly think of anything else. Some pat expressions stand like a wall between the writer and thought. Such a one is “the American way of life.” Many student writers feel that when they have said that something accords with the American way of life or does not they have exhausted the subject. Actually, they have stopped at the highest level of abstraction. The American way of life is the complicated set of bonds between a hundred and eighty million ways. All of us know this when we think about it, but the tag phrase too often keeps us from thinking about it. So with many another phrase dear to the politician: “this great land of ours,” “the man in the street,” “our national heritage.” These may prove our patriotism or give a clue to our political beliefs, but otherwise they add nothing to the paper except words.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

Colorful Words

The writer builds with words, and no builder uses a raw material more slippery and elusive and treacherous. A writer's work is a constant struggle to get the right word in the right place, to find that particular word that will convey his meaning exactly, that will persuade the reader or soothe him or startle or amuse him. He never succeeds altogether — sometimes he feels that he scarcely succeeds at all — but such successes as he has are what make the thing worth doing. There is no book of rules for this game. One progresses through everlasting experiment on the basis of everwidening experience. There are few useful generalizations that one can make about words as words, but there are perhaps a few. Some words are what we call “colorful.” By this we mean that they are calculated to produce a picture or induce an emotion. They are dressy instead of plain, specific instead of general, loud instead of soft. Thus, in place of “Her heart beat,” we may write, “her heart pounded, throbbed, fluttered, danced.” Instead of “He sat in his chair,” we may say, “he lounged, sprawled, coiled.” Instead of “It was hot,” we may say, “It was blistering, sultry, muggy, suffocating, steamy, wilting.” However, it should not be supposed that the fancy word is always better. Often it is as well to write “Her heart beat” or “It was hot” if that is all it did or all it was. Ages differ in how they like their prose. The nineteenth century

liked it rich and smoky. The twentieth has usually preferred it lean and cool. The twentieth century writer, like all writers, is forever seeking the exact word, but he is wary of sounding feverish. He tends to pitch it low, to understate it, to throw it away. He knows that if he gets too colorful, the audience is likely to giggle. See how this strikes you: “As the rich, golden glow of the sunset died away along the eternal western hills, Angela's limpid blue eyes looked softly and trustingly into Montague's flashing brown ones, and her heart pounded like a drum in time with the joyous song surging in her soul.” Some people like that sort of thing, but most modern readers would say, “Good grief,” and turn on the television.

Colored Words

Some words we would call not so much colorful as colored — that is, loaded with associations, good or bad. All words — except perhaps structure words — have associations of some sort. We have said that the meaning of a word is the sum of the contexts in which it occurs. When we hear a word, we hear with it an echo of all the situations in which we have heard it before. In some words, these echoes are obvious and discussible. The word mother, for example, has, for most people, agreeable associations. When you hear mother you probably think of home, safety, love, food, and various other pleasant things. If one writes, “She was like a mother to me,” he gets an effect which he would not get in “She was like an aunt to me.” The advertiser makes use of the associations of mother by working it in when he talks about his product. The politician works it in when he talks about himself. So also with such words as home, liberty, fireside, contentment, patriot, tenderness, sacrifice, childlike, manly, bluff, limpid. All of these words are loaded with associations that would be rather hard to indicate in a straightforward definition. There is more than a literal difference between “They sat around the fireside” and “They sat around the stove.” They might have been equally warm and happy around the stove, but fireside suggests leisure, grace, quiet tradition, congenial company, and stove does not. Conversely, some words have bad associations. Mother suggests pleasant things, but mother-in-law does not. Many mothers-in--law are heroically lovable and some mothers drink gin all day and beat their children insensible, but these facts of life are beside the point. The point is that mother sounds good and mother-in-law does not. Or consider the word intellectual. This would seem to be a complimentary term, but in point of fact it is not, for it has picked up associations of impracticality and ineffectuality and general dopiness. So also such words as liberal, reactionary, Communist, socialist, capitalist, radical, schoolteacher, truck driver; operator, salesman, huckster, speculator. These convey meaning on the literal level, but beyond that — sometimes, in some places — they convey contempt on the part of the speaker. The question of whether to use loaded words or not depends on what is being written. The scientist, the scholar, try to avoid them; for the poet, the advertising writer, the public speaker, they are standard equipment. But every writer should take care that they do not substitute for thought. If you write, “Anyone who thinks that is nothing but a Socialist (or Communist or capitalist)” you have said nothing except that you don't like people who think that, and such remarks are effective only with the most naive readers. It is always a bad mistake to think your readers more naive than they really are.

Colorless Words

But probably most student writers come to grief not with words that are colorful or those that are colored but with those that have no color at all. A pet example is nice, a word we would find it hard to dispense with in casual conversation but which is no longer capable of adding much to a description. Colorless words are those of such general meaning that in a particular sentence they mean nothing. Slang adjectives like cool (“That's real cool”) tend to explode all over the language. They are applied to everything, lose their original force, and quickly die. Beware also of nouns of very general meaning, like circumstances, cases, instances, aspects, factors, relationships, attitudes, eventualities, etc. In most circumstances you will find that those cases of writing which contain too many instances of words like these will in this and other aspects have factors leading to unsatisfactory relationships with the reader resulting in unfavorable attitudes on his part and perhaps other eventualities, like a grade of “D.” Notice also what etc. means. It means “I'd like to make this list longer, but I can't think of any more examples.”

This page titled 8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

8.7: Key Takeaways

- Revising and editing are the end stages of the writing process in which you improve your work before producing a final draft.
- When revising, you add, cut, move, or change information in order to improve content.
- During editing and proofreading, you take a second (and maybe third) look at the words and sentences you used to express your ideas and fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- Unity in writing means that all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong together and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense.
- Cohesion in writing means that the writer's wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and between paragraphs; transitional words and phrases effectively make writing more cohesive.
- Writing should be clear and concise, with no unnecessary words, and effective formal writing uses specific, appropriate words and avoids slang, contractions, clichés, and overly general words.
- Peer reviews, done properly, can give writers objective feedback about their writing. It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer reviews and incorporate only useful feedback.
- Remember to budget time for careful editing and proofreading. Use all available resources, including editing checklists, peer editing, and your institution's writing lab, to improve your editing skills.
- Deal with higher order concerns (changes in content in organization) before dealing with lower order concerns, such as word choice and sentence structure.
- Along with getting feedback from others, reverse outlining is a good way to check your draft to see if any higher order concern changes need to be made.
- Be sure to proofread your work (for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and formatting) using one of the proofreading techniques before turning in your paper.

This page titled 8.7: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 7.7: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

Licensing

9.1: Research Process and Scope

9.2: Research Questions and Strategy

9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details

9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques

9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details

9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description

9.4: Evaluating Sources

9.5: Critical Reading

9.6: Persuasive Appeals

9.7: Using and Organizing Information

9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details

9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description

9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style

9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details

9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation

9.9: Information Power and Privilege

9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details

9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description

9.10: Information Value and Privilege

9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details

9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege

9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic

9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic

9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles

9.12: Misinformation and Fake News

9.13: Professional Conversations

9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors

Detailed Licensing

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

This page titled 9: Critical Thinking + Information Literacy is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Andi Pogue.

- Critical Thinking and Information Literacy (Pogue) by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.1: Research Process and Scope

What is Your Information Need?

In this section, you'll learn about the first pillar of information literacy. While the pillars are often presented in a certain order, it's important to remember that they're not intended to be a step-by-step guide to be followed in a strict order.

In most research projects, you will find that you move back and forth between the different pillars as you discover more information and come up with more questions about your topic.

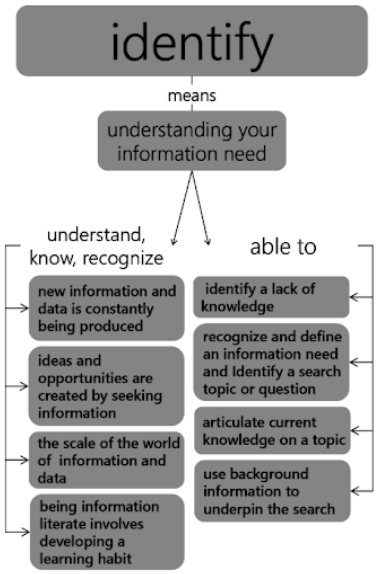
The first step is to identify your information need so that you can begin your research, but as you start researching, it's likely that you'll revisit some of the ideas in this chapter to make sure you are actually meeting that need with your research findings. I've provided a text and graphic representation below of the "Identify" pillar.

A person proficient in the Identify pillar is expected to be able to identify a personal need for information. They understand:

- That new information and data is constantly being produced and that there is always more to learn
- That being information literate involves developing a learning habit so new information is being actively sought all the time
- That ideas and opportunities are created by investigating/seeking information
- The scale of the world of published and unpublished information and data

They are able to:

- Identify a lack of knowledge in a subject area
- Identify a search topic/question and define it using simple terminology
- Articulate current knowledge on a topic
- Recognize a need for information and data to achieve a specific end and define limits to the information need
- Use background information to underpin the search
- Take personal responsibility for an information search
- Manage time effectively to complete a search



Identifying Your Personal Need for Information

One of the first things you need to do when beginning any information-based project is to identify your personal need for that

information. This may seem obvious, but it is

something many of us take for granted. We may mistakenly assume that we already know enough to proceed.

Such an assumption can lead us to waste valuable time working with incomplete or outdated information. Information literacy addresses a number of abilities and concepts that can help us to determine exactly what our information needs are in various circumstances. These will be discussed more coming up.

Information Context

When you realize that you have an information need it may be because you thought you knew more than you actually do, or it may be that there is simply new information you were not aware of. One of the most important things you can do when starting to research a topic is to scan the existing information landscape to find out what is already out there. We'll get into more specific strategies for accessing different types of information later in the unit, but for now it pays to think more broadly about the information environment in which you are operating.

For instance, any topic you need information about is constantly evolving as new information is added to what is known about the topic. Trained experts, informed amateurs, and opinionated laypeople are publishing in traditional and emerging formats; there is always something new to find out. The scale of information available varies according to topic, but in general it's safe to say that there is more information accessible now than ever before.

Due to the extensive amount of information available, part of becoming more information literate is developing habits of mind and of practice that enable you to continually seek new information and to adapt your understanding of topics according to what you find. Because of the widely varying quality of new information, evaluation is also a key element of information literacy, and will be addressed in future weeks.

Finally, you will be asked to explore your topic this week. As you begin searching for information on your topic, be sure to keep your mind open for new avenues or angles of research that you haven't yet considered. Often the information you find for your initial need will turn out to be the pathway to a rich vein of information that can serve as raw material for many subsequent projects.

When you understand the information environment where your information need is situated, you can begin to define the topic more clearly and you can begin to understand where your research fits in with related work that precedes it. Your

information literacy skills will develop against this changing background as you use the same underlying principles to do research on a variety of topics.

Information Need Leads to Questions

Your lack of knowledge on a topic might reveal itself in lots of different ways. When reading an article or textbook, you may notice that something the author refers to is completely new to you. You might realize while out walking that you can't identify any of the trees around your house. You may be assigned a topic you have never heard of.

Furthering Your Thinking

Let's explore this idea further. Wherever you are right now, look around you. Find one thing in your immediate field of view that you can't explain.

- What is it that you don't understand about that thing?
- What is it that you need to find out so that you can understand it?
- How can you express what you need to find out?

For example: You can't explain why your coat repels water. You know that it's plastic, and that it's designed to repel water, but can't explain why this happens. You need to find out what kind of plastic the coat is made of and the chemistry or physics of that plastic and of water that makes the water run off instead of soaking through. (The terminology in your first explanation would get more specific once you did some research.)

Identify What You Don't Know

All of us lack knowledge in countless areas, but this isn't a bad thing. Once we step back and acknowledge that we don't know something, it opens up the possibility that we can find out all sorts of interesting things, and that's when the searching begins.

Taking your lack of knowledge and turning it into a search topic or research question starts with being able to state what your lack of knowledge is. Part of this is to state what you already know. It's rare that you'll start a search from absolute zero. Most of the time you've at least heard something about the topic, even if it is just a brief reference in a news story, lecture, or reading.

Taking stock of what you already know can help you to identify any erroneous assumptions you might be making based on incomplete or biased information. If you think you know something, make sure you find at least a couple of reliable sources to

confirm that knowledge before taking it for granted. You'll be exploring your chosen topic this week and you'll be asked to think about what you already know and what questions still need to be answered.

Taking a Wider View

While the identification of an information need is presented in this reading as the first step in the research process, many times the information need you initially identified will change as you discover new information and connections. Other chapters in this book deal with finding, evaluating, and managing information in a variety of ways and formats.

As you become more skilled in using different information resources, you will likely find that the line between the various information literacy skills becomes increasingly blurred, and that you will revisit your initial ideas about your topic in response to both the information you're finding and what you're doing with that information.

Continually think about your relationship to the information you find. Why are you doing things the way you are? Is it really the best way for your current situation? What other options are there? Keeping an open mind about your use of information will help you to ensure that you take responsibility for the results of that use, and will help you to be more successful in any information-intensive endeavor.

The Point of Research

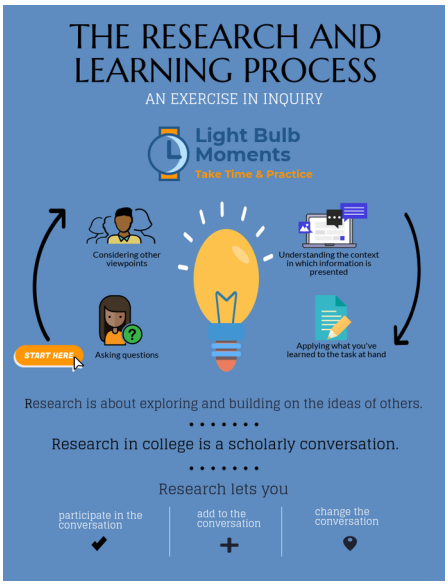
Why do we research? Research is an exercise in inquiry. In other words, it's about asking new, interesting, or challenging questions about things that spark our curiosity. The purpose of research should extend beyond your college classes. We as humans are naturally curious and research helps us make sense of our world.

Research can help solve complex problems and help us make better decisions. Research helps us investigate multiple points of view and use what we learn to accomplish specific tasks. Research is about learning, and learning is not a simple transaction. Facts and figures can be memorized, but thinking critically and becoming knowledgeable about something is a process, and the research process takes time.

The research and learning process is about:

- asking questions
- considering alternative points of view
- learning to understand the circumstances or facts surrounding a specific event or issue, also also known as context, and
- applying this knowledge to the task in front of you - writing a paper, giving a presentation, responding to an online discussion, or raising your hand in class.

These activities, no matter how small, are what make you a part of the scholarly community. Scholarship is a conversation. It's much like talking at a party about current events where many voices are heard. Research enables you to participate in, add to, or change the conversation.



Research requires experimentation and patience. Searching for the right sources of information is like exploring a brand new place.

The Research Process

The research process is usually not simple, and it is iterative -- meaning it involves a lot of trial and error. When you begin researching, you may sometimes feel like you are

travelling in circles and retracing your steps. But it's worth it! This uneasy feeling is necessary in order to get you moving on the road to research victory and finding those perfect pieces of information.

Learning to do research will not only improve your success in college courses, but it will also improve your ability to interpret and respond to the issues that are most important in your professional and personal life.

Scope: Knowing What's Available

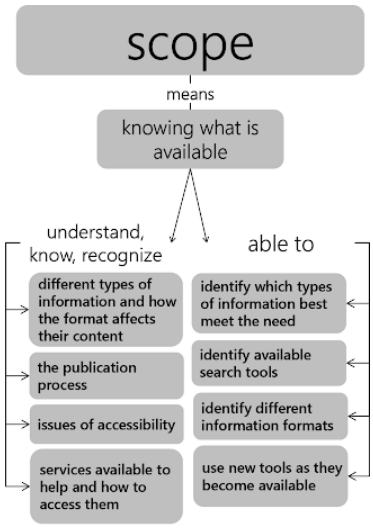
A person who is information literate in the Scope pillar is able to assess current knowledge and identify gaps.

The above statement is from the Seven Pillars of Information Literacy, the model of information literacy presented in the Introduction of your textbook. The following list, from the creators of the Seven Pillars model, provides more detail about the Scope pillar. Components include:

- "Know what you don't know" to identify any information gaps
- Identify which types of information will best meet the need
- Identify the available search tools, such as general and subject specific resources at different levels
- Identify different formats in which information may be provided
- Demonstrate the ability to use new tools as they become available

Additionally the information literate person in the Scope pillar understands

- What types of information are available
- The characteristics of the different types of information source available to them and how they may be affected by the format (digital, print)
- The publication process in terms of why individuals publish and the currency of information
- Issues of accessibility
- What services are available to help and how to access them



College Research

As a student, you're going to be asked to do academic research.

In college assignments, it's important to understand what's expected of you. Take some time to critically read through the assignment instructions and look for details like:

- Type of project - examples: informative, pro/con, persuasive
- Length requirements - examples: number of pages/words to write or required time of presentation/speech
- Number and types of sources required - examples: journal articles, books, websites, etc.

If these details are missing or unclear, don't be afraid to ask your instructor for clarification.

It's important to understand your assignment because these details will guide your research process. Think of it this way, you'll need a whole lot more information and sources to write a 15-page paper than a 3-page paper, so knowing the assignment requirements might make a difference when choosing between a broader or more narrowed topic idea.

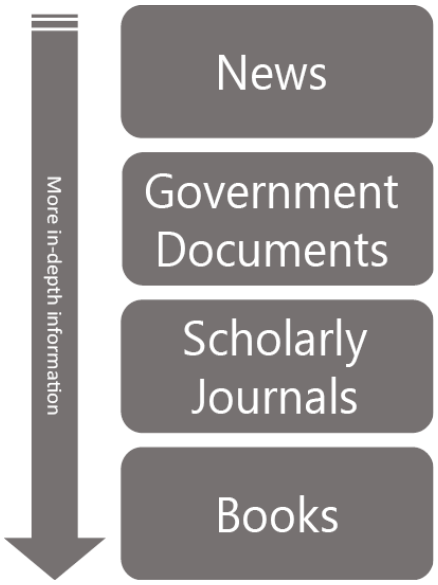
The type of paper or project you're working on is also key when deciding on a topic. Some of the most common types of college research assignments are:

- Informative: With informative assignments, your job is to learn all you can about the topic and then summarize it.
- Pro/Con: When working on pro/con assignments you'll need to research an issue from two different perspectives, then explain both sides.
- Persuasive (also known as argumentative): Persuasive assignments ask you to clearly take a stance on an issue and then support that stance with evidence.

Information Production

In addition to knowing that you are missing essential information, another component of information literacy is understanding that the information you seek may be available in different formats such as books, journal articles, government documents, blog postings, and news items.

Each format has a unique value. The graphic below represents a common process of information production. When an event happens, we usually hear about it from news sources: broadcast, web, and print. Over time, more in-depth exploration and analysis of the event often comes from government studies and scholarly journal articles. Deeper exploration, as well as an overview of much of the information available about the event, is often published in book format.



Characteristics of Sources

When you start exploring a research topic, your first stop might be Google, where you'll find websites and other freely available content. Websites can be great, but as you saw, the results can often be overwhelming and sometimes it's hard to pick out the best content.

By using a library, you'll have access to many different types of sources, including more scholarly content. Using a variety of source types will help build your knowledge on a

subject. Here are some of the types and characteristics of sources you'll find in the library.

Books

Books are usually the first thing that come to mind when you think about libraries. And books can be very useful for all types of research projects. What are some of the benefits of using a book?

- They often provide in-depth coverage on a topic.
- They can give you good background, history, or provide a thorough analysis of a topic.
- Authors consult many different sources and synthesize information into one book.
- Physical books (and some ebooks too) are often hand-selected by librarians because of the quality of the author and/or content.
- They often contain a bibliography, footnotes, or endnotes that can be used as jumping-off points to find other relevant sources.

You might be thinking, "I don't have time to read a whole book!" You don't have to (unless you really want to). When using a book for research, check out the table of contents or the index to figure out which sections will be most relevant to you. It's also helpful to read the introduction, since that's usually where you'll find a big-picture overview.

Academic Journals

Often your research assignments will call for **academic journal articles**, but what are they? Academic journal articles are scholarly sources where experts and scholars publish their research findings.

Every academic discipline has scholarly journals. Their purpose is to provide a space for researchers to share information and also to maintain a record of new knowledge.

Scholars and researchers read journals to keep up with the latest research in their fields, but they're also for students like you.

This whole process becomes a kind of evolving conversation among scholars. Many journal articles are **peer-reviewed**, which means that new articles are read and critiqued by other experts in that subject before they are accepted for publication. What are the benefits of using academic journal articles?

- They can provide powerful evidence to back up claims you've made in a research project.
- They are considered some of the most credible types of sources because of the amount of careful work involved in writing, reviewing, and publishing them.
- They often have a very narrow focus and might try to answer a specific question through original research, or summarize research done by others on a very specific topic.
- Authors cite their sources. When you read them, look for references, footnotes, or endnotes and use these as a jumping-off point to find other relevant sources.

News and Magazines

News & magazine articles are usually short and are written by journalists or freelance writers for a general audience. They usually focus on current issues and events.

Magazines and newspapers are often called **popular** sources because they are written for the general population, as opposed to academic or scholarly sources (such as books and journals), which are written by and for scholars and other experts.

The purpose of magazines and newspapers might be to inform, entertain, or persuade, along with the overarching purpose of selling copies or getting website clicks. What are the benefits of using newspaper or magazine articles?

- The writing style is professional, but at a level that allows most people to understand the content.
- They can provide an overview of a topic and/or interviews with a first-person account (called a primary source) or reaction to a topic or event.
- They can help you understand how the same story is covered in different parts of the country or world.
- They can help you understand issues happening in specific communities; most every city and town has a newspaper.
- They are published frequently (daily, weekly, or monthly) so it's important to make sure the information hasn't become outdated.
- They sometimes contain visuals like photographs or colorful graphics to keep the reader's attention.

Reference Material

Reference works are most often books and ebooks that give you a good snapshot of a topic. These sources are not meant to be read cover to cover, but instead offer definitions or brief entries on specific topics. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, and collections of primary source documents are examples of reference sources.

The Los Rios Libraries have print reference books and lots of eBooks that are available online. What are the benefits of using reference books?

- They may provide short entries on a lot of different topics (example: *Encyclopedia Britannica*).
- They can be specialized to focus on a very narrow subject, but cover many aspects of that topic (example: *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*).
- They can provide ideas to narrow a broad topic down to something more researchable.
- They often provide brief entries that allow you to wrap your head around difficult topics, ideas, or events, making them a great starting point for your research.

Videos

Your college library also owns **videos** including documentaries, performances, feature films, and more. Videos might be available on DVD to check out or through a streaming media database to view online. What are the benefits of using videos?

- They are great sources if you learn well by seeing and hearing information.
- Documentary films and news clips can give you a first-person view (called a primary source) of an event or topic.
- Films and videos can sometimes present complex material in new ways so that it is easier to understand.
- Most videos include closed captioning or subtitles so they are accessible to a wide range of viewers.

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, unless otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Identify: Understanding your information need. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/identify-understanding-your-information-need/

Los Rios Libraries. (2020). What is research? *Los Rios libraries information literacy tutorials*. https://lor.instructure.com/resources/44fe428e10b347bea9892a63482f55fd?shared

Scope: Knowing what is available. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/scope-knowing-what-is-available/

This page titled 9.1: Research Process and Scope is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 1: Research Process and Scope by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRATEGY

9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description

9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details

9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description

This page titled 9.2: Research Questions and Strategy is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 2: Research Questions and Strategy by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description

Topic: violence in high schools

Concepts: Violence and High School

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to violence:

- bullying OR
- guns OR
- knives OR
- gangs

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to high school:

- secondary school OR
- 12th grade

This page titled 9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details

Scenario

Sarah's art history professor just assigned the course project and Sarah is delighted that it isn't the typical research paper. Rather, it involves putting together a website to help readers understand a topic. It will certainly help Sarah get a grasp on the topic herself! Learning by attempting to teach others, she agrees, might be a good idea.

The professor wants the web site to be written for people who are interested in the topic and with backgrounds similar to the students in the course. Sarah likes that a target audience is defined, and since she has a good idea of what her friends might understand and what they would need more help with, she thinks it will be easier to know what to include in her site. Well, at least easier than writing a paper for an expert like her professor.

An interesting feature of this course is that the professor has formed the students into teams. Sarah wasn't sure she liked this idea at the beginning, but it seems to be working out okay. Sarah's team has decided that their topic for this website will be 19th century women painters. But her teammate Chris seems concerned, "Isn't that an awfully big topic?" The team checks with the professor, who agrees they would be taking on far more than they could successfully explain on their website. He suggests they develop a draft thesis statement to help them focus, and after several false starts, they come up with:

> The involvement of women painters in the Impressionist movement had an effect upon the subjects portrayed.

They decide this sounds more manageable. Because Sarah doesn't feel comfortable with the technical aspects of setting up the website, she offers to start locating resources that will help them to develop the site's content.

Before we learn more about what happens with Sarah and her team, let's look at the components of the Plan pillar.

Plan Pillar

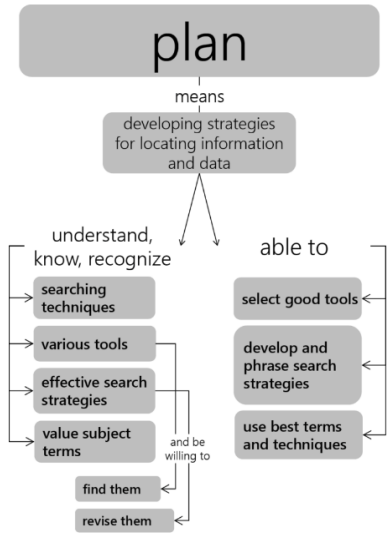
I've provided information in text and graphic form for the Plan Pillar. Mastering the Plan Pillar means you have the ability to: "construct strategies for locating information and data." That is a fairly short sentence, but it packs a punch. It includes

- Understanding a range of searching techniques
- Understanding the various tools and how they differ
- Knowing how to create effective search strategies
- Being open to searching out the most appropriate tools
- Understanding that revising your search as you proceed is important
- Recognizing that subject terms are of value

And these are just the items to understand! There are also the things you need to be able to do:

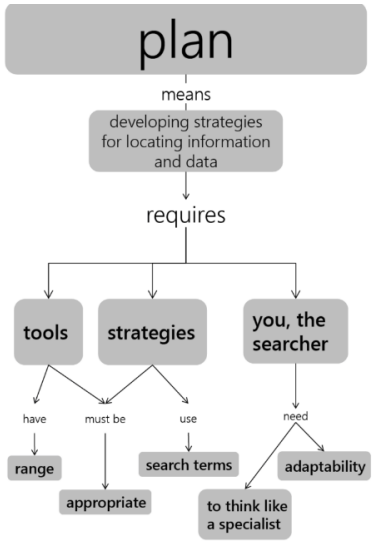
- Clearly phrase your search question.
- Develop an appropriate search strategy, using key techniques.
- Selecting good search tools, including specialized ones.
- Use the terms and techniques that are best suited to your search.

Here is a visual representation of these components:



Proficiencies in the Plan pillar

Now take a look at the essence of these items condensed into another concept map:



Proficiencies in the Plan pillar simplified

The second concept map is simplified. The focus is on the key elements: the tools and strategies that you use and the mindset that will help you as you plan your research. This may seem a bit daunting, so let's see how Sarah tackles the project.

She sometimes falters, but that happens even to experienced researchers. As you read through Sarah's quest for good information, think about the range and appropriateness of the strategies she uses. What would you do differently? What approaches seem to be good ones?

As you read about Sarah's quest for information, and reflect on your own information searches in the past, remember particularly the bullet within the Plan pillar that emphasizes the need to revise your search as you work. It is very important to do this, and to build time into the process so you are able to revise.

As you learn more about your topic, or the terms used in conjunction with its concepts, or key scholars in the field, it is only natural that you will need to shift focus, and, perhaps, change course. This is a natural part of the research process and indicates that your efforts are bearing fruit. Let's return to Sarah...

Sarah Continued

The next time the class meets, Sarah tells her teammates what she has done so far:

“I thought I’d start with some scholarly sources, since they should be helpful, right? I put a search into the online catalog for the library, but nothing came up! The library should have books on this topic, shouldn’t it? I typed the search in exactly as we have it in our thesis statement. That was so frustrating. Since that didn’t work, I tried Google, and put in the search. I got over 8 million results, but when I looked over the ones on the first page, they didn’t seem very useful. One was about the feminist art movement in the 1960s, not during the Impressionist period. The results all seemed to have the words I typed highlighted, but most really weren’t useful. I am sorry I don’t have much to show you. Do you think we should change our topic?”

Alisha suggests that Sarah talk with a reference librarian. She mentions that a librarian came to talk to another of her classes about doing research, and it was really helpful. Alisha thinks that maybe Sarah shouldn’t have entered the entire thesis statement as the search, and maybe she should have tried databases to find articles. The team decides to brainstorm all the search tools and resources they can think of.

Here’s what they came up with:

Search Tools & Resources:

- Wikipedia
- Professor
- Google search
- JSTOR database

Based on your experience, do you see anything you would add?

Sarah and her team think that their list is pretty good. They decide to take it further and list the advantages and limitations of each search tool, at least as far as they can determine.

Search Tool	Advantages	Limitations
Wikipedia	Easy access; list of references	Professor doesn't seem to like it; maybe misinformation?
Professor	The expert!	Not sure we can get to office hours; we want to appear self-directed
Google search	Lots of results	We need a better search term
JSTOR database	Authoritative, scholarly articles	None that we know of

Self Reflection

As you work through your own research quests, it is very important to be self-reflective. The first couple of items in this list where discussed in week 2 in excerpts from the Identify chapter:

- What do you really need to find?
- Do you need to learn more about the general subject before you can identify the focus of your search?
- How thoroughly did you develop your search strategy?

- Did you spend enough time finding the best tools to search?
- What is going really well, so well that you'll want to remember to do it in the future?

Another term for what you are doing is metacognition, or thinking about your thinking. Reflect on what Sarah is going through as you read this chapter. Does some of it sound familiar based on your own experiences?

You may already know some of the strategies presented here. Do you do them the same way? How does it work? What pieces are new to you? When might you follow this advice? Don't just let the words flow over you. Instead, think carefully about the explanation of the process. You may disagree with some of what you read. If you do, follow through and test both methods to see which provides better results.

Selecting Search Tools

Let's move away from Sarah and start thinking about this process in terms of this week's assignments and beyond. You have picked a topic that you will focus on for the next several weeks. Now is the time to begin the planning process to gather all the elements that are needed for your mid-term project.

One of the first steps is to start to think about where you can look for information. Part of planning to do research is determining which search tools will be the best ones to use. This applies whether you are doing scholarly research or trying to answer a question in your everyday life, such as what would be the best place to go on vacation.

"Search tools" might be a bit misleading, since a person might be the source of the information you need. Or it might be a web search engine, a specialized database, an association—the possibilities are endless. Often people automatically search Google first, regardless of what they are looking for. Choosing the wrong search tool may just waste your time and provide only mediocre information, whereas other sources might provide really spot-on information and quickly, too. In some cases, a carefully constructed search on Google, particularly using the advanced search option, will provide the necessary information, but other times it won't. This is true of all sources: make an informed choice about which ones to use for a specific need.

So, how do you identify search tools? Let's begin with a first-rate method. For academic research, talking with a librarian or your professor is a great start. They will direct you to those specialized tools that will provide access to what you need. If you ask a librarian for help, they may also show you some tips about searching in the resources.

If neither your professor nor a librarian is available when you need help, check your school's library website to see what guidance is provided. At CRC, we have a database directory that lists, describes, and provides links to all of our databases. We also have program research guides that might offer some clues as to which databases are a good fit for specific disciplines.

Finding Background Information

You have picked a topic, but you'll likely need to refine it to decide exactly what aspects you will focus on in your research. One of the best ways to do that is to get some good background information. This is a time to read all you can about your topic without worrying about exactly what you want to say in your paper. Instead, pay attention to issues that interest you, and take note of concepts, organizations, people, studies, or events that you might want to research further. You've already done a little of this when you listened to your podcast. You should have taken notes that might include the names of researchers, places where studies have been conducted, or other information that might be useful. Notice what details are sticking in your mind; what aspects interest you the most. One of those aspects could become the issue you focus on in your midterm project.

Here are a few library resources that are great for background research:

- **Gale Ebooks**: Find the library's research databases page, and select Gale Ebooks from the General section (at the top). This is a database of subject encyclopedias, and it's a great place to find solid background information. Search for your topic and look for any related or narrower topics that you've identified.

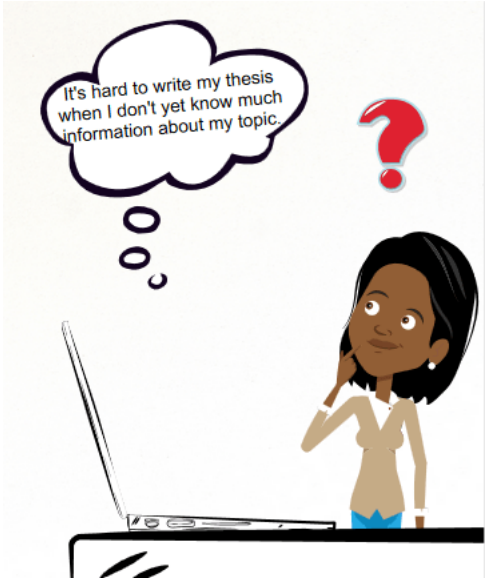


- **CQ Researcher**: If your topic is a current social issue, try the CQ Researcher database (also in the General Section on the Research Databases page). CQ Researcher provides overview reports on current issues and can be a treasure trove of

information. Look for a timeline of events related to your topic, an overview of the issue, and even different perspectives on possible solutions.

- **Opposing Viewpoints**: This database also covers many current and social issues. It's found in the controversial topics section of the databases page. Featured issues are profiled each day. You can also do a keyword search or browse by topics. Results in this page are organized by source type, meaning all the scholarly articles, news articles, and other source types are grouped together.

From Background to Research Question



Because a thesis comes in the beginning of your paper, speech, or research project, you might be tempted to start there. But instead of creating your thesis first, use your background information to ask a

research question. A research question will guide your search by giving you a goal and focus for your paper.

Here are some examples of how to narrow a few broad topics into manageable research questions:

- **Broad topic:** Homelessness
- **Research question:** What approach should cities use to help homeless people get housing?
- **Broad topic:** Kids and sleep
- **Research question:** How does the early morning start time of high schools affect students' academic performance?
- **Broad topic:** Education
- **Research question:** How can we make sure more kids have access to high-quality preschool?

You'll notice that these questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no". Instead, you have to explain the answer using details. Good research questions often make you look for causes/effects of an issue, relationships between events and ideas, and/or solutions to a problem.

Keywords

Once you've selected some good background sources for your topic, it is time to move on to identifying words you will use to search for more detailed and in-depth information to help answer your research question.

This is sometimes referred to as building a search query. When deciding what terms to use in a search, break down your topic into its main concepts. Ask yourself, what are the most important words in this question? They are often the nouns.

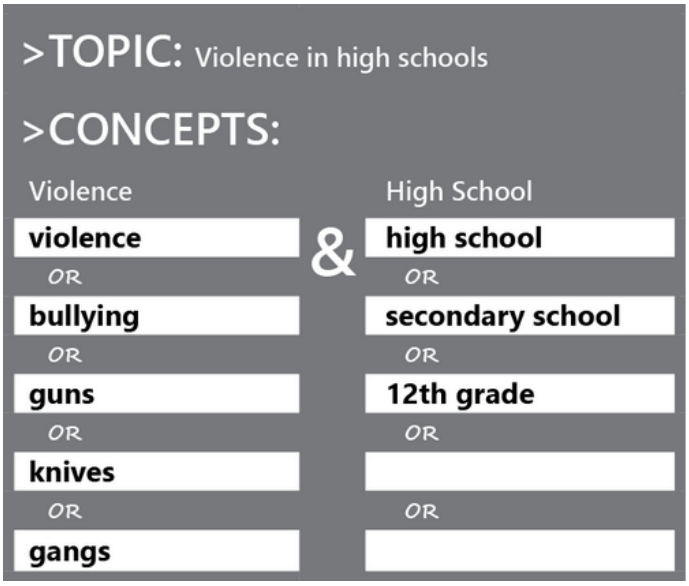
Don't enter an entire sentence, or a full question. Different databases and search engines process such queries in different ways, but many look for the entire phrase you enter as a complete unit, rather than the component words.

While some will focus on just the important words, such as Sarah's Google search that you read about earlier, more often, the results are still unsatisfactory. The best thing to do is to use the key concepts involved with your topic.

You'll also want to think of synonyms or related terms for each concept. If you do this, you will have more flexibility when searching in case your first search term doesn't produce any or enough results. This may sound strange, since if you are looking for

information using a Web search engine, you almost always get too many results. Databases, however, contain fewer items, and having alternative search terms may lead you to useful sources. Even in a search engine like Google, having terms you can combine thoughtfully will yield better results.

The following image is an example of a process you can use to brainstorm search terms. It illustrates how you might think about the topic of violence in high schools. Notice that this exact phrase is not what will be used for the search. Rather, it is a starting point for identifying the terms that will eventually be used.



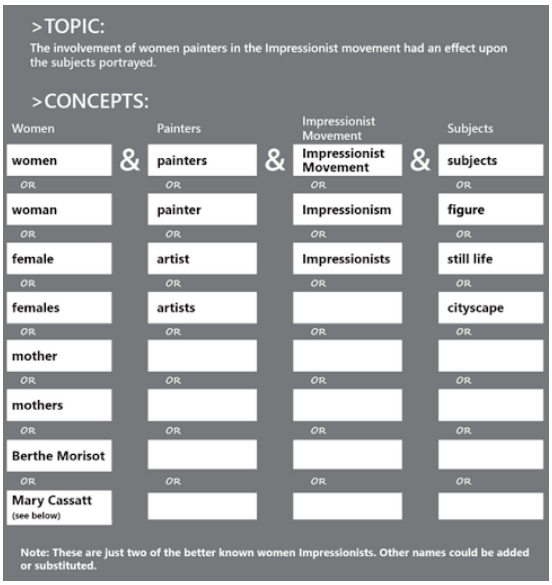
Machine readable text document of preceding graphic

Sarah's Topic

Now, let's think of this process using the topic Sarah's team is working on. They have divided their topic into four concepts and brainstormed multiple search terms for each concept.

Keep in mind that the number of concepts will depend on what you are searching for. And that the search terms may be synonyms or narrower terms. Occasionally, you may be searching for something very specific, and in those cases, you may need to use broader terms as well.

Let's see what Sarah's team came up with:



Machine readable text document of preceding graphic

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0):

Los Rios Libraries. (2020). Getting started with research. *Los Rios libraries information literacy tutorials*. https://lor.instructure.com/resources/44fe428e10b347bea9892a63482f55fd?shared

Plan: Developing research strategies. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/plan-developing-research-strategies/

This page titled 9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description

Topic: The involvement of women painters in the Impressionist movement had an effect upon the subjects portrayed.

Concepts: Women and Painters and Impressionist Movement and Subjects

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Women:

- Women OR
- Woman OR
- Female OR
- Females OR
- Mother OR
- Mothers OR
- Berthe Morisot OR
- Mary Cassatt

A note about the last two bullets: These are just two of the better known women Impressionists. Other names could be added or substituted.

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to painters:

- Painters OR
- Painter OR
- Artist OR
- Artists

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Impressionist Movement:

- Impressionist Movement OR
- Impressionism OR
- Impressionists

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Subjects:

- Subjects OR
- Figure OR
- Still life OR
- Cityscape

This page titled 9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.3: ADVANCED SEARCHING TECHNIQUES

9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details

9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description

This page titled 9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 3: Advanced Searching Techniques by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details

Advanced Searching

All of the searching we've done in this class and that you probably do on a regular basis is general keyword searching. But, there are many tips and tricks hidden in databases and Internet search engines that can help you become an advanced-level searcher. That's what the next several tabs are about and you'll have a chance to practice some of these techniques in this week's assignments.

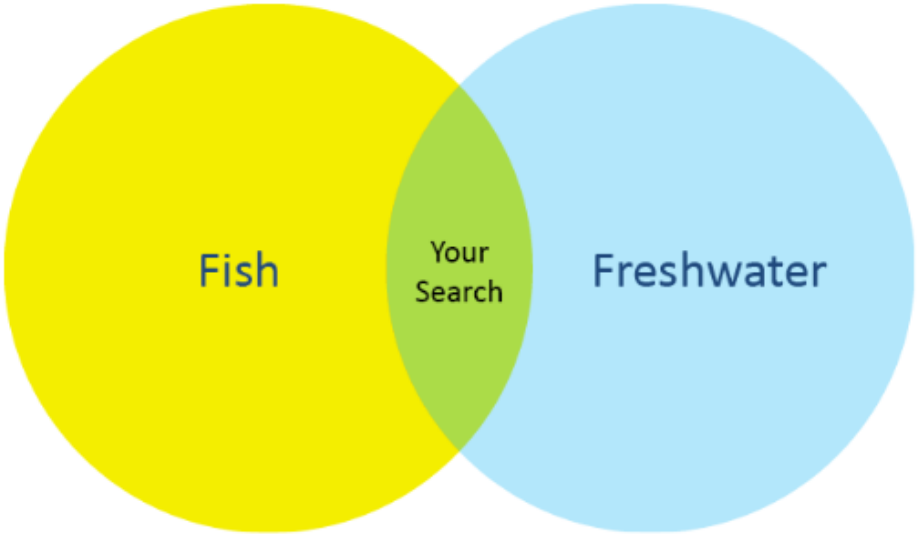
Boolean Operators

One way to limit a database search is to use Boolean operators; words you can add to a search to narrow or broaden your search results.

Boolean operators are the words And, Or, and Not. You can usually find these words and the searching technique in the advanced search query area of a database. You can still use Boolean operators without being in an advanced search screen, but, ***this is important:*** in most databases, in order for Boolean operators to work properly in a keyword search box, the operators must be in all caps. That is why I have kept the operators in all caps throughout this section, so that you understand the importance of remembering to use all caps when using the Boolean operators searching technique.

AND

AND will narrow your search. For example, if you are interested in fresh water fishing you would enter the terms “fish and freshwater.” Your results would then include records that contained ***both*** of these words. In the image below, your results are represented by the green area where the two circles intersect.

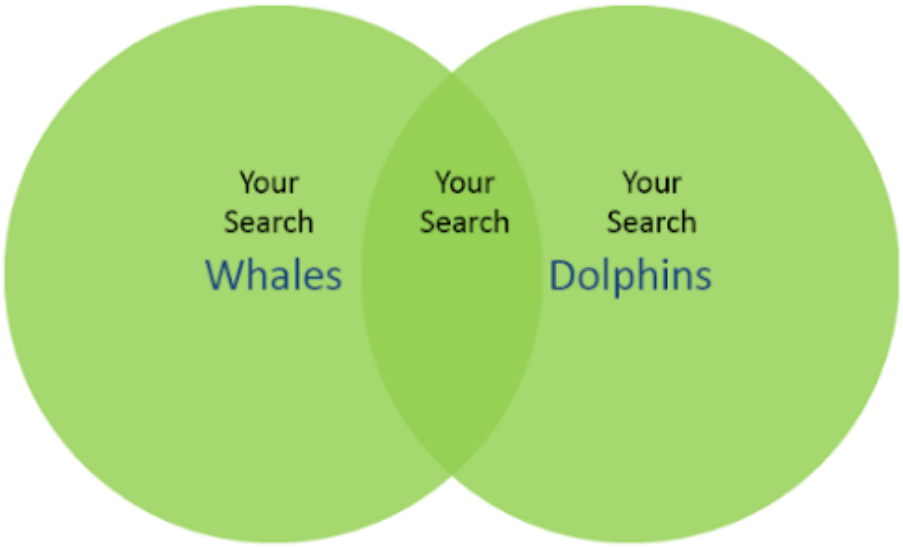


OR

The Boolean operator OR will broaden your search and is usually used with synonyms (different words that have the same meaning). If you are interested in finding information on mammals found in the Atlantic Ocean, you could enter the terms “whales or dolphins.”

The circles below represent the OR search. All of the records that contain one, or another, or both of your search terms will be in

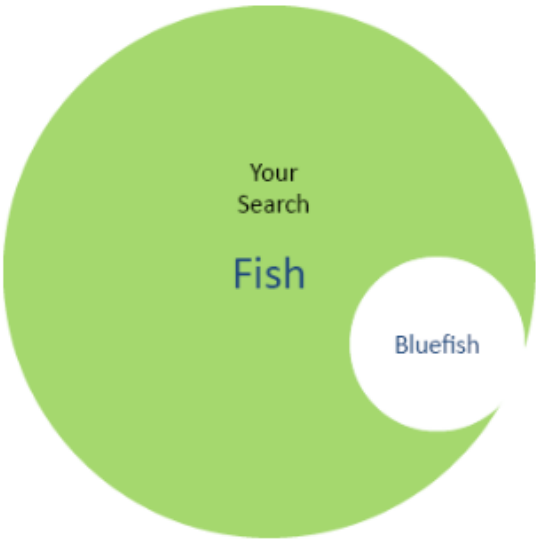
your results list.



NOT

The Boolean operator NOT will eliminate a term from your results. If you were looking for information on all Atlantic Ocean fish ***except*** Bluefish, you would enter “fish not bluefish.”

The larger green circle represents the results that you would retrieve with this search. Notice how Bluefish is excluded from the results.



Remember Sarah and her team researching women painters from last week? Let's apply Boolean operators to Sarah and her team's research. They've started their research by looking for sources about the women creating Impressionist art and they've identified two search strings:

- women painters
- women artists

They could do two separate searches by typing one or the other of the search strings into the search box of whatever tool they are using, but they'd end up with two separate result lists and have the added headache of trying to identify unique items from the lists.

They could also lump everything together and search on the phrase:

- women painters AND women artists

But once you understand Boolean operators, that last strategy won't make as much sense as it seems to.

There are three Boolean operators: AND, OR, and NOT.

AND is used to get the intersection of all the terms you wish to include in your search. With this example:

women painters AND women artists

Sarah's team is asking the database to retrieve both of those search strings, meaning all the results would include women painters AND women artists. If a source only has one string, it won't show up in the results.

This isn't what the team had in mind. They are interested in both artists and painters, but because they don't know which term might be used, they want to search both.

Instead, OR would be a better choice.

OR is used when you want at least one of the terms to show up in the search results. If both do, that's fine too, but it isn't a condition of the search. The OR Boolean operator makes a lot more sense for this search:

women painters OR women artists

Now, the team could get fancy with this search, and use both AND as well as OR:

women AND (painters OR artists)

The parentheses mean that these two concepts, painters and artists, should be searched as a unit, and the search results should include all items that use one word or the other. The results will then be limited to those items that contain the word women.

When using parentheses for appropriate searches, make sure that the items contained within those parenthesis are related in some way. With OR, as in the previous example, it means either of the terms will work. With AND, it means that both terms will appear in the source.

Try this out on your own. Type both of these searches in Google Scholar and compare the results (please note, you must capitalize OR when using it as a Boolean operator in Google products). Were they the same? If not, can you determine what happened? Which result list looked better?

Truncation

Using Boolean operators isn't the only way you can create more useful searches. This and the next few tabs will give you more tools for your searching tool box.

Look at this search string:

Entrepreneurs AND (adolescents OR teens)

You might expect that the items that are retrieved from the search can refer to entrepreneurs plural or entrepreneur singular. But, that's not always the case. Because computers are very literal, they usually look for the exact terms you enter.

While it is true that some search functions are moving beyond this model, you want to think about alternatives, just to be safe. In this case, using the singular as well as the plural form of the word might help you to find useful sources. Truncation, or searching on the root of a word and whatever follows, lets you do this.

So, if you modify the search string to this:

Entrepreneur* AND (adolescents OR teens)

You will get items that refer either to the singular or plural version of the word entrepreneur, but also entrepreneurship.

Look at these examples:

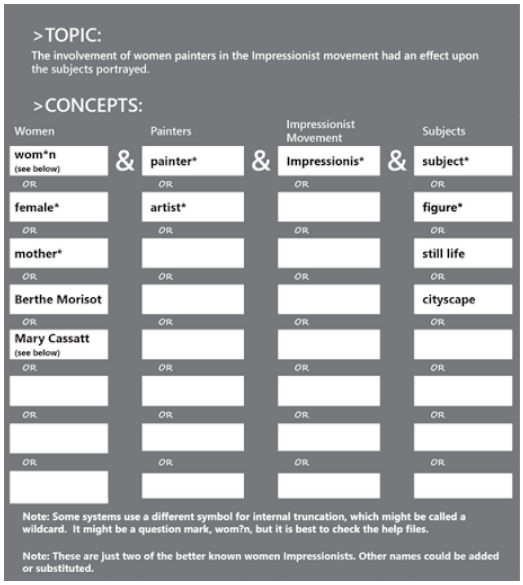
adolescen*

educat*

Think of two or three words you might retrieve when searching on these roots. It is important to consider the results you might get and alter the root if need be. An example of this is polic*. Would it be a good idea to use this root if you wanted to search on policy or policies? Why or why not? Try it out and see what you find.

In some cases, a symbol other than an asterisk is used. To determine what symbol to use, check the help section in whatever resource you are using. The topic should show up under the truncation or stemming headings.

Here is the same search terms worksheet you saw last week for Sarah's team, but with truncation acknowledged:



Machine readable text description of preceding graphic

OK - back to that polic* example. If you actually tried it, you'll find that police and policing also came up with this search. That's because policy, policies, police, and policing all have the same root. Keep this in mind when using truncation or wild card searching.

Phrase Searching

Phrase searches are particularly useful. If you put the exact phrase you want to search in quotation marks, you will only get items with those words as a phrase and not items where the words appear separately in a document, website, or other resource.

Your results will usually be fewer, although surprisingly, this is not always the case. Try these two searches in the search engine of your choice:

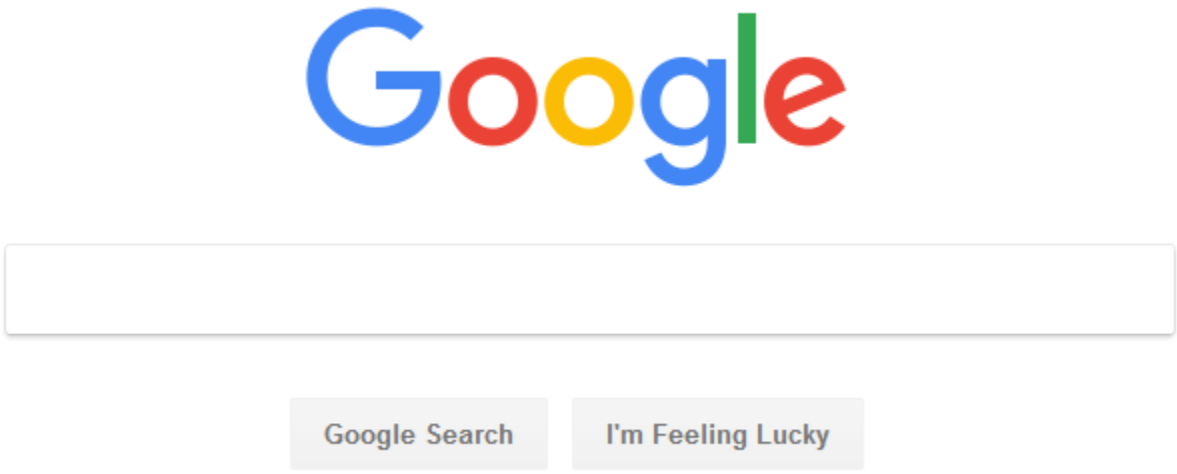
“essay exam”

essay exam

Was there a difference in the quality and quantity of results? Most databases allow phrase searching with the use of quotation marks. You'll also often see phrase searching when you enter an advanced search screen of a resource.

Advanced Web Searching

Advanced web searching allows you to refine your search query and prompts you for ways to do this. Consider the basic Google.com search box.



It is very minimalist, but that minimalism is deceptive. It gives the impression that searching is easy and encourages you to just enter your topic, without much thought. You certainly do get many results. But are they really good results? Simple search boxes aren't always the best way to go.

Advanced search screens show you many of the special searching options available to you to refine your search, and, therefore, get more manageable numbers of better items. Many web search engines and research databases include advanced search

screens. Advanced search screens will vary from resource to resource and from web search engine to research database, but they often let you search using

- Implied Boolean operators (for example, the “all the words” option is the same as using the Boolean and)
- Limiters for date, domain (.edu, for example), type of resource (articles, book reviews, patents)
- Field (a field is a standard element, such as title of publication or author’s name)
- Phrase (rather than entering quote marks)

Explore on Your Own

Go to the advanced search option in Google. Did you even know this page existed?!

Take a look at the options Google provides to refine your search. Compare this to the basic Google search box. One of the best ways you can become a better searcher for information is to use the power of advanced searches, either by using these more complex search screens or by remembering to use Boolean operators, phrase searches, truncation, and other options available to you in most search engines and databases.

While many of the text boxes at the top of the Google Advanced Search page mirror concepts already covered in this week's reading (for example, “this exact word or phrase” allows you to omit the quotes in a phrase search), the options for narrowing your results can be powerful.

You can limit your search to a particular domain (such as .edu for items from educational institutions) or you can search for items you can reuse legally (with attribution, of course!) by making use of the “usage rights” option.

However, be careful with some of the options, as they may excessively limit your results. If you aren't certain about a particular option, try your search with and without using it and compare the results. If you use a search engine other than Google, check to see if it offers an advanced search option, many do.

The CRC Library has an online searching tips guide that covers all the searching tips included in this week's reading. You might want to bookmark this web address:

https://researchguides.crc.losrios.edu/searchtips

The guide will be available even after you have completed this course.

Scenario

Harry is feeling overwhelmed by one of his class assignments. Harry would have been happy if the assignment was to write a traditional research paper, but his professor has asked the class to solve a real life problem.

The professor has asked the class to imagine a small city undergoing a natural disaster such as a flood or a tornado. Each group in the class is required to plan a hypothetical information command center for this city. The professor explains that the government needs to obtain accurate, up-to-date information on the scope of the damage and injuries sustained due to the disaster. This information is vital for the city to be able to provide adequate emergency and medical assistance to its citizens.

Harry can see that this is an important function for any city in the midst of a crisis but he is not sure about where to get reliable information to help him construct a plan for the city.

Harry and his classmates do some brainstorming and decide to approach this assignment as if they were actually producing a research paper. Their first step will be to research recent disasters. They reason that this will provide some information about the way some cities have gathered information during disasters.

If an information gathering strategy worked for other cities, it will work for their hypothetical city. There certainly have been a lot of natural disasters recently, so it shouldn't be too hard to find some information. Super Storm Sandy and Hurricane Irene are two events that have happened in recent years. The group starts to research Super Storm Sandy with Google and Wikipedia.

Gather Pillar

Harry and his classmates are engaging in the Gather pillar of the Seven Pillars of Information Literacy model. Just as municipalities needed to gather reliable information in order to provide vital services to their citizens, Harry and his group members need to gather information that will help them complete this assignment.

These information needs are components of the Gather pillar, which states that the information literate individual understands:

- How information and data are organized
- How libraries provide access to resources
- How digital technologies provide collaborative tools to create and share information
- The issues involved in collection of new data
- The different elements of a citation
- The use of abstracts
- The need to keep up to date

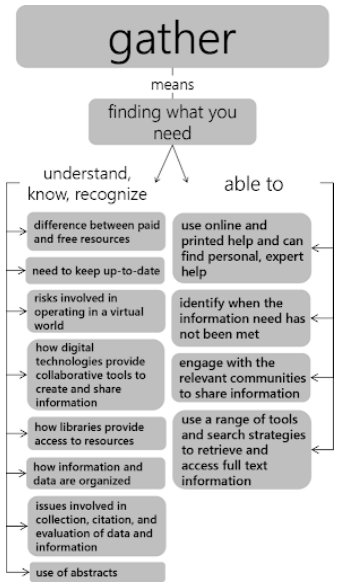
They are able to:

- Use a range of retrieval tools and resources effectively
- Construct complex searches appropriate to different digital and print resources
- Access full text information, both print and digital, read and download online material and data
- Use appropriate techniques to collect new data
- Keep up to date with new information
- Engage with their community to share information
- Identify when the information need has not been met
- Use online and printed help and can find personal, expert help

- The abilities connected with the Gather pillar overlap, in some aspects, with those in other chapters. Where this is the case, those abilities are not addressed in this chapter.

The following is a graphic representation of the bulleted list that describes the Gather Pillar:

- The difference between free and paid resources
- The risks involved in operating in a virtual world
- The importance of appraising and evaluating search result



Information and the Internet

Traditionally, information has been organized in different formats, usually as a result of the time it took to gather and publish the information. For example, the purpose of news reporting is to inform the public about the basic facts of an event. This information needs to be disseminated quickly, so it is published daily in print, online, on broadcast television, and radio media. More in-depth treatment of information takes longer to research, write, and publish and traditionally was published in scholarly journals and books.

Today, information is still published in traditional formats as well as in newly evolving formats on the Internet. These new information formats are loosely defined as Web 2.0 formats and can include electronic journals, books, news websites, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and location postings. The coexistence of all of these information formats is messy and chaotic. The process for finding relevant information is not always clear.

One way to make some sense out of the current information universe is to thoroughly understand traditional information formats. We can then understand the concepts inherent in the information formats found online. There are some direct correlations such as books and journal articles, but there are also some newer formats like tweets that didn't exist until recently.

Let's look at the news industry. Many traditional newspapers are shutting down and those that remain are retrenching. While there are many reasons for this, one of the major trends has been the rise of the Internet. In the United States, more than 50 percent of the population reads the news online.

Indeed, online news sites provide a different and, some might argue, a more relevant experience for the reader. They offer video and sound, up-to-the-minute updates on breaking news, and the ability to interact with the content by posting comments. Another important feature of online news is that search engines can deliver content from the site in response to a query. In other words, readers don't have to visit a site such as the New York Times in order to read its content.

This has both positive and negative consequences. The positive consequence is that readers can quickly and conveniently obtain information from a variety of sources on a topic or event. The negative consequence is that it is more difficult to evaluate the credibility of the sources. We'll be exploring evaluating sources more later in this unit.

For Harry and his group, all of this means they will have to research many different kinds of information resources in order to create an effective information command center.

Twitter and Blog Postings

Many of the group's Google results are from Twitter feeds and blog postings. These did not provide a lot of information. After all, a tweet consists of only 280 characters. However, these resources did help Harry's group by suggesting key people, cities, technologies, and other resources associated with Super Storm Sandy to research.

Often a blog posting will provide a link to a longer, more useful resource. The students' review of blogs and tweets also provided an otherwise unthought-of insight. As Harry and his group were reviewing Twitter feeds posted during Super Storm Sandy, they noted that people were using Twitter to inform their friends and relatives about their whereabouts, their health, and the conditions of their surroundings. Since electricity was not available, most televisions and radios did not work, but mobile technologies like Twitter served as effective communication tools. Once Harry realized this, a Twitter feed was quickly incorporated into his command center's communication plan.

Newspaper Articles

One of the members of Harry's group suggested they should consult a newspaper to see what role the newspaper played to help the city understand the destruction caused by the storm. The group chose the New York Times. The New York Times can be accessed online and articles from the day of the storm can be viewed.

However, the group found that more useful information was published in the New York Times in the days after the storm. Harry's initial search of the New York Times for articles containing the phrase super storm Sandy published on October 29, 2012 resulted in some blog postings from reporters and many stories about damage from the storm. But when Harry reentered his search without a date limit, he retrieved articles that analyzed how the region's municipalities performed during the storm. It takes time to conduct this type of analysis, so looking for information that was published days, weeks, or months after the storm took place was a good strategy.

One limitation Harry encountered was a paywall on the New York Times website. He was able to access a few articles for free, but after viewing five articles, the website restricted access without a New York Times subscription. This is where library databases can become extremely valuable. Your college will subscribe to databases that give you access to important newspaper content, including the New York Times, which is included in the US Major Dailies and Opposing Viewpoints databases.

Primary Sources

Another member of Harry's group recalled that he had cousins in New York City who experienced Super Storm Sandy firsthand. He offered to interview his cousins about their experiences during the storm. This type of information is known as a primary information or source. Primary sources are accounts from a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of an event. Speeches, photographs, diaries, autobiographies, and interviews are all primary sources.

In this case, the primary source is still alive and is accessible to Harry's group. However, some researchers are not so fortunate. If this is the case, primary sources can still be found in a variety of locations and formats. There are many online sites that have created digitized collections of copies of diaries and letters from historical events. It is important to remember that primary sources are not limited to a single format. You may find them in books, journals, newspapers, email, websites, and artwork.

The CRC Library has a guide to source types (bookmark this page - it will remain published even after you finish this course) that can help you differentiate the kind of source you're using.

Scholarly Articles

The results of the research that Harry and his group has done are useful, but Harry is concerned that there might be too much focus on Super Storm Sandy. He wants to find more information on crisis and disaster management in general. Harry thinks that there might be general standards or practices that should be incorporated into his group's plan. Journal articles and books might provide this information.

Harry starts his search for journal articles by using a multidisciplinary database because he is not sure which specific disciplines will cover the information he seeks. He constructs and executes a search query and finds that the abstracts included in the results help him choose several peer-reviewed, or scholarly, articles to read.

Scholarly journal articles usually include an abstract at the beginning of the article. An abstract summarizes the contents of the article. In an abstract, key points as well as conclusions are briefly described. Abstracts are often included in the database record.

Researchers find this information helpful when deciding whether or not to retrieve the whole article.

Most of the articles that Harry chooses are available in PDF format from the database, but there are a few articles that look very relevant that don't have links to a PDF. Harry really wants to read these articles so he decides to try to find out if there is another way to obtain the full text. He consults a librarian who instructs him to look for the title of the journal (not the article) in the online catalog. The catalog record will provide information on whether the journal is available online from another database.

Journals, and the articles they contain, are often quite expensive. Libraries spend a large part of their collection budget subscribing to journals in both print and online formats. You may have noticed that a Google Scholar search will provide the citation to a journal article but will not link to the full text. This happens because Google does not subscribe to journals. It only searches and retrieves freely available web content.

However, libraries do subscribe to journals and have entered into agreements to share their journal and book collections with other libraries. If you are affiliated with a library as a student, staff, or faculty member, you have access to many other libraries' resources, through a service called interlibrary loan. Do not pay the large sums required to purchase access to articles unless you do not have another way to obtain the material, and you are unable to find a substitute resource that provides the information you need.

There is one more feature Harry found while searching in databases: some offer the option of an alert service. This feature allows Harry to enter the most productive search strings, as well as his email address. When new items are added to the database that fit his search, he receives an alert. Harry found this to be a great way to keep up to date with new articles on his topic without having to initiate a new search.

Books

Next, Harry's group looks for books on the topic. They search the library's online catalog using search terms that were successful in their database searches. They find some great titles and head to the library book cases to retrieve them.

Most academic libraries use the Library of Congress classification system to organize their books and other resources. The Library of Congress classification systems divides a library's collection into 21 classes or categories. A specific letter of the alphabet is assigned to each class. More detailed divisions are accomplished with two and three letter combinations. Book shelves in most academic libraries are marked with a Library of Congress letter-number combination to correspond to the Library of Congress

letter-number combination on the spines of library materials. This is often referred to as a call number and it is noted in the catalog record of every physical item on the library shelves.

Harry uses the call numbers to locate some books that he found in the catalog. He is happily surprised to find that there are also some really useful books sitting on the shelf right next to the books he previously identified. This is a handy way to find additional information resources on a topic. It is more efficient to first search the online catalog to locate relevant resources and then search the shelves.

Conclusions

Harry and his classmates have spent time gathering information to help them create a realistic and accurate crisis command center. They accessed and used Web 2.0 information sources in the form of Twitter feeds and blogs. They used online newspapers and the library's online databases to find journal articles. They even gathered some very useful hard copy books.

During this process, the students learned about different ways that information is organized including the Library of Congress classification system. Harry was amazed at the wealth of quality information he was able to gather. It took him a while and the process was more complicated than just searching the web, but Harry now feels more confident about acing the assignment. He also feels that he learned more than how to set up a command center. He learned how to engage in academic research!

This chapter compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0):

Gather: Finding what you need. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/gather-finding-what-you-need/

Plan: Developing research strategies. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/plan-developing-research-strategies/

Scope: Knowing what is available. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing.

This page titled 9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description

Topic: The involvement of women painters in the Impressionist movement had an effect upon the subjects portrayed.

Concepts: Women and Painters and Impressionist Movement and Subjects

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Women using truncation to capture all forms of the search term:

- Wom*n OR
- Female* OR
- Mother* OR
- Berthe Morisot OR
- Mary Cassatt

A note about the last two bullets: These are just two of the better known women Impressionists. Other names could be added or substituted.

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to painters using truncation to capture all forms of the search term::

- Painter* OR
- Artist* OR

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Impressionist Movement using truncation to capture all forms of the search term:

- Impressionis*

Keyword brainstorming for other words related to Subjects using truncation to capture all forms of the search term:

- Subject* OR
- Figure* OR
- Still life OR
- Cityscape

Note: Some systems use a different symbol for internal truncation, which might be called a wildcard. It might be a question mark: woma?n, but it is best to check the "help" or "how to" section of a searchable resource.

This page titled 9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.4: Evaluating Sources

Introduction to Evaluation

In 2010, a textbook being used in fourth grade classrooms in Virginia became big news for all the wrong reasons. The book, *Our Virginia* by Joy Masoff, had caught the attention of a parent who was helping her child do her homework, according to an article in The Washington Post. Carol Sheriff was a historian for the College of William and Mary and as she worked with her daughter, she began to notice some glaring historical errors, not the least of which was a passage which described how thousands of African Americans fought for the South during the Civil War.

Further investigation into the book revealed that, although the author had written textbooks on a variety of subjects, she was not a trained historian. The research she had done to write *Our Virginia*, and in particular the information she included about Black Confederate soldiers, was done through the Internet and included sources created by groups like the Sons of Confederate Veterans, an organization which promotes views of history that de-emphasize the role of slavery in the Civil War.

How did a book with errors like these come to be used as part of the curriculum and who was at fault? Was it Masoff for using untrustworthy sources for her research? Was it the editors who allowed the book to be published with these errors intact? Was it the school board for approving the book without more closely reviewing its accuracy?

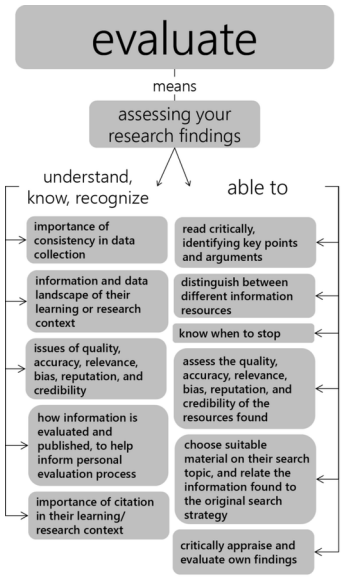
There are a number of issues at play in the case of *Our Virginia*, but there's no question that evaluating sources is an important part of the research process and doesn't just apply to Internet sources. Using inaccurate, irrelevant, or poorly researched sources can affect the quality of your own work. Being able to understand and apply the concept of evaluating sources is crucial to becoming a more savvy user and creator of information.

Evaluate Pillar

The Evaluate pillar states that individuals are able to review the research process and compare and evaluate information and data. It encompasses important knowledge and abilities.

They understand

- The information and data landscape of their learning/research context
- Issues of quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, reputation and credibility relating to information and data sources
- How information is evaluated and published, to help inform their personal evaluation process
- They are able to
- Distinguish between different information resources and the information they provide
- Choose suitable material on their search topic, using appropriate criteria
- Assess the quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, reputation and credibility of the information resources found
- Assess the credibility of the data gathered
- Read critically, identifying key points and arguments
- Relate the information found to the original search strategy
- Critically appraise and evaluate their own findings and those of others
- Know when to stop
- The importance of consistency in data collection
- The importance of citation in their learning/research context



Distinguishing between Information Sources

We read about types of sources way back in one of the first weeks of class. Here's a little refresher. Information is published in a variety of formats, each with its own special considerations when it comes to evaluation. Consider the following formats.

Social Media



Social media is a quickly rising star in the landscape of information gathering. Facebook updates, Tweets, wikis, and blogs have made information creators of us all and have a strong influence not just on how we communicate with each other but also on how we learn about current events or discover items of interest.

Anyone can create or contribute to social media and nothing that's said is checked for accuracy before it's posted for the world to see. So do people really use social media for research? Currently, the main use for social media like tweets and Facebook posts is as primary sources that are treated as the objects under study rather than sources of information on a topic. But now that the Modern Language Association has a recommended way to cite a Tweet social media may, in fact, be gaining credibility as a resource.

News Articles



These days, social media will generally be among the first to cover a big news story, with news media writing an article or report after more information has been gathered. News articles are written by journalists who either report on an event they have witnessed firsthand, or after making contact with those more directly involved.

The focus is on information that is of immediate interest to the public and these articles are written in a way that a general audience will be able to understand. These articles go through a fact-checking process, but when a story is big and the goal is to inform readers of urgent or timely information, inaccuracies may occur. In research, news articles are often best treated as primary sources, especially if they were published immediately after a current event.

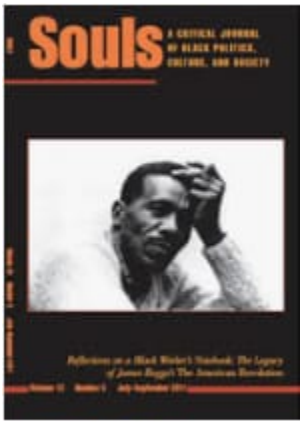
Magazine Articles



While news articles and social media tend to concentrate on what happened, how it happened, who it happened to, and where it happened, magazine articles are more about understanding why something happened, usually with the benefit of at least a little hindsight.

Writers of magazine articles also fall into the journalist category and rely heavily on investigation and interviews for research. Fact-checking in magazine articles tends to be more accurate because magazines publish less frequently than news outlets and have more time to get facts right. Depending on the focus of the magazine, articles may cover current events or just items of general interest to the intended audience. The language may be more emotional or dramatic than the factual tone of news articles, but the articles are written at a similar reading level so as to appeal to the widest audience possible. A magazine article is considered a popular source rather than a scholarly one, which gives it less weight in an academic research context, but doesn't take away the value of these sources.

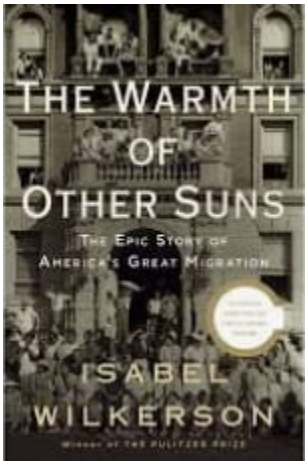
Scholarly Articles



Scholarly articles are written by and for experts and scholars in a field and generally describe formal research studies or experiments conducted to provide new insight on a topic rather than reporting current events or items of general interest. You may have heard the term “peer review” in relation to scholarly articles. This means that before an article is published, it undergoes a review process in order to confirm that the information is accurate and the research it discusses is valid. This process adds a level of credibility to the article that you would not find in a magazine or news article.

Scholarly articles tend to be long and feature specialized language that is not easily understood by someone who does not already have some level of expertise on the topic. Though they may not be as easy to use, they carry a lot of weight in a research context (academic or otherwise), especially if you are working in a field related to science or technology. These sources will give you information to build on in your own original research.

Books



Books have been a staple of the research process since Gutenberg invented the printing press because a topic can be covered in more depth in a book than in most other types of sources. Also, the conventional wisdom for books is that anyone can write one, but only the best ones get published. This is becoming less true as books are published in a wider variety of formats and via a wider variety of venues than in previous eras, which is something to be aware of when using a book for research purposes. For now, the editing process for formally published books is still in place and research in the humanities, which includes topics such as literature and history, continues to be published primarily in this format.

Choosing Sources

When choosing a source for your research, what criteria do you usually use? Gauging whether the source relates to your topic at all is probably one. How high up it appears on the results list when you search may be another. Beyond that, you may base your

decision at least partly on how easy it is to access.

These are all important criteria, to varying degrees, but there are other criteria you should keep in mind when deciding if a source will be useful to your research.

Quality



Scholarly journals and books are traditionally considered to be higher quality information sources because they have gone through a more thorough editing process that ensures the quality of their content. Generally, you also pay more to access these sources or may have to rely on a library or university to pay for access for you. Information on the Internet can also be of a high quality but there is less of a quality assurance process in place for much of that information. In the current climate, the highest quality information, even on the Internet, often requires a subscription or other form of payment for access.

Clues to a source's level of quality are closely related to thinking about how the source was produced, including what format it was published in and whether it is likely to have gone through a formal editing process prior to publication.

Accuracy



A source is accurate if the information it contains is correct. Sometimes it's easy to tell when a piece of information is simply wrong, especially if you have some prior knowledge of the subject. But if you're less familiar with the subject, inaccuracies can be harder to detect, especially when they come in subtler forms such as exaggerations or inconsistencies.

To determine whether a source is accurate, you need to look more deeply at the content of the source, including where the information in the source comes from and what evidence the author uses to support their views and conclusions. It also helps to

compare your source against another source. A reader of *Our Virginia* may not have reason to believe the information the author cites from the Sons of Confederate Veterans website is inaccurate, but if they compared the book against another source, the inconsistencies might become more apparent.

Relevance



Relevance has to do with deciding whether the source actually relates to your topic and, if it does, how closely it relates. Some sources may be an exact match; for others, you may need to consider a particular angle or context before you can tell whether the source applies to your topic. When searching for relevant sources, you should keep an open mind—but not too open. Don't pick something that's not really related just because it's on the first page or two of results or because it sounds good.

You can assess the relevance of a source by comparing it against your research topic or research question. Keep in mind that the source may not need to match on all points, but it should match on enough points to be usable for your research beyond simply satisfying a requirement for an assignment.

Bias



An example of bias is when someone expresses a view that is one-sided without much consideration for information that might negate what they believe. Bias is most prevalent in sources that cover controversial issues where the author may attempt to persuade their readers to one side of the issue without giving fair consideration to the other side of things. If the research topic you are using has ever been the cause of heated debate, you will need to be especially watchful for any bias in the sources you find.

Bias can be difficult to detect, particularly when we are looking at persuasive sources that we want to agree with. If you want to believe something is true, chances are you'll side with your own internal bias without consideration for whether a source exhibits bias. When deciding whether there is bias in a source, look for dramatic language and images, poorly supported evidence against an opposing viewpoint, or a strong leaning in one direction.

Reputation



Is the author of the source you have found a professor at a university or a self-published blogger? If the author is a professor, are they respected in their field or is their work heavily challenged? What about the publication itself? Is it held in high regard or relatively unknown? Digging a little deeper to find out what you can about the reputation of both the author and the publication can go a long way toward deciding whether a source is valuable.

You can investigate the reputation of an author by looking at any biographical information that is available as part of the source. Looking to see what else the author has published and whether this information has positive reviews is also important in establishing whether the author has a good reputation. The reputation of a publication can also be investigated through reviews, word-of-mouth by professionals in the field, or online databases that keep track of statistics related to a journal's credibility.

Credibility



Credibility has to do with the believability or trustworthiness of a source based on evidence such as information about the author, the reputation of the publication, and how well-formatted the source is. How likely would you be to use a source that was written by someone with no expertise on a topic or a source that appeared in a publication that was known for featuring low quality information? What if the source was riddled with spelling and formatting errors? Looking at sources like these should inspire

more caution.

Objectively, credibility can be determined by taking into account all of the other criteria discussed for evaluating a source. Knowing that some types of sources, such as scholarly journals, are generally considered more credible than others, such as self-published websites, may also help. Subjectively, deciding whether a source is

credible may come down to a gut feeling. If something about a source doesn't sit well with you, you may decide to pass it over.

Evaluating Your Findings

In the case of *Our Virginia*, the author used a biased source as part of her research and the inaccurate information she got from that source affected the quality of her own work. Likewise, if anyone had used her book as part of their research, it would have set off a chain reaction, since whatever information they cited from *Our Virginia* would naturally have to be called into question, possibly diminishing the value of their own conclusions.

Evaluating the sources you use for quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, and credibility is a good first step in making sure this doesn't happen, but have you ever thought about evaluating the sources used by your own sources? This takes extra time, but looking at the reference list, bibliography, or notes section of any source you use to gauge the quality of the research done by the author of that source can be an important extra step.

The 5 Ws of Source Evaluation

The five Ws refer to five W questions. You've probably explored these W questions in other classes - but here, we'll apply them to source evaluation.

The beauty of the who, what, when, where, and why questions of information evaluation is that they can be applied to any source. They help you determine whether a source is relevant (meets your information need) and credible (provides reliable, accurate information). Relevant, credible sources are the foundations for strong research papers. Here's what to ask when you're looking at a possible source:

1. **Who** is the author of the source? Who published the source? Are they experts?
2. **What** is the purpose of the information source?
3. **When** was the source created? Has it been updated?
4. **Where** can I verify the information?
5. **Why** would I use this source instead of another one?

Let's take a deep dive into the Ws to see how to apply these questions effectively when looking at sources.

Who & What

Who

Who is the author of the source? Who published the source? Are they experts?



You should explore the “who” for every source you’re considering (examples: book, website, article, etc.). Look for author names and credentials (examples: job title or degrees). Look for professional connections that might be notable, such as membership in an organization or employment with an institution.

The who also applies to publishing. Who is responsible for publishing the source? Was it an individual posting on a personal blog? Or was it a book published by a university? The publisher can provide clues about the quality of the source and what kind of review process it’s gone through before it was released to the public.

Where to find information about the author/publisher:



Photo by Jon Collier CC 2.0

- **Books:** Look inside the book cover or at the end of the book for a biography of the author. Check the title page or OneSearch record for publisher information.
- **Newspapers/Magazines/Journals:** Look at the top or bottom of an article for an author’s name and credentials (like their level of education), or information about where they work. Check the top of the page or OneSearch record for the name of the publication.
- **Websites:** Look for hyperlinks on authors’ names, which often link to short biographies. Look at the top or bottom of the page for an “About” section for publisher information. Don’t assume that the webmaster is also the author of the website’s content.

- **Films:** Look at the opening or closing credits for writer, director, and performers. For YouTube content, take a look at the channel and look for links to external pages with more information.

For all of these sources, it's not enough to simply identify the author or publisher - you need to use that information to establish credibility. Questions you might ask yourself:

- Has the author studied and written a lot about the topic, making them an expert?
- Has the author's life and experiences given them a unique perspective? Consider the fact that there may be different types of experts for any given topic, and the expertise you seek might differ based on the purpose of your research or how you plan to use that particular source.
- Is the publisher well-respected?

If you can't find answers to these questions inside the source, Google the author/publisher to find any related news, credentials, or affiliations.

What

What is the purpose of the information source?

People can have lots of reasons for creating and sharing information. They may want to use that information to sell you something, to persuade you, to share research findings, to inform or entertain you. This purpose may be obvious or it may be hidden.

For example, the purpose of a well-respected newspaper like the *New York Times* is to report on current events in a variety of spheres (politics, culture, sports, etc.), and share informed opinions with the public. An academic journal like the *Journal of the American Medical Association* is designed to share original research and scholarly communication with a professional community. A website promoting tourism in a particular city will provide information portraying that place in the best possible light and carry glowing reviews and advertisements for local restaurants, hotels, and other businesses.

Your job as a researcher is to look at the source, read the language, observe the layout and context, and try to determine the source's purpose.

When

When was the source created? Has it been updated?



Look for a date of publication or creation as you are selecting sources. Check to see if the source has been updated recently. We use the term currency to describe how up-to-date and timely an information source is. If you can't find a date of publication, look for clues in the text to figure out if the source is old. Old sources might have broken links or might refer to old news or facts.

When evaluating for currency, keep in mind that the ideal date of publication might vary depending on your topic and on the type of source you are using.

Up-to-date information is critical when you research rapidly-changing topics such as scientific information (including medical topics) and technological advancements. However, when you are researching long-standing social or political issues, or topics in history, humanities, and social sciences, the age of sources may not be as important. In these fields, interpretations change over time, but more slowly. These topics often need a balance of older and newer sources. Older sources may help you understand the historical context and reasons why we have current problems. Newer sources may describe recent events and developments related to the issue.

For sources that provide an overview or background information (e.g. encyclopedias) the facts typically remain relevant for decades.

This short video can help you reinforce the things to look for when evaluating "When."

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

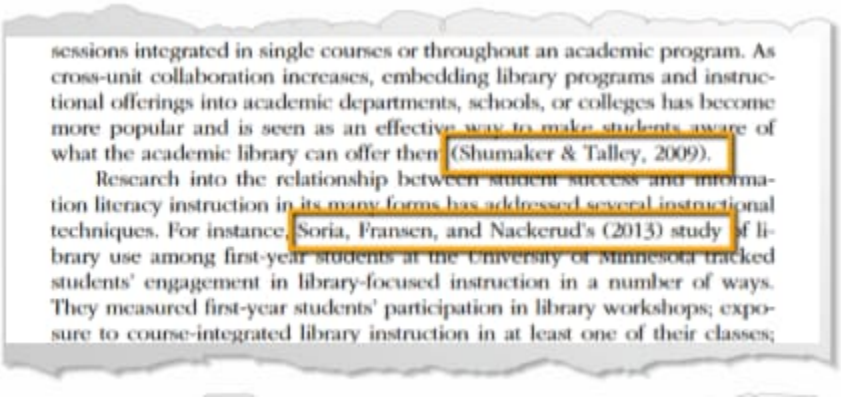
View this YouTube Video online

Where

Where can I verify the information?

It may seem obvious, but when you're selecting sources for a research assignment you want to gather credible information. How can you tell if something is credible and accurate? This is the "Where" - Where can the information be verified? Look for the following clues inside the source:

Source citations:



sessions integrated in single courses or throughout an academic program. As cross-unit collaboration increases, embedding library programs and instructional offerings into academic departments, schools, or colleges has become more popular and is seen as an effective way to make students aware of what the academic library can offer them (Shumaker & Talley, 2009).

Research into the relationship between student success and information literacy instruction in its many forms has addressed several instructional techniques. For instance, Soria, Fransen, and Nackerud's (2013) study of library use among first-year students at the University of Minnesota tracked students' engagement in library-focused instruction in a number of ways. They measured first-year students' participation in library workshops; exposure to course-integrated library instruction in at least one of their classes;

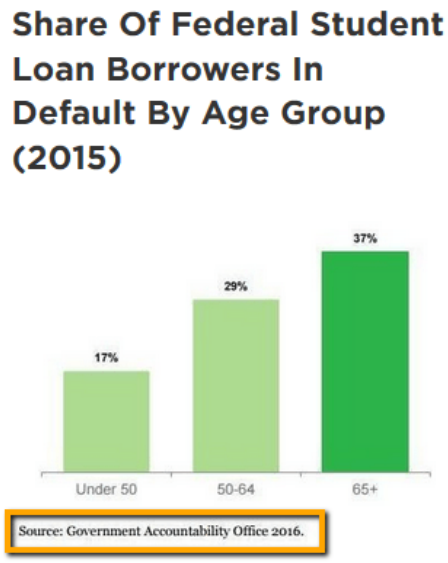
You are asked to cite sources in your research assignments, and your instructors are probably pretty critical if you don't do it up to their standards. So turn that idea around. You should be just as critical of the sources you're using, and make sure authors are telling you where they got their information and how they came to their conclusions.

Just like you, professionals and experts also research, read, and cite from others. When a source includes citations, it's a clue that the source you are reading is based on more than just one person's knowledge or opinions.

Citations can be formal (e.g. list of references or endnotes) and include all the details of consulted sources, or they can be informal with a good in-text citation. The best in-text citations give you enough detail to allow you to find the original source (e.g. names and publishers of research studies or hyperlinks to original sources).

But the mere fact that a source includes citations doesn't automatically mean it's credible. Take a look at who the author is quoting or referencing and evaluate their authority on the topic.

Use of data as evidence:



Data can be a powerful tool to back up claims, persuade, or illustrate a point. Writers often include statistics, charts, graphs, and other forms of evidence to support their arguments or findings. As a savvy researcher, it's important to look carefully at data and ask questions including:

- How was the data gathered?
- Who gathered the data and is there any evidence of bias or conflicts of interest in the data collection? (e.g. an oil company who funded research showing few emission-related pollutants in the environment).
- Is there sufficient data to support the claims the author is making?
- Is the author "cherry-picking" facts that support their opinions or drawing conclusions that aren't proven by the data collected?

Agreement among experts:

Another clue for accuracy is whether experts generally agree with the information presented in a source. There will always be hot-button issues like gun violence or immigration about which there is controversy. Even though experts might disagree about the correct solutions or policies, there will be clustering or agreement on certain ideas. If you come across a source that goes against everything you've read or know about a topic, apply the 5 Ws to evaluate its credibility.

Peer Reviewed Journals:

Peer-reviewed or refereed sources are articles in academic journals that have undergone an intensive screening process. The articles have been reviewed by a panel of experts in that subject area before they are published. The journal appoints this peer review panel and asks them to look for specific criteria in each article including quality of research, additions to the field of study, and making sure the research abides by the journal's high standards.

Why

Why would I use this source instead of another one?

Your final evaluation task is to decide whether the source provides relevant information that helps you answer your research question. Keep in mind that you'll select several sources for your research assignment, and each source should serve a specific purpose.

One source might give you background information to help you understand and focus your topic. Other sources might provide specific evidence in the form of research studies to back up claims you're making. A different source might tell the personal story of someone who has lived and experienced the focus of your topic. Notice that each source has a different purpose and provides a different type of information. By using all these sources in your research paper, you're able to discuss history, bring in credible evidence, and show the personal side of this issue. The paper will be well-rounded and thorough.

Here are some factors to look at when thinking about relevancy and the reasons why you would use a source.:

Scope:

Scope refers to the amount of information and focus of the source. Think of a telescope. Is the source zoomed in to examine an individual or single element of your topic, or is the source zoomed out to look at the big picture examining the entire topic and the background, history, or other surrounding issues? Is the source short or long? There's certainly more information in a 300-page book than in a 2-paragraph article.

Perspective:

When preparing a research paper, it can be helpful to select sources that represent different perspectives on an issue. Perspective describes the point of view of the source. Is the source providing an expert's opinion on an issue, an interview with a victim or survivor of an event, or a researcher's view based on a new study they completed?

For a controversial issue, look for sources that agree with your position on the issue, and look for a few sources that oppose your position. The best persuasive arguments have good evidence to back up claims, while still acknowledging opposing views on an issue.

Now that we've covered all 5 Ws, we can put our evaluation skills together to select the best sources. Measure each source you encounter using the 5 W questions (Who, What, When, Where, Why), and then compare one source against another to select the most relevant and credible information for your topic. Remember that using credible and relevant information will help you be a thorough, thoughtful, and accurate researcher.

Strategic Searching

The key to finding relevant and credible sources related to your topic is sometimes just as simple as searching in the right place. Keep in mind that you'll have an easier time finding certain types of information using different search tools. Let's look briefly at the differences between starting your search at Google (or any other search engine) versus starting at your college library using a library database.

	Types of Sources	Access	Authority	Relevance
Google	websites, statistics, images, social media, shopping, and more	Published content like books, journal articles, and news often require payment to access	Can range from very good to very bad and can be difficult to verify.	Results are based on search terms and popularity of links. Some searches include irrelevant or duplicate links.

	Types of Sources	Access	Authority	Relevance
Library Database	books, ebooks, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, films, and more	All resources are paid for by the college and provided to students for **FREE**.	Authority is easier to confirm. Many sources are published through formal processes including editing before release. Database contains filters to distinguish scholarly material, including limiting results to peer-reviewed journals.	Relevancy is controlled by using keywords. Users can focus search with limiters (e.g. subject, source type, etc.). Duplicate results are generally removed.

Knowing When to Stop

For some researchers, the process of searching for and evaluating sources is a highly enjoyable, rewarding part of doing research. For others, it's a necessary evil on the way to constructing their own ideas and sharing their own conclusions. Whichever end of the spectrum you most closely identify with, here are a few ideas about the ever-important skill of knowing when to stop.

You've satisfied the requirements for the assignment and/or your curiosity on the topic

If you're doing research as part of a course assignment, chances are you've been given a required number of sources. Novice researchers may find this number useful to understand how much research is considered appropriate for a particular topic. However, a common mistake is to focus more on the number of sources than on the quality of those sources. Meeting that magic number is great, but not if the sources used are low quality or otherwise inappropriate for the level of research being done.

You have a deadline looming

Nothing better inspires forward motion in a research project than having to meet a deadline, whether it's set by a professor, an advisor, a publisher, or yourself. Time management skills are especially useful, but since research is a cyclical process that sometimes circles back on itself when you discover new knowledge or change direction, planning things out in minute detail may not work. Leaving yourself enough time to follow the twists and turns of the research and writing process goes a long way toward getting your work in when it's expected.

You need to change your topic

You've been searching for information on your topic for a while now. Every search seems to come up empty or full of irrelevant information. You've brought your case to a research expert, like a librarian, who has given advice on how to adjust your search or how to find potential sources you may have previously dismissed. Still nothing. It could be that your topic is too specific or that it covers something that's too new, like a current event that hasn't made it far enough in the information cycle yet. Whatever the reason, if you've exhausted every available avenue and there truly is no information on your topic of interest, this may be a sign that you need to stop what you're doing and change your topic.

You're getting overwhelmed

The opposite of not finding enough information on your topic is finding too much. You want to collect it all, read through it all, and evaluate it all to make sure you have exactly what you need. But now you're running out of room on your flash drive, your Dropbox account is getting full, and you don't know how you're going to sort through it all and look for more. The solution: stop looking. Go through what you have. If you find what you need in what you already have, great! If not, you can always keep looking. You don't need to find everything in the first pass. There is plenty of opportunity to do more if more is needed!

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0):

Bond, Emily. (2018). *Evaluate the date* [Video file]. https://youtu.be/jAfGCfWJfgo

Evaluate: Assessing your research process & findings. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/evaluate-assessing-your-research-process-and-findings/

Los Rios Libraries. (2020). Evaluating and selecting sources. *Los Rios libraries information literacy tutorials*. https://lor.instructure.com/resources/44fe428e10b347bea9892a63482f55fd?shared

This page titled 9.4: Evaluating Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 4: Evaluating Sources by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.5: Critical Reading

Reading for Understanding

Reading is a much harder skill to master than we think, and many instructors take this for granted when assigning academic material. We forget how hard it is to read and actually understand information that might be completely new to us.

The next bit of reading is an excerpt from the book, *Reading for understanding: How reading apprenticeship improves disciplinary learning in secondary and college classrooms*. I included it here because it really defines reading and how learning to read critically will help you become a better researcher.

Read: Excerpt from chapter 2: The Reading Apprenticeship Framework

Read, Re-read, Read Again

Reading critically takes skill and time. In order to really grasp hard material, it's recommended that you read it at least three times:

1. **Read for an Overview** - Read quickly, to get a general picture of the writer's purpose (central arguments), methods, and conclusions. The author is not going to explicitly spell everything out for you - it's up to you to figure out what the information is about.
2. **Read for Understanding** - Once you have a general idea, read a second time more carefully to gain a critical, thoughtful understanding of the key points. Think about what the author is presenting - do they provide evidence and do you find the arguments convincing? (Use some of your evaluation skills here.)
3. **Read for Note Taking and Summary** - As you read a third time, begin to take brief notes about arguments, evidence, conclusions, or questions you still have.

Identifying Key Points and Arguments

Step one is relatively easy - this is how we read most everything. We skim through an article or online post to get the general meaning and an overview. Steps two and three become more difficult. When looking for key points and arguments, you are trying to determine how (or even if) you will use the source for your own research.

There are some places that commonly contain this type of information so these sections might be good places to start.

Abstract

If it's an academic journal article, it often includes an abstract. this is a one to two paragraph summary of the article that might include a research question, information on research subjects, and a very quick summary of findings. It is an excellent place to look to determine whether the research article is going to help you further your arguments.

Introduction

The purpose of the introduction to any piece that has one is to give information about what the reader can expect from the source as a whole. There are different types of introductions, including forewords and prefaces that may be written by the author of the book or by someone else with knowledge of the subject. Introductory sections can include background information on why the topic was chosen, background on the author's interest in the topic, context pertaining to why the topic is important, or the lens through which the topic will be explored. Knowing this information before diving in to the body of the work will help you understand the author's approach to the topic and how it might relate to the approach you are taking in your own research.

Table of Contents

Most of the time, if your source is a book or an entire website, it will be divided into sections that each cover a particular aspect of the overall topic. It may be necessary to read through all of these sections in order to get a “big picture” understanding of the information being discussed or it may be better to concentrate only on the areas that relate most closely to your own research. Looking over the table of contents or menu will help you decide whether you need the whole source or only pieces of it.

List of References

If the source you’re using is research-based, it should have a list of references that usually appears at the end of the document. Reviewing these references will give you a better idea of the kind of work the author put into their own research. Did they put as much work into evaluating their sources as you are? Can you tell from the citations if the sources used were credible? When were they published? Do they represent a fair balance of perspectives or do they all support a limited point of view? What information does the author use from these sources and in what way does he or she use that information? Use your own research skills to spy on the research habits of others to help you evaluate the source.

Taking Notes about a Text

Note taking is sometimes referred to as annotating. Annotating simply means to take notes about the text you are reading. Some people hand-write directly on the document, some people hand-write separate notes on another piece of paper or in a notebook, and some people type up notes - you should do what feels best to you. There is research that shows that hand-writing notes with a good old fashioned paper and pen will help you retain more information than note taking on a computer (Goodwin, 2018).

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).
- **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.

In this video, the instructor is addressing an English class as she explains how to annotate a text. Many of the tips and suggestions

she gives can apply to any type of critical reading for research. Take note of the suggestions she offers when annotating (underlining, highlighting, making notes in the margins). You'll be asked to annotate a source this week so you should decide what methods are most effective for you.

Click to access the link to open the video in a new tab.

Guiding Questions

As you take notes - you should be having a conversation with the text - this is called "talking to the text" and it will help you better understand what you're reading. This is also a time to pick out those pieces of the source that are going to help answer your research question or support your thesis.

Reading critically means you are analyzing the logic of the article and/or chapter or section of a book. We'll be getting more into logical arguments next week. For now, here are some questions or prompts you can use to analyze logic while talking to the text:

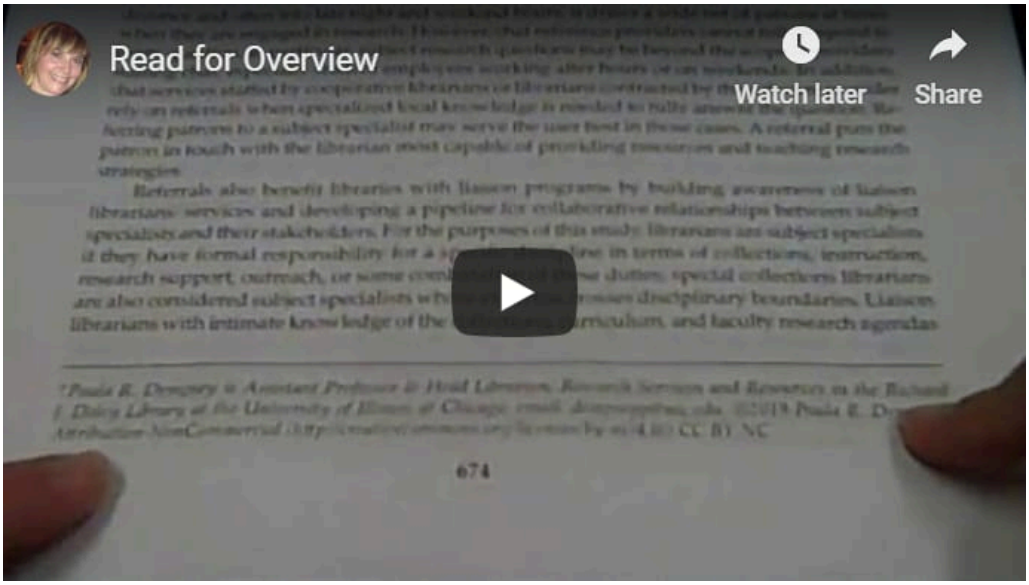
1. What is the main purpose of this article or chapter/section?
2. What are the key questions the author is addressing?
3. What is the most important information in this article or chapter/section and how can I use this to support my research and thesis?
4. What are the main conclusions in this article or chapter/section? Can I use them to support my thesis?

In this series of videos, I go through some of the steps I've outlined in the reading this week to give you an example of how one might "talk to the text."

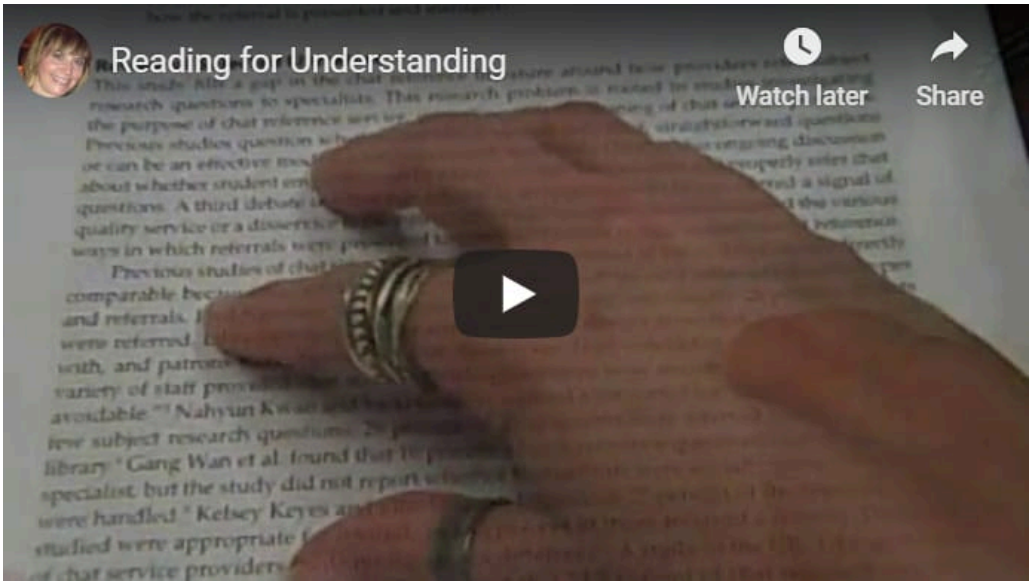
You will be challenged this week to practice "talking to the text" with one of your sources. You'll share your findings with me in an assignment and with your small-group.

Video One: Reading for an Overview

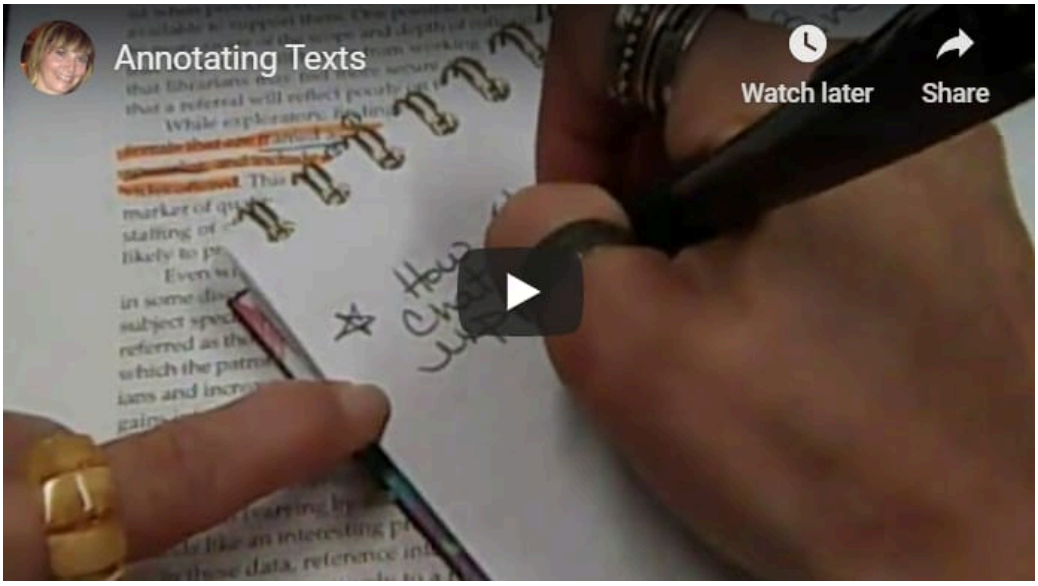
Click on the image to access the link to open the video in a new tab.



Video Two: Reading for Understanding



Video Three: Reading to Annotate (Taking Notes)



Another Example of Talking to the Text

Zoe Fisher is a librarian at Pierce College in Washington. She is using a popular-type source (magazine article) to model talking to the text using the reader apprenticeship model.

All of the notes she makes could potentially become ideas she might use and pull out in a research assignment or other writing project.

If you're curious, the article she is reading and talking to is: Jabr, F. (2013). Why the Brain Prefers Paper. *Scientific American, 309*(5), 48.

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Cranfill, K. (2014). *Annotating text* [Video file]. https://youtu.be/JZXgr7_3Kw4 [NOT LICENSED UNDER CC - FREELY ACCESSIBLE ON YOUTUBE]

Dalsheim, J. (2017). *Tips for reading.* https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fTl674DT4QmjDLnYGeabJEi63I3JzS5MDqbgg0Oz21c/edit

Evaluate: Assessing your research process & findings. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide.* Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/evaluate-assessing-your-research-process-and-findings/

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C. & Murphy, L. (2012). *Reading for understanding: How reading apprenticeship improves disciplinary learning in secondary and college classrooms,* 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass. [NOT LICENSED UNDER CC - USED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE PUBLISHER]

Zemilansky, P. (2016). Research and critical reading. J. Kepka (Ed.) In *Oregon writes open writing text.* https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/oregonwrites/

References

Goodwin, B. (2018). The magic of writing stuff down: Is the pen mightier than the laptop? *Educational Leadership, 75*(7), 78-79. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx

Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2016). *The miniature guide to critical thinking concepts and tools,* 7th ed. Foundation for Critical Thinking.

This page titled 9.5: Critical Reading is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 5: Critical Reading by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.6: Persuasive Appeals

Rhetorical Analysis and the Rhetorical Triangle

A rhetorical analysis refers to the process of analyzing a text, source, or artifact. It may be in written form (like your sources) or some other form of communication like a speech. The goal of a rhetorical analysis is to take into consideration the purpose, audience, and the occasion (or the context in which the text will be written or read).

The term rhetoric is often connected to argument or criticism, and often carries a negative connotation (e.g., "The political rhetoric is so divisive."). But rhetoric is really a neutral term. It's the effort to use rhetorical appeals to influence an audience and achieve a certain set of purposes and outcomes.

The principles Aristotle laid out in his Rhetoric nearly 2,500 years ago still form the foundation of much of our contemporary practice of argument. Aristotle argued that rhetoric was present in every situation. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Everything's an argument"? - This refers to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, which he defined as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle). The rhetorical situation Aristotle argued was present in any piece of communication is often illustrated with a triangle to suggest the interdependent relationships among its three elements:

- Ethos or the voice of the speaker or writer and how they establish their credibility
- Pathos or the audience and the emotional connection that's established with the intended listeners or readers
- Logos or the message and how logically it is conveyed



If each corner of the triangle is represented by one of the three elements of the rhetorical situation, then each side of the triangle depicts a particular relationship between two elements:

- Tone - The connection established between the speaker and the audience.
- Attitude - The orientation of the speaker toward the message; the purpose of the message
- Reception - The manner in which the audience receives the message conveyed

Rhetorical Appeals

In this section, we'll focus on how the rhetorical triangle can be used in service of argumentation, especially through the balanced use of ethical, logical, and emotional appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos, respectively. In the rhetorical triangle, you'll note that each appeal has been placed next to the corner of the triangle with which it is most closely associated:

- Ethos - Appeals to the audience's ethics. Ethos relies on the credibility, reputation, and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer (most closely associated with the voice).
- Logos - Appeals to the audience's logic. Logos relies on reason, logic, and facts in the argument (most closely associated with the message).
- Pathos - Appeals to emotion. Pathos relies on stirring the emotions (sympathy, anger, pride, etc.) of the listeners or readers (most closely associated with the audience).

Each of these appeals relies on a certain type of evidence: logical, emotional, or ethical. Based on your audience and purpose, you have to decide what combination of techniques will work best as you present your case. Some of the best arguments use a combination of all three.

The Appeal to Ethics (Ethos)

Ethos is an appeal to the audiences' ethics and relies on the credibility of the author. When reading a source, you should ask yourself, "Why should I trust you?" In other words, "How has the author established their credibility?" The same holds true when you are writing. You want to establish reasons for your audience to trust you.

For example, a college professor who places a college logo on a website gains some immediate credibility from being associated with the college. An advertisement for tennis shoes using a well-known athlete gains some credibility. You might create an ethical appeal in an essay on solving a campus problem by noting that you are serving in student government.

Three of the best ways to demonstrate ethos are:

- By personal experience: Although your lived experience might not set hard and-fast rules about the world, it is worth noting that you may be an expert on certain facets of your life. For instance, a student who has played rugby for fifteen years of their life is in many ways an authority on the sport.
- By education or other certifications: Professional achievements demonstrate ethos by revealing status in a certain field or discipline.
- By citing other experts: The common expression is “Stand on the shoulders of giants.” This is actually the tag line of Google Scholar. You can develop ethos by pointing to other people with authority and saying, “Look, this smart/experienced/qualified/important person agrees with me.”

As a student, you might not have enough experience to persuade your audience that you're an expert. In these cases, you can establish your credibility by using reliable sources and acknowledging those who've helped you learn more about the topic (citing your sources). The appeal to ethics can add an important component to your argument, but keep in mind that ethos is only as strong as the credibility of the association being made. In other words, if you're not citing very good sources, then you're harming your ethical appeal to the audience.

The Appeal to Logic (Logos)

Logos refers to an appeal to the audience's logical reasoning. Logos will often employ statistics, data, or other quantitative facts to demonstrate the validity of an argument. For example, in an essay proposing that participating in high school athletics helps students develop into more successful students, you could show graphs comparing the grades of athletes and non-athletes, as well as high school graduation rates and post–high school education enrollment. These statistics would support your points in a logical way and would probably work well with a school board that is considering cutting a sports program.

Keep in mind that stating a fact or a statistics does not alone constitute logos.You need to make sure your interpretation of the logic is sound. If it's not, it's described as a logical fallacy. We'll explore this further in the next page of reading.

The Appeal to Emotions (Pathos)

The goal of an emotional appeal is to garner sympathy, develop anger, instill pride, inspire happiness, or trigger other emotions. When authors choose this method, their goal is for the audience to react emotionally regardless of what they might think logically.

There are two especially effective techniques for cultivating pathos:

- Make the audience aware of the issue’s relevance to them specifically. “How would you feel if this happened to you? What

are we to do about this issue?"
- Tell stories. A story about one person or one community can have a deeper impact than broad, impersonal data or abstract, hypothetical statements. Consider the difference between these two appeals:
  - About 1.5 million pets are euthanized each year
  - Scooter, an energetic and loving former service dog with curly brown hair like a Brillo pad, was put down yesterday.
  - Both are impactful, but the latter is more memorable and more specific.

Unfortunately, emotional appeals are also often used unethically to sway opinions without solid reasoning.

Whether your argument relies primarily on ethos, logos, pathos, or a combination of these appeals, plan to make your case with your entire arsenal of facts, statistics, examples, anecdotes, illustrations, figurative language, quotations, expert opinions, discountable opposing views, and common ground with the audience. Carefully choosing these supporting details will control the tone of your writing as well as the success of your argument.

How to Use Rhetoric to Get What You Want

This video by Camille Langston from from TED-Ed gives you another quick overview of rhetorical appeals.



Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

There are two basic approaches to how you believe something is true. These are called inductive and deductive reasoning.

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning presents facts and then wraps them up with a general conclusion. For instance, you visit your local grocery store daily to pick up necessary items. You notice that on Friday, two weeks ago, all the clerks in the store were wearing football jerseys. Again, last Friday, the clerks wore their football jerseys. Today, also a Friday, they're wearing them again. From just these observations, you can conclude that on all Fridays, these supermarket employees will wear football jerseys to support their local team. This type of pattern recognition, leading to a conclusion, is known as inductive reasoning.

The Power of Inductive Reasoning

You have been employing inductive reasoning for a very long time. Inductive reasoning is based on your ability to recognize meaningful patterns and connections. By taking into account both examples and your understanding of how the world works, induction allows you to conclude that something is likely to be true. By using induction, you move from specific data to a generalization that tries to capture what the data "mean."

Imagine that you ate a dish of strawberries and soon afterward your lips swelled. Now imagine that a few weeks later you ate strawberries and soon afterwards your lips again became swollen. The following month, you ate yet another dish of strawberries, and you had the same reaction as formerly. You are aware that swollen lips can be a sign of an allergy to strawberries. Using induction, you conclude that, more likely than not, you are allergic to strawberries.

- **Data:** After I ate strawberries, my lips swelled (1st time).
- **Data:** After I ate strawberries, my lips swelled (2nd time).
- **Data:** After I ate strawberries, my lips swelled (3rd time).
- **Additional Information:** Swollen lips after eating strawberries may be a sign of an allergy.
- **Conclusion:** Likely I am allergic to strawberries.

The results of inductive thinking can be skewed if relevant data are overlooked. In the previous example, inductive reasoning was used to conclude that you are likely allergic to strawberries after suffering multiple instances of lips swelling after eating them. Would you be as confident in your conclusion if you were eating strawberry shortcake on each of those occasions? Is it reasonable to assume that the allergic reaction might be due to another ingredient besides strawberries?

This example illustrates that inductive reasoning must be used with care. When evaluating an inductive argument, consider

- the amount of the data,
- the quality of the data,
- the existence of additional data,
- the relevance of necessary additional information, and
- the existence of additional possible explanations.

Inductive reasoning can never lead to absolute certainty. Instead, induction allows you to say that, given the examples provided for support, the claim more likely than not is true. Because of the limitations of inductive reasoning, a conclusion will be more credible if multiple lines of reasoning are presented in its support.

Deductive Reasoning

Knowledge can also move the opposite direction. Deductive reasoning presents a generalization (think thesis statement), then provides supportive facts to back up that generalization.

Say that you read in the news about a tradition in a local grocery store, where employees wore football jerseys on Fridays to support the home team. This time, you're starting from the overall rule, and you would expect individual evidence to support this rule. Each time you visited the store on a Friday, you would expect the employees to wear jerseys. Such a case, of starting with the overall statement and then identifying examples that support it, is known as deductive reasoning.

The Power of Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning is built on two statements whose logical relationship should lead to a third statement that is an unquestionably correct conclusion. In other words, one fact plus one fact equal a third fact. Here's an example:

1. All raccoons are omnivores.
2. This animal is a raccoon.
3. This animal is an omnivore.

If the first statement is true (All raccoons are omnivores) and the second statement is true (This animal is a raccoon), then the conclusion (This animal is an omnivore) is unavoidable. If a group must have a certain quality, and an individual is a member of that group, then the individual must have that quality.

Going back to the very first example from the introduction, we could frame it this way:

1. Grocery store employees wear football jerseys on Fridays.
2. Today is Friday.
3. Grocery store employees will be wearing football jerseys today.

Unlike inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning allows for certainty only as long as the evidence is a true fact.

What this means is that inductive reasoning can often be hidden inside a deductive argument. That is, a generalization reached through inductive reasoning can be turned around and used as a starting “truth” for a deductive argument. Here's an example:

1. Most Labrador retrievers are friendly.
2. Kimber is a Labrador retriever.
3. Therefore, Kimber is friendly.

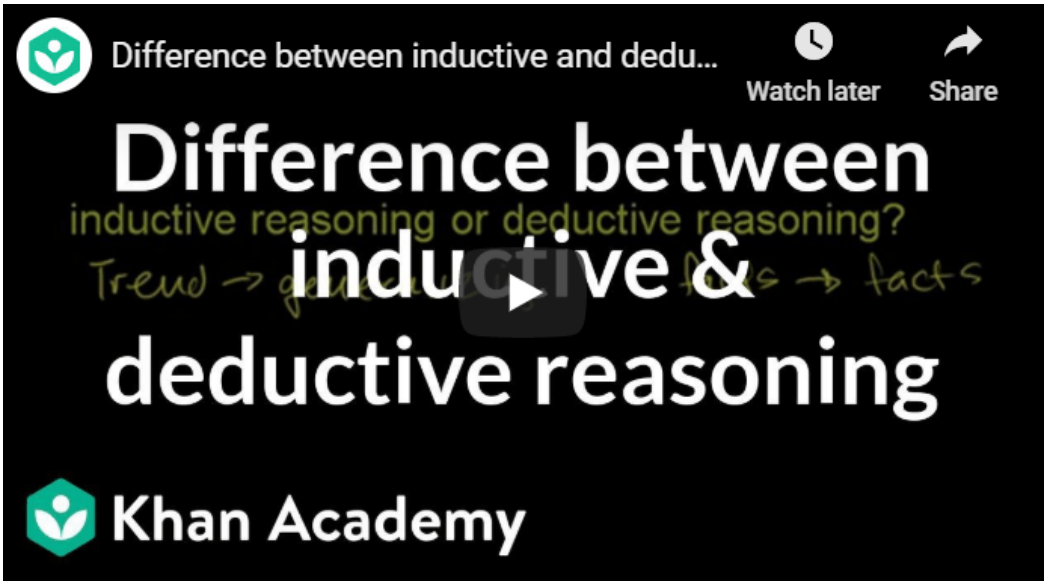
In this case we cannot know for certain that Kimber is a friendly Labrador retriever. The structure of the argument may look logical, but it is based on observations and ***generalizations*** rather than indisputable facts.

One way to test the accuracy of a premise is to apply the same questions asked of inductive arguments. As a recap, you should consider:

- the amount of the data,
- the quality of the data,
- the existence of additional data,
- the relevance of the additional data, and
- the existence of additional possible explanations.

Determine whether the starting claim is based upon a sample that is both representative and sufficiently large, and ask yourself whether all relevant factors have been taken into account in the analysis of data that leads to a generalization.

Here is a video that briefly explains the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning.



Logical, Emotional, or Ethical Fallacies

Rhetorical appeals used in argumentation have power. They can be used to motivate or to manipulate. When they are used irresponsibly, they lead to fallacies, which are misleading statements and constructions used in argumentation.

Fallacies are, at best, unintentional reasoning errors, and at worst, they are deliberate attempts to deceive. Fallacies are commonly used in advertising and politics, but they are not acceptable in academic arguments and won't serve you well in the workplace either. The following are some examples of three kinds of fallacies that abuse the power of logical, emotional, or ethical appeals (logos, pathos, or ethos).

Logical Fallacies	Definition	Examples
Begging the question (or circular reasoning)	The point is simply restated in different words as proof to support the point.	Of course animals have rights, just look at how they're being treated.
Either/or fallacy.	A situation is presented as a an "either/or" choice when in reality, there are more than just two options	Either I start college this fall or I work in a factory for the rest of my life.
Hasty generalization	A conclusion is reached with insufficient evidence.	Mrs. Dobson's Rottweiler bit a neighbor boy. All Rottweilers are violent dogs.
Red herring	The writer inserts an irrelevant detail into an argument to divert the reader's attention from the main issue.	My room might be a mess, but I got an A in math.
Straw man	The writer rebuts a competing claim by offering an exaggerated or oversimplified version of it.	Our campus is "dry" and doesn't allow alcohol. Obviously the administration is composed of a bunch of puritans who don't speak for the majority and can be ignored.

Emotional Fallacies	Definition	Examples
Flattery	The writer suggests that readers with certain positive traits would naturally agree with the writer's point.	You are a calm and collected person, so you can probably understand what I'm saying.
Group think (or group appeal).	The reader is encouraged to decide about an issue based on identification with a popular, high-status group	The varsity football players all bought some of our fundraising candy. Do you want to buy some?
Riding the bandwagon	The writer suggests that since "everyone" is doing something, the reader should do it too.	The hot thing today is to wear black socks with tennis shoes. You'll look really out of it if you wear those white socks.
Scare tactics (or veiled threats)	The writer uses frightening ideas to scare the readers into agreeing or believing something.	If the garbage collection rates are not increased, your garbage will likely start piling up.

Emotional Fallacies	Definition	Examples
Stereotyping	The writer uses a sweeping, general statement about a group of people in order to prove a point.	Women won't like this movie because it has too much action and violence. OR Men won't like this movie because it's about feelings and relationships.

Ethical Fallacies	Definition	Examples
Guilt by association	An adversary's credibility is attacked because the person has friends or relatives who possibly lack in credibility.	We do not want people like her teaching our kids. Her father is in prison for robbery.
Personal attack (or ad hominem)	An adversary's personal attributes are used to discredit his or her argument.	I don't care if the government hired her as an expert. If she doesn't know enough not to wear jeans to court, I don't trust her judgment about anything.
Poisoning the well	Negative information is shared about an adversary so others will later discredit his or her opinions.	I heard that he was charged with aggravated assault last year, and his rich parents got him off.
Scapegoating	A certain group or person is unfairly blamed for all sorts of problems.	Jake is such a terrible student government president; it is no wonder that it is raining today and our spring dance will be ruined.

Do your best to avoid using these examples of fallacious reasoning, and be alert to their use by others so that you aren't "tricked" into a line of unsound reasoning. Getting into the habit of reading academic, commercial, and political rhetoric carefully will enable you to see through manipulative, fallacious uses of verbal, written, and visual language. Being on guard for these fallacies will make you a more proficient college student, a smarter consumer, and a more careful voter, citizen, and member of your community.

Spotting Fallacies

It takes time and practice to be able to spot fallacies in arguments. This is a fun website you can use to help you think more critically and test your knowledge on spotting fallacies.



Rhetorical Theory of Reading

We got into critical reading last week. It's vital to use critical reading to understand a text and to spot rhetoric. You are constantly making meaning from texts. To understand this further, we're going to look at 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*. Brent's ideas do a good job demystifying critical reading's main claims.

Brent treats reading not only as a vehicle for transmitting information and knowledge, but also as a means of persuasion. 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 what's happening when you are reading critically. 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?

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 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 have been summarized from his book:

- Readers are guided by personal beliefs, assumptions, and pre-existing knowledge when interpreting texts. This is called information bias and we'll be exploring it further later in the course.
- 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.

Applied to research, 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.

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Abrams, S. (2018). Argumentation. In *EmpoWord: A student-centered anthology and handbook for college writers*, (pp. 201-241). https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=pdxopen

Inductive and deductive reasoning. (n.d.). *English composition I*. Lumen Learning. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/engcomp1-wmopen/chapter/text-inductive-reasoning/

Khan Academy. (2010). *Difference between inductive and deductive reasoning*. https://youtu.be/GEId0GonOZM [NOT LICENSED UNDER CC - FREELY ACCESSIBLE ON YOUTUBE]

Langston, C.A. (2016) How to use rhetoric to get what you want [Video]. https://youtu.be/3klMM9BkW5o [NOTE LICENSED UNDER CC- FREELY ACCESSIBLE ON YOUTUBE AND TED-ED]

Recognizing the rhetorical situation. (2012). *The writer's handbook, v.1*. https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/writers-handbook/s08-02-recognizing-the-rhetorical-sit.html NOTE: This title is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

Richardson, J. , Smith, A., Meaden, S. (2019). *Thou shalt not commit logical fallacies*. https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/ Note: authors do not specify CC license, but list Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommerical CC BY-NC

Zemilansky, P. (2016). Research writing and argument: All writing is an argument. J. Kepka (Ed.) In *Oregon writes open writing text*. https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/oregonwrites/

References

Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html

Brent, D. (1992). *Reading as rhetorical invention: Knowledge, persuasion, and the teaching of research-based writing*. National Council of Teachers of English.

This page titled 9.6: Persuasive Appeals is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6: Persuasive Appeals by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.7: USING AND ORGANIZING INFORMATION

9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details

9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description

This page titled 9.7: Using and Organizing Information is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 7: Using and Organizing Information by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details

The Scholarly Conversation

As a student you're participating in a scholarly conversation anytime you write a paper, complete a research project, or make a speech describing, arguing, or synthesizing information on a topic you've studied. In this conversation, you are *listening* to lots of different voices such as your professors, the authors of your textbooks, journalists reporting on an issue, and researchers who have performed studies or analyzed that issue.

Through your academic assignments, you're adding your voice to the discussion. Depending on the purpose of the assignment you may be:

- synthesizing and drawing connections between what others have said on an issue
- explaining your personal experiences related to the topic, and/or
- expressing your own opinions or conclusions about what the research shows.

For this scholarly conversation to be successful, you have to **approach your academic assignments with honesty,use information sources effectively**, and **give proper credit** to the other *voices* in the conversation through attribution and citation.

These terms - attribution and citation - are going to come up a lot over the next two weeks. Before moving on, here are some quick definitions of the terms:

- **Attribution** (noun): Crediting ideas, words, or works to a particular author, artist, or person.
- **Cite** (verb): To give information from a source as support or evidence in a research paper or project.
- **Citation** (noun): A note describing the original source of ideas, words, or works included in a research paper or project.

Manage Pillar

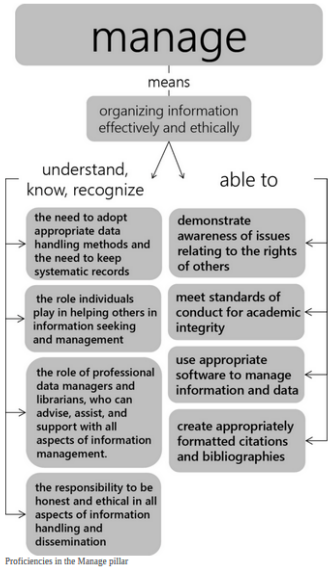
Being a part of the scholarly conversations means you know how to effectively use and organize information. This is where the Manage pillar comes in. It focuses on the need to use and organize information professionally and ethically. This means:

Individuals understand:

- Their responsibility to be honest in all aspects of information handling and dissemination (e.g. copyright, plagiarism, and intellectual property issues).
- The need to adopt appropriate data-handling methods.
- The role they play in helping others in information seeking and management.
- The need to keep systematic records.
- The importance of storing and sharing information and data ethically.
- The role of professionals, such as data managers and librarians, who can advise, assist, and support with all aspects of information management.

They are able to

- Use reference management software, if appropriate, to manage information.
- Cite printed and electronic sources using suitable referencing styles.
- Create appropriately formatted bibliographies.
- Demonstrate awareness of issues relating to the rights of others including ethics, data protection, copyright, plagiarism, and any other intellectual property issues.
- Meet standards of conduct for academic integrity.
- Use appropriate data management software and techniques to manage data.



Proficiencies in the Manage pillar

Scenario

In order to manage information and take part in a scholarly conversation, we often rely on the works of others. We are using information to help build our knowledge, form educated opinions, and create our own contributions.

So how should we handle this product of creativity (a.k.a information)? Let's think about a simple example: apple picking in the fall. It is a popular thing to do, especially in our Sierra foothills. Have you ever been to Apple Hill? People come to orchards, get bags or baskets, gather apples, and then line up to weigh them and pay. The farmers' hard work is being rewarded.

Now imagine a different situation. You worked hard to research and write a very good article that is being published in the college newsletter. You've discovered that your roommate has copied a couple of paragraphs and inserted them into one of her assignments because the topics were related. Was this fair? How were you rewarded for your hard work? Bottom line - she should not have used your intellectual capital without attribution to you. What she did was an act of plagiarism.

Once your ideas become tangible - meaning they're written down on paper, on a computer, on your phone, they become your intellectual personal property and you hold the copyright. This means that no one has the right to reproduce all or any part of it (i.e. copy it) without your permission. If your roommate decides to use some information from your article in her own paper, she should provide a citation. If she is using direct quotes from your article, again, she would need to put double quotes around your words and provide information about the author (you, in this instance) to avoid plagiarism.

There is a lot to learn about using information legally and ethically, copyright and plagiarism are just two aspects of intellectual property. This knowledge will empower you in your academic work and help you be successful.

Plagiarism Defined

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas in your academic work without giving credit to the original author. In college, the way we most often give credit is in the form of a citation. Plagiarism can include:

- Summarizing the ideas, statements of fact, or conclusions made by another without citing the source.
- Word-for-word copying (CTRL + V) of work written by someone else without quotation marks and/or a citation.
- Close or extended paraphrasing of another person's work without acknowledging the source. In other words, you've taken someone else's ideas and changed a few words here and there, but haven't acknowledged where you got the idea from.
- Using an image, video, or music without permission and/or proper attribution.

In the classroom (and in the world of publishing), documenting your information sources is the only way others can tell how thorough and careful you've been in researching your topic. If you don't tell readers where your information came from, they may think (and many do) that you either made up the information or "stole" it . Failing to cite your sources is plagiarism.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be intentional, meaning you knowingly copied the words of another person in your paper. Or it can be unintentional, meaning you weren't trying to pass off someone else's ideas as your own, but you didn't properly cite your sources. Unintentional plagiarism often happens when students don't know citation rules, fail to keep track of their research, or are rushing and/or disorganized when completing an assignment.

Scenario

Jackie was working on her 10-page research paper at the last minute. It was 3:30 am and her paper was due in class at 9:00 am. She finished the last sentence at 5:15 am, did a spellcheck and voila! Done! Groggy yet awake she went to class, turned in the paper and waited for her grade. She received an email from her professor that read, "There are some major issues with your research paper that I need to discuss with you. Please see me." Uh oh.

When she nervously went to see him, the professor told Jackie that she hadn't cited any of her sources, and because she included a lot of direct quotes in her paper, she was guilty of plagiarism. She received an F on her paper and may be referred to the school administration for academic dishonesty.

Academic Honesty

In your college courses, it's expected that you (and only you) will do the assigned work. By completing the assignments, papers, quizzes, and exams, you are showing that you have mastered the content of the course - meaning you have learned the information and gained the skills covered in that class. (Your grade shows how well you've done that.)

When you are dishonest in your academic work, either by cheating or plagiarizing another person's work, the learning process breaks down.

Plagiarism Detection

You should be aware that our Learning Management System (Canvas) includes a plagiarism detection tool called Vericite. If your instructor is using this tool, your papers and assignments could be compared to a large database of material to search for signs of matching text. If you have not quoted, paraphrased, or cited sources properly, you could be accused of academic dishonesty.

Consequences of Academic Dishonesty

There are big consequences for academic dishonesty. If you plagiarize or cheat at a Los Rios college, you could face one or more of these consequences:

- Receiving a failing grade on the assignment
- Receiving a lower overall grade in the class
- Failing the class altogether
- Being referred to the College's Disciplinary Officer and/or
- Being placed on disciplinary probation, suspension or even expulsion from the College.

Even if you are not ***caught*** cheating or plagiarizing, you are still damaging your opportunity to **learn** from the coursework.

Real World Scenario

Students often feel that they are being singled out in regard to plagiarism and academic dishonesty. But that is far from the case. There are numerous examples of scholars and other professionals who have been caught plagiarizing.

Take a look at these headlines...



Another example, with a dramatic outcome, is that of Eugene Tobin. He was the president of Hamilton College in New York State, when it was discovered that he had included plagiarized material in speeches he had given over the course of almost a decade. He resigned from his position as the head of this prestigious institution, admitting his guilt (Isserman, 2003). Other college presidents and administrators have also been caught violating academic trust. If you try a search using the terms *plagiarism* and *college president*, you may be dismayed at the number of results.

If you plagiarize in your career, you could face job penalties like firing or suspension, your reputation could be damaged, and you could even face lawsuits.

Clearly, plagiarism and cheating are things you want to avoid.

Plagiarism can be avoided when you learn to give proper credit through attribution and citation and when you learn to use information sources effectively by staying organized throughout the research and writing process. More on that is coming up next.

Why We Cite

One of the best ways to avoid plagiarism and to follow the rules of academic writing is to cite your sources. Students often think about plagiarism and wanting to avoid it when they talk about the reasons to cite a source. It is more than that though. This very short video from North Caroline State University Library explains exactly what a citation is and why we use them.



In your research projects, it's important to seek out a variety of sources like books, articles, websites, films, etc. These sources

will help you define and describe your topic, identify new developments, current events, or emerging research, and see what conclusions or opinions other people have come up with related to your topic.

When you write your paper and present the information you found in your research, you need to say where this information came from. This is called attribution or acknowledging your sources, and it's usually done through a citation. Again, a citation is a brief note that describes the original source of the ideas.

Citing your sources serves a few purposes:

- It **shows your preparation** for your research assignment and illustrates the conversation surrounding your topic.
- When you use ***credible sources***, it helps **strengthen your argument.**
- It allows your reader to **learn more** by referring them back to the original source.
- It helps you **avoid plagiarism** by giving credit to the thinkers and authors whose works you are drawing from.

A citation is required anytime you:

- **Summarize** someone's ideas on a topic.
- Use a **direct quote** or copy and paste from a source.
- **Paraphrase** information you read in a source - meaning you've taken someone else's idea and put it into your own words.
- State a fact that is **not** considered **common knowledge.**

Summarizing

Summarizing is when you describe or explain the central ideas or most important information found in a source. You might read a whole 5-page article about an issue, but in your research paper you just describe the **main points** of that article in one sentence. Summarizing is taking a lot of information and explaining it in as few words as possible. But because you are explaining what you *learned from a source*, you need to include a citation at the end of the summarizing sentence.

How to Summarize: An Overview

A summary is a brief explanation of a longer text. Some summaries, such as the ones that accompany annotated bibliographies, are very short, just a sentence or two. Others are much longer, though summaries are always much shorter than the text being summarized in the first place.

Summaries of different lengths are useful in research writing because you often need to provide your readers with an explanation of the text you are discussing. This is especially true when you are going to quote or paraphrase from a source.

Of course, the first step in writing a good summary is to do a thorough reading of the text you are going to summarize in the first place. Beyond that important start, there are a few basic guidelines you should follow when you write summary material:

- Stay "neutral" in your summarizing. Summaries provide "just the facts" and are not the place where you offer your opinions about the text you are summarizing. Save your opinions and evaluation of the evidence you are summarizing for other parts of your writing.
- Don't put quotes inside your summary. Summaries will be more useful to you and your colleagues if you write them in your own words.
- Don't "cut and paste" from database abstracts. Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of the library's database system include abstracts of articles. Do no "cut" this abstract material and then "paste" it into your own annotated bibliography. For one thing, this is plagiarism. Second, "cutting and pasting" from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography in the first place, which is to help you understand and explain your research.



Machine readable text description of preceding graphic

Summarizing Information Graphic Description

The information graphic shows a definition of summarizing:

Summarizing is taking the main themes or ideas from your source and explaining or describing them in just a few sentences. An entire chapter of a book or a 5-page article might be summarized in just one or two sentences.

The book, *Geek Girl Rising*, by Heather Cabot and Samantha Walravens is the featured example. In a paper, a summary in APA style would be written as follows:

In their book, *Geek Girl Rising*, Heather Cabot and Samantha Walravens, highlight success stories of women working in technology and provide inspiration for girls wanting to break into this male-dominated industry (2017).

Quoting

Writer's quote (and paraphrase) from research in order to support their points and to persuade their readers. A quote from a piece of evidence in support of a point answers the reader's question, says who?"

This is especially true in academic writing since scholarly readers are most persuaded by effective research and evidence. For example, readers of an article about a new cancer medication published in a medical journal will be most interested in the scholar's research and statistics that demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment. Conversely, they will not be as persuaded by emotional stories from individual patients about how a new cancer medication improved the quality of their lives. While this appeal to emotion can be effective and is common in popular sources, these individual anecdotes do not carry the same sort of "scholarly" or scientific value as well-reasoned research and evidence.

Of course, your instructor is not expecting you to be an expert on the topic of your research paper. While you might conduct some primary research, it's a good bet that you'll be relying on secondary sources such as books, articles, and Web sites to inform and persuade your readers. You'll present this research to your readers in the form of quotes and paraphrases.

A **direct quote** includes the exact word-for-word sentences or phrases that you found in a source. When you copy and paste text into your paper, you are directly quoting that source. A direct quote ***must*** have quotation marks around it and it must include a citation to show the reader where those words came from.

While quotes and paraphrases are different and should be used in different ways in your research writing (as the examples in this section suggest), they do have a number of things in common. Both quotes and paraphrases should:

- be “introduced” to the reader, particularly the first time you mention a source;
- include an explanation of the evidence which explains to the reader why you think the evidence is important, especially if it is not apparent from the context of the quote or paraphrase; and
- include a proper citation of the source.

When to Quote

the question of when to quote and when to paraphrase depends a great deal on the specific context of the writing and the effect you are trying to achieve. Learning the best times to quote and paraphrase takes practice and experience.

In general, it is best to use a quote when:

- The exact words of your source are important for the point you are trying to make. This is especially true if you are quoting technical language, terms, or very specific word choices.
- You want to highlight your agreement with the author’s words. If you agree with the point the author of the evidence makes and you like their exact words, use them as a quote.
- You want to highlight your disagreement with the author’s words. In other words, you may sometimes want to use a direct quote to indicate exactly what it is you disagree about. This might be particularly true when you are considering the antithetical positions in your research writing projects.

Tips for Quoting

- Introduce your quotes to your reader, especially on first reference.
- Explain the significance of the quote to your reader.
- Cite your quote properly according to the rules of style you are following in your essay.
- Quote when the exact words are important, when you want to highlight your agreement or your disagreement.

Quoting in APA Style - An Example

Consider this BAD example in APA style, of what NOT to do when quoting evidence:

“If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage.” (Repetto, 2001, p. 84).

Again, this is a potentially valuable piece of evidence, but it simply isn’t clear what point the research writer is trying to make with it. Further, it doesn’t follow the preferred method of citation with APA style.

Here is a revision that is a GOOD or at least BETTER example:

Repetto (2001) concludes that in the case of the scallop industry, those running the industry should be held responsible for not considering methods that would curtail the problems of over-fishing. “If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage” (p. 84).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you use your own words to explain something that you learned from a source. Paraphrasing can be a useful way to clearly explain the meaning of information you uncovered through your research. It’s a good way to describe what you’ve learned and also help the reader understand the significance of the information. Paraphrasing is a common writing technique, but it’s also where many students unintentionally plagiarize.

Students unintentionally plagiarize because they:

- Take a sentence from a source and rearrange the words.
- Use the thesaurus tool to change a few words in a sentence.

To do a good job of paraphrasing, you have to make sure you are using only your words, not the author’s. First, read the original

source and think about it. Make a few notes of what you think it means. After that, try explaining the author's ideas in your own words. It's helpful if you wait a little while between reading the source and trying to paraphrase it so that the author's words aren't quite so fresh in your mind. If there's a word or phrase that you keep repeating when you try to paraphrase, then you probably should just quote it (with quotation marks and a citation).

When to Paraphrase

In general, it is best to paraphrase when:

- There is no good reason to use a quote to refer to your evidence. If the author's exact words are not especially important to the point you are trying to make, you are usually better off paraphrasing the evidence.
- You are trying to explain a particular piece of evidence in order to explain or interpret it in more detail. This might be particularly true in writing projects like critiques.
- You need to balance a direct quote in your writing. You need to be careful about directly quoting your research too much because it can sometimes make for awkward and difficult to read prose. So, one of the reasons to use a paraphrase instead of a quote is to create balance within your writing.

Tips for Paraphrasing

- Introduce paraphrases to your reader, especially on first reference.
- Explain the significance of the paraphrased material to your reader.
- Cite your paraphrased ideas properly according to the rules of style you are following in your essay.
- Paraphrase when the exact words aren't important, when you want to explain the point of your evidence, or when you need to balance the direct quotes in your writing.

Paraphrasing in APA Style - An Example

Paraphrasing in APA style is slightly different from MLA style as well. Consider first this BAD example of what NOT to do in paraphrasing from a source in APA style:

Computer criminals have lots of ways to get away with credit card fraud (Cameron, 2002).

The main problem with this paraphrase is there isn't enough here to adequately explain to the reader what the point of the evidence really is. Remember: your readers have no way of automatically knowing why you as a research writer think that a particular piece of evidence is useful in supporting your point. This is why it is key that you introduce and explain your evidence.

Here is a revision that is GOOD or at least BETTER:

Cameron (2002) points out that computer criminals intent on committing credit card fraud are able to take advantage of the fact that there aren't enough officials working to enforce computer crimes. Criminals are also able to use the technology to their advantage by communicating via email and chat rooms with other criminals.

Again, this revision is better because the additional information introduces and explains the point of the evidence. In this particular example, the author's name is also incorporated into the explanation of the evidence as well. In APA, it is preferable to weave in the author's name into your essay, usually at the beginning of a sentence. However, it would also have been acceptable to end an improved paraphrase with just the author's last name and the date of publication in parentheses.

Common Knowledge

Common Knowledge is a term for facts that are generally well-known, not controversial, and easy to look up. When you state something that is common knowledge in your paper, you don't have to include a citation because you are assuming that the reader already knows this information. Common knowledge can vary somewhat depending on who the audience for your research project is. If you aren't sure whether something you are stating in your paper is common knowledge, always play it safe and include a citation.



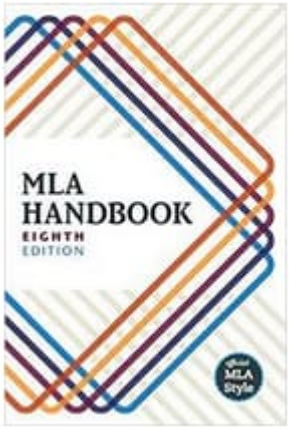
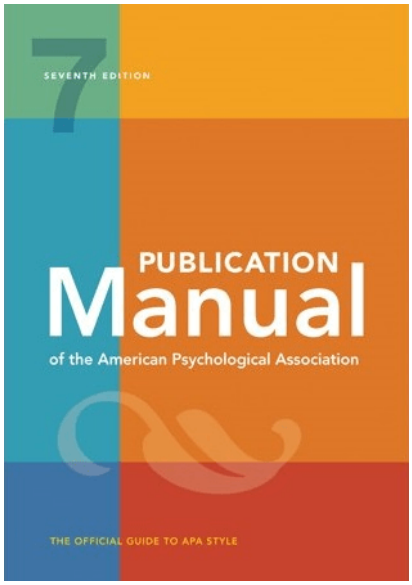
Machine readable text description of preceding graphic.

How to Cite

Now that we know ***when*** we have to cite our sources, let's talk about ***how*** we cite our sources.

Citation styles are sets of rules to follow for citing sources and formatting research papers.

Professionals in different disciplines or subject areas have put together these styles to help writers in their field write well, convey important information, and organize their research.

MLA (Modern Language Association)	APA (American Psychological Association)	Chicago
		

You don't need to memorize all the rules of each citation style, you really just need to know where to go to get guidance and help. We'll be focusing more on this next week.

Regardless of which style you are using for your research assignment, there are generally two parts to a citation in academic writing. The first part tells the reader when you have included information from a source in your paper. This could be done through an in-text/parenthetical citation (MLA, APA) or through a footnote/endnote (Chicago, etc.).

In this first part of the citation, you are signalling to the reader that you've just provided information or ideas that you gained from someone else. You show this by including information about who's responsible for the information. This could include things like the author's last name, title, date of publication and/or page number.

The second part of a citation is generally a full description of the source organized in a list at the end of your paper. This list may be called a Works Cited List (MLA style), a References list (APA style) or a Bibliography (Chicago style). Include a citation for each source that you've referenced in your paper. This full citation will allow the reader to find the source if they want to read it.

We'll be using APA Style in this class. It is used by many disciplines, including Early Childhood Education, Psychology, Sociology, Communication Studies, and Library Science.

Ethical Issues and Intellectual Property

Knowing how to properly cite sources shows that you understand the practice of professional and ethical use of information. Ethical treatment of information assumes that you are treating an author's rights appropriately and avoiding an act of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism.

As a creator of information yourself, you should understand the importance of respecting other authors' rights and following the general rules of academic integrity, including being cognizant of copyright, and other issues associated with intellectual property.

Anatomy of An Academic Journal Article

In order to use and cite information effectively, you must understand what it is you're reading. Before we get into the assignments this week, I want to take a minute to explore more deeply the content of academic journal articles.

We've talked about these sources in earlier weeks of the course. These are the sources your instructors will often call "scholarly articles" or "scholarly sources." College instructors love it when you use academic journal articles because many of them see this as the most "valuable" type of academic information. We'll be exploring the value of information in coming weeks, but what I mean by that gets to the heart of most instructors' passions.

They are academics and scholars. They have chosen a field that allows them to teach other people about their discipline expertise every day. Because of this, they think very highly of academic writing and research and it will benefit you greatly as a student if you understand how to read and use these types of sources. I am going to break down one of the most common types of academic journal article, which is to present empirical research - or research that the authors have designed and collected and then presented in the form of an academic paper.

Common Sections of an Empirical Research Academic Journal Article

Title

All journal articles are going to have a title. Sometimes titles are quite descriptive and you can immediately understand what the article is about. Other times, you might need to read the abstract to get a true picture of what's included in the article.

Abstract

An abstract is the very first thing the reader will see under the article's title. It is a one-paragraph summary and can be very useful for researchers. You should know immediately after reading the abstract whether the article is relevant to your research or if it's something you should pass up. In the databases, you can click on the little magnifying glass to the right of an article's title to

read the abstract without having to open up the entire article. As you're searching for sources, don't spend a lot of time reading beyond the abstract - you'll do that later as you begin organizing your thoughts and how you will use each source in your research assignment.

Introduction

This part of the paper will introduce the reader to the author(s)' research question. Just like in science class, researchers will pose a question, decide how they're going to go about answering that question (usually a survey or treatment of subjects), administer their study, and then analyze the results. The introduction will lay all of this out for you so you know exactly what information the researchers were trying to find.

Literature Review

The literature review may be its own section or might be part of the introduction. This is the section in which the authors take time to summarize other research that has been done that relates to their research question. This section can be very powerful to you as a researcher because you will often find other sources that are mentioned that could also be powerful evidence for your topic. Sometimes, researchers will write an entire paper that is a review of the literature. The embedded research guide below includes an example of a single paper that is a literature review.

Methods

This is the section in which the author(s) describe their research subjects and how they went about researching and coming to conclusions. They will sometimes describe specific research methods and ways of analysis. At this level in your college career, those sections aren't necessarily the most useful. It might be useful to describe the types and number of research subjects, and perhaps even include specific questions that were asked, but getting into the minute details of the research method probably isn't necessary for the level of academic writing you will be faced with in community college. If you continue onto graduate and/or post graduate school, these sections will become more useful.

Results

This is the section in which authors describe what they found. This can be one of the most useful sections for you as a novice researcher. This is where you might grab quotes or evidence that could be used to make points in your own writing.

Discussion

The discussion section allows the authors to lay out how their findings impact the body of research in that area. They might show how their research is in line with other similar studies or they might show how their findings dispute other published research. Authors will often point out limitations to their research and make suggestions of other studies that could be conducted to help flesh out questions that remain.

Conclusion

This is the section in which the authors summarize their entire paper. They will often restate their research question, give a summary of their findings, and again point out where further research can be done. This section can be very useful to novice researchers. You might even want to start here.

On that note, I think the most useful sections to novice researchers are the Introduction, Results/Discussion, and Conclusion. You'll be able to practice this in this week's assignments and later in the course.

The embedded information below is from the Distance Education Research Guide has more information on types of academic journal articles, differences between scholarly and popular sources, and defines primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. You might want to bookmark this page as a reference for other research assignments you might encounter.

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Krause, S.D. (2016). Quoting, paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism. J. Kepka (Ed.) In *Oregon writes open writing text*. https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/oregonwrites/chapter/quoting-paraphrasing-and-avoiding-plagiarism

Los Rios Libraries. (2020). Avoiding plagiarism and citing sources. *Los Rios libraries information literacy tutorials*. https://lor.instructure.com/resources/44fe428e10b347bea9892a63482f55fd?shared

Manage: Organizing information effectively and ethically. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/manage-organizing-information-effectively-and-ethically/

North Carolina State University Libraries. (2014). *Citation: A (very) brief introduction*. https://youtu.be/IMhMuVvXCVw. NOTE: This source is licensed under Creative Commons 3.0 BY-NC-SA US

References

Isserman, Maurice. (2003). Plagiarism: A lie of the mind. *Chronicle of Higher Education 49*(34), p. B12.

This page titled 9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description

The information graphic shows a definition of common knowledge:

Common Knowledge is a fact that is generally well-known, not controversial, and easy to look up. Common knowledge statements don't require a citation because you are assuming that the reader already knows this information.

The sources featured in this example are:

- A National Public Radio headline from its website that reads, "President Trump's Inaugural Address, Annotated"
- The cover of the book, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* by Thomas F. Jackson
- A headline from the Sacramento Bee website that reads, "These are the top Fourth of July celebrations you don't want to miss."

In an a paper - the following faces related to the sources would be considered common knowledge and would not require a citation:

- Donald J. Trump is the 45th president of the United States.
- The USA celebrates its independence from Britain on July 4.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement.

This page titled 9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.8: CITING SOURCES AND APA STYLE

9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details

9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation

This page titled 9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 8: Citing Sources and APA Style by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details

Why We Cite - The Scholarly Conversation



Citing a source means you've taken the time to think critically about the information you're taking in. You've made sure your sources establish credibility by telling you how they gained their knowledge (citing their sources) or came to their conclusions (describing their research). Now, you are asked to do the same in your research and writing assignments; acknowledge those that helped build your knowledge by giving them credit in the form of a citation.

When you're asked to think about why it's important to cite sources, students often go straight to the negative, "I need to cite properly or I'll be accused of plagiarizing." While it's true this is part of the reason your instructors are so big on citations, there's actually a much more positive side. Citing sources allows you to:

- Appreciate the work of others who've researched and studied topics before you. This is where the Google Scholar tagline comes from: "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants."
- Spread information and encourage future research by sharing information about the sources that were meaningful to you in your own exploration.
- Show that you belong to a scholarly community and speak the "language" of the group. This is why there are different citation formats for different disciplines of study like APA and MLA.

Think about all the conversations you might have in a day. You might text your best friend as soon as you wake up. You might answer your mother's phone call as you walk to class. You might participate in an all-staff discussion and meeting at work. You know how to navigate these conversations; you take time to listen and take in information and you contribute by sharing your own ideas and feelings.

You will use those same skills in college to take part in a scholarly conversation. You are "listening" by exploring new topics and gaining new knowledge through lectures, discussions, readings, research, and more. You are contributing by completing assignments like research papers, speeches, and other academic projects. A writing style, like APA, is part of this. It helps you navigate this scholarly conversation in a meaningful way.

Remember that research and taking part in scholarly conversations takes time and can be complicated. You wouldn't just push your way into a table of friends and immediately take over the conversation (at least I hope you wouldn't). Instead, you ease in and listen to what's going on; maybe ask some questions to get some background and figure out how the conversation started, where it's going, and how you might contribute.

Think of your scholarly conversations in similar terms. Take time to understand your topic, look at different perspectives, find quality information to build your knowledge, and then jump in and add to the conversation with a well researched paper or speech. And when you do it, show that you respect this community of scholars by following the rules and citing your sources.

This short video from Clemson University will help you wrap your head around this idea of a scholarly conversation with a visual representation. It's another way to help you understand how you too are part of this conversation.



Using Sources Effectively

We've established why it's important to cite sources, and we know the basics of when a citation is required, but how do we keep ourselves organized to avoid unintentional plagiarism?

Preventing plagiarism starts at the beginning of your research assignment as you gather your sources. Here are a few tips:

1. **Use Your Critical Reading Skills**: Anytime you find a source to use in your research, read it, "talk to the text," and make notes of the useful information. You can do this by printing and highlighting, saving documents with comments in Google Drive, or writing index cards with information from each source. If you create an outline for your paper, start filling in the sources that support each of the points of your outline. Whatever your organization method, make sure that you can easily identify the information you want to include in your paper ***and*** the source where it came from.
2. **Cite in the First Draft**: A common mistake that many students make is not including citations in early drafts of their paper, or only including something informal (like one word to describe the source they used). This habit can lead to confusion in later drafts when you're trying to go back and include citations. Solve this problem by writing your full citation as soon as you start inserting information from your sources in your first draft. Including the citation right away will ensure that as you reorganize and improve your drafts, you don't accidentally overlook or mistakenly cite information incorrectly.
3. **Get Help**: There's no way you can master all of the citation styles that are out there, and as a student you are still learning about the writing process. Take advantage of resources like the college reading and writing center, the tutoring center, and the library for assistance with including information from sources effectively. A librarian can review your citations and give you tips for organizing your research. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Rules of Academic Writing & Citation Styles

Just about everything in life has rules. There are rules on the basketball court, rules when you're playing chess, rules when you're driving a car, and there are rules in academic writing too.

As a college student, learning and understanding these rules helps show your instructors that you're a serious student and that you respect not only yourself, but the people who are helping you build your knowledge.

These rules of academic writing vary depending on what you're studying and come in different styles (APA, MLA, Chicago to name a few), but the idea behind them is the same. They help you create an organized paper, and ensure that you acknowledge the people whose words and ideas inspired your work. In this class, we're focusing on APA Style.

What is APA Style?

APA, which stands for the American Psychological Association, is an organization devoted to the study of psychology. The organization itself dates back to the late 1800s, but in the 1920s, a group of social scientists recognized the importance of having some consistency in their writing, and APA Style was born.

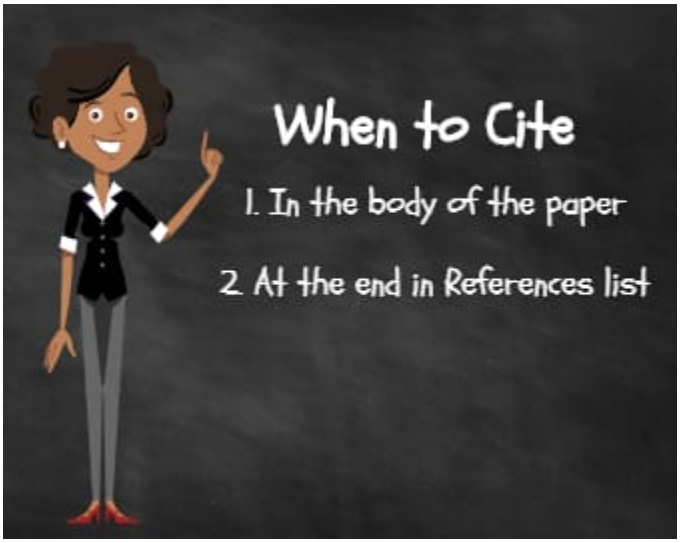
APA Style is now used by many disciplines, including social and behavioral sciences like psychology, sociology, communication studies, and library science.

These rules of writing help create consistency in communication and research, which not only helps those who are creating new content, but also those who are consuming it. As a college student you will take part in this scholarly conversation by consuming (learning and doing research) and creating (writing papers and completing other academic projects).

When to Cite

In academic writing, you're asked to recognize those who've helped build your knowledge and ideas. This is done in the form of a citation and it tells your reader (usually your instructor) where you got your information.

You will always cite your sources twice.



1. The first time is in the body of the paper with a short citation. In APA style, it's the author's last name, date, and if it's a direct quote, a page number.
2. Then you cite a second time at the end of your paper with a references list. These references have all the details your reader would need to get back to the original source like author name(s), article or book titles, dates, and a few other key elements. We'll explore the references list later in the the lesson.

It's important to cite your sources every time you're using ideas or information from someone else. This includes when you summarize information, paraphrase, or use a direct quote.

APA Citation Basics

The next several sections will give you a very brief overview of your in-text citations and your references list. The information is meant to introduce you to formatting, but is in no way an exhaustive list of possible scenarios.

It's not realistic or useful to try to memorize every rule or detail of an APA citation. Instead, it's better to understand the basics and then know where to go when you need more information or help. The last section of this week's lesson will point you to more resources that will be helpful when you have specific source citation questions.

References List Basics

The second part of your citation is an entry in the references list at the end of your paper. This citation is much longer than the in-text citation and includes all the important elements to allow your reader to find the original source, including names of author(s), book or article titles, dates, and other information. Here are some details to keep in mind when formatting your references page:

- References should start on a new page with a centered and bolded References heading.
- Sources should be listed in alphabetical order by the first element of the citation (this is usually the author's last name).
- References should include a hanging indent meaning the first line of the citation is flush with the left margin and all subsequent lines are indented 1/2 inch. This allows your reader to easily see when one citation ends and a new one begins.
- When referring to books, chapters, article titles, or web pages, only the first letter of the first word of the title and subtitle is capitalized, excluding proper nouns.
- Titles of publications are italicized, including books, journals, and magazines.
- Every source you used in the body of your paper should be included in the references list, with a couple exceptions.
    - Any personal communication like an email or interview you conducted is cited in-text only (in the body of your paper). The reason for this is that your references are designed to point the reader to the original source so they can explore it further. In these cases, your reader wouldn't have access to your personal email or notes you took during an interview, so it's not appropriate to include the information in your list of references.
    - If you describe an entire website, but don't refer to a specific fact or idea from the site, you would not need to include it in your list of references. Simply list the URL in an in-text citation.

Here is an example of a References page from an APA formatted paper.

Anatomy of an APA Citation

APA citations contain the following information:

- Author name(s)
- Publication date
- Title of the work
- Publication data (like name of magazine, volume number, page numbers, etc.)
- DOI shown as a hyperlink (if available) - DOI stands for digital object identifier and is most often associated with academic journal articles.



Machine readable text description of preceding graphic.

Authors

APA Style tries to alleviate any potential gender bias by only including last names and initials of authors. Even if a full name is included on the source, only list the last name and first and middle initials (if given).

One Author Example

Bond, E.

Two Authors Example:

Bond, E. & Adkins, A.

Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

A DOI is a digital object identifier and it's associated with electronic content, most often academic journal articles. It is often displayed at the top header or bottom footer of the article. If no DOI is listed, you can search a website to try to find it: https://www.crossref.org/

1. In the search box at the top, select "Search metadata"
2. Search by title or author to see if you can find a DOI for your source. A DOI hyperlink is preferred over a URL to the source.



Books

If an electronic book includes a DOI (digital object identifier), it should be included in the citation. If no DOI is present or doesn't appear on www.crossref.org, and the book was accessed from a website (other than a library database), include the website URL.

If the eBook was obtained from a Library Database, such as EBSCO, it is likely available from other providers as well, which means it's **not** necessary to include the database information or URL. It is appropriate to include the version information (e.g. Kindle version) of eBook citations. APA has more information about how to use DOIs and URLs on its website.

Basic format for a print book citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Year). *Title of book.* Publisher.

Example:

McAdoo, M.L. (2010). *Building bridges: Connecting faculty, students, and the college library*. American Library Association.

Basic format for an eBook citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Year). *Title of book* [version information]. DOI or URL

Example:

Brundage, E. (2016). *All things cease to appear: A novel* [Kindle version]. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

https://catalog.saclibrary.org/OverDrive/98244775-9fba-428a-a741-1594bebc8470/Home

Journal Articles

If a journal article includes a DOI (digital object identifier), it should be included in the citation. The DOI is often located in the top header or bottom footer of the page. If no DOI is present and can't be found on www.crossref.org, and the article was obtained from a website, include the website URL. If the article was obtained from a Library Database, such as EBSCO, it is likely available from other providers as well, which means it's **not** necessary to include the database information or URL. APA has more information about how to use DOIs and URLs on its website.

Basic format for a journal article citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Year) Title of article. *Title of journal, volume*(issue number), pages. DOI or URL

Journal Article from a Library Database with a DOI:

Nichols-Hess, A., Greer, K., Lombardo, S.V., & Lim, A. (2015). Books, bytes, and buildings: The academic library's unique role in improving student success. *Journal of Library Administration, 55*(8), 622-638. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/01930826.2015.1085241

Journal Article from a Website, no DOI:

Sparks, K. (2017). Applying the creative process to library branding. *Marketing Libraries Journal, 1*, 30-39. http://journal.marketinglibraries.org/dec2017/5_Branding_MLJ-v1-i1-Fall2017.pdf

Magazine Articles

If a magazine article includes a DOI (digital object identifier), it should be included in the citation. If no DOI is present or can't be found on www.crossref.org and the article was obtained from a website, include the website URL. If the article was obtained from a Library Database, such as EBSCO, it is likely available from other providers as well, which means it's **not** necessary to include the database information or URL. APA has more information about how to use DOIs and URLs on its website.

Basic format for a magazine article citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Date) Title of article. *Title of magazine, volume*(issue number), pages. DOI or URL (if applicable)

Magazine Article from a Library Database with no DOI:

Begley, S. (2016, September 26). Carla Hayden. *Time, 188*(12), 64.

Magazine Article from a Website, no DOI:

Weiner, J. (2010, April 14). The entirety of Twitter is heading to the Library of Congress. *Vanity Fair*. https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2010/04/the-entirety-of-twitter-is-headed-for-the-library-of-congress

Note about above example: Notice Twitter and Library of Congress are capitalized in the title because they are proper nouns.

Newspaper Articles

Newspaper article citations are slightly different than other article citations in that you'll include the abbreviation p. or pp. before listing the page numbers. If the article was obtained from a website, include the website URL. If the article was obtained from a Library Database, such as EBSCO, it is likely available from other providers as well, which means it's **not** necessary to include the database information or URL.

Basic format for a newspaper article citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Date) Title of article. *Title of newspaper*, pp. # (if available). URL (if from website)

Newspaper Article from a Library Database:

Blakemore, E. (2017, October 17). Major libraries unite to explore the impact that a warmer climate may have on the Arctic. *The Washington Post*, p. E02.

Newspaper Article from a Website:

Magagnini, S. (2015, October 23). Sacramento region's first Holocaust library opens to the public. *Sacramento Bee*.

http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/history/article11100063957.html

Web Pages

Sources found on a web page can sometimes be tricky because author and/or date information isn't immediately apparent. Do your best to find as much information as possible so that your citation is useful to your reader. Some exceptions to the basic format:

- If no date is available, writ (n.d.) in place of the date.
- If the author is an organization and not a named person or people, use the name of the organization in place of the author and omit it from where the site name usually goes (see the example below).
- If the information on the website is likely to change over time, include the date you retrieved the information.

Basic format for a Web Page citation:

Author last name, first/middle initial. (Date [if no date available list n.d.]) *Title of page*. Site name. URL.

Document from a Web Page with Organization as Author:

Association of College & Research Libraries. (2015, February 5). *Framework for information literacy for higher education*. http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework

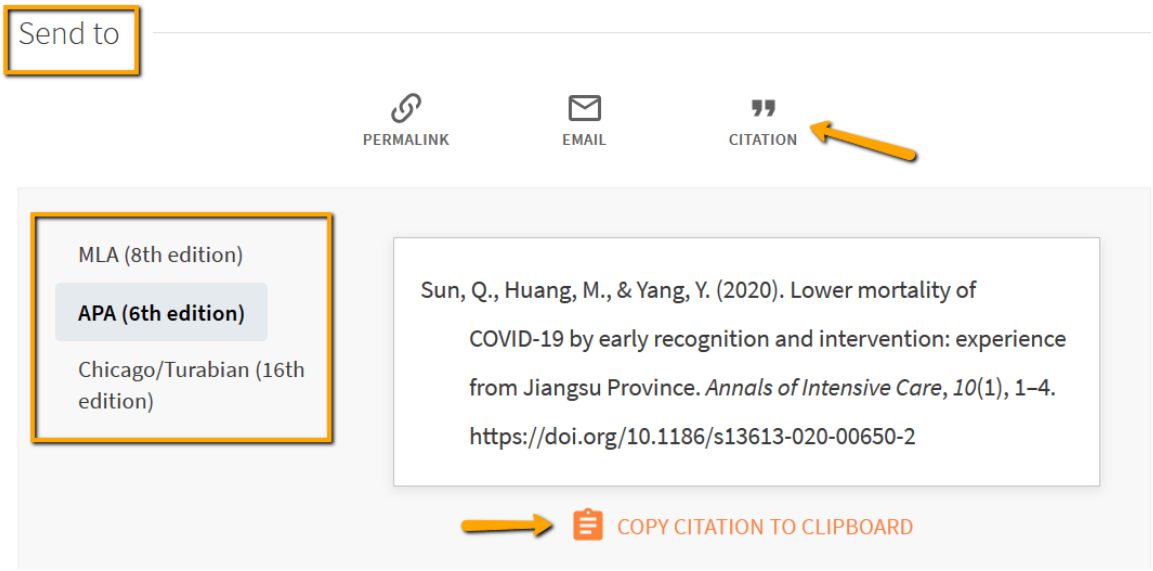
Document from a Web Page with Author Identified:

Banks, M. (2017, December 19). *Ten reasons libraries are still better than the Internet*. American Libraries. https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/12/19/ten-reasons-libraries-still-better-than-internet/

Document from a Web Page with no Author and likely to change:

Quantum mechanics. (2020, March 5). Wikipedia. Retrieved March 10, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_mechanics

Using Tools in the Databases



The great thing about using your college library's research databases is that there are many useful tools built into the technology to help you. One of the most useful is the citation generator. In OneSearch it appears in the "Send To" area of the record. In most other databases, look for a "tools" menu to find the citation generator. You'll choose the APA citation, which you can copy and paste into your References list.

This is a useful time-saver, but I must include a word of caution. Citation generators are robots that are scraping the information from the source, and sometimes the formatting is off (e.g. having a title in all capital letters). It's up to you to know the basics so you can identify when something looks strange. It's always a good idea to check the generated citation against a style guide and make any needed corrections.

Reference Management Software

There are a lot of software options to help researchers manage their source material. You may have heard of some of these reference management products. Endnote, Refworks, Mendeley, and Zotero, among others, all help manage the information gathering and retrieval process.

In addition to providing one central location for all of your references, these reference managers can:

- import bibliographic information directly from a library catalog database,
- provide additional space for personal notations,
- create a bibliography or list of references in a variety of citation styles such including APA.

When you transfer to a four-year institution, your academic library will likely provide free access to some form of reference management software.

If you'd like to try one, Zotero and Mendeley are available for free.

APA Style Guide

We are not writing a formal paper in this class, but you'll likely encounter a research paper assignment in your college career that needs to be written in APA Style. The CRC Library's APA Style Guide has more information on formatting a paper, your references list, in text citations, and almost any type of source you might use. This guide will remain available even after this course is complete. You might want to bookmark the link for future use.

 This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Clemson University Library. (2016). Joining the (scholarly) conversation. [Video file.] https://youtu.be/79WmzNQvAZY Note: Listed as CC, but specific CC licensing is not specified in this source.

Los Rios Libraries. (2020). APA style for community college researchers. *Los Rios libraries information literacy tutorials*. https://lor.instructure.com/resources/44fe428e10b347bea9892a63482f55fd?shared

Manage: Organizing information effectively and ethically. (2016). In G. Bobish & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *The information literacy user's guide*. Milne Publishing. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/chapter/manage-organizing-information-effectively-and-ethically/

References

American Psychological Association. (2020). *About APA Style*. https://apastyle.apa.org/about-apa-style

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Sample Papers*. https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/paper-format/sample-papers

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association: The official guide to APA style (7th ed.). American Psychological Association, 2020.

This page titled 9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation

The image shows the following citation:

Willis, J. (2020). Spirituality and resistance: How we wake up to racism. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 36*(1), 85–97. https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.36.1.08

Labels for Each Element

- Author: Willis, J.
- Date: (2020).
- Article Title: Spirituality and resistance: How we wake up to racism.
- Journal Title (italicized): *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
- Volume (italicized): *36*
- Issue: (1)
- Page Numbers: 85-97
- DOI shown as hyperlink: https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.36.1.08

This page titled 9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.9: INFORMATION POWER AND PRIVILEGE

9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details

9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description

This page titled 9.9: Information Power and Privilege is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 9: Information Power and Privilege by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details

Why Are We Reading This?

This week's readings are designed to challenge our thinking about the voices in academic spaces. Whose voices are the loudest? Are there voices that aren't being heard and why? What does this mean for you as a student? Are you hearing the voices you need to hear?

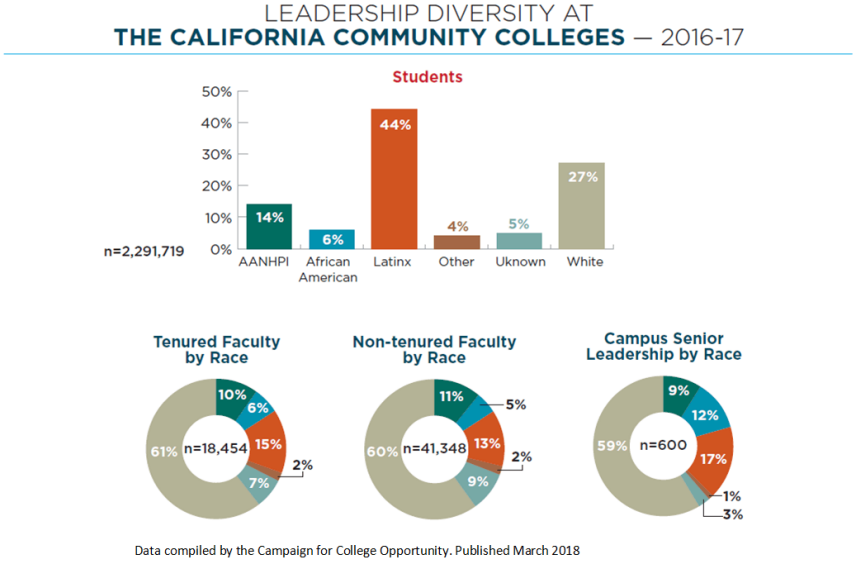
These are questions I'd like you to think about as you read selected articles this week. For some, you will find this reading empowering. Others might find it uncomfortable. And some might fall somewhere in between. I think it's important that both students and educators understand the system in which we're working. It's important to have these conversations to push the needle and create a more representative educational system. You'll have a chance to share your thoughts in one of this week's discussion forums.

Makeup of Students, Faculty, Administrators

In 2018, The Campaign for College Opportunity (a non profit organization) released an alarming report describing the makeup of students, faculty, and administrators at California campuses. Alarming because the ethnicities and genders of faculty and administrators in no way mirror those of the students.

The report is titled, *Left Out: How Exclusion in California's Colleges and Universities Hurts Our Values, Our Students, and Our Economy*. The authors looked at 2016-17 data from databases connected to California colleges and universities as well as federal databases. They found that student populations are increasingly diverse with more than two-thirds of those enrolled identifying as something other than white. However, the data shows that campus faculty and leadership do not match the racial and gender diversity of the student populations.

This is true in all state systems: California State Universities, University of California campuses, and California Community Colleges (CCCs). For CCCs, the data shows that 68% of students identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Latinx. However, only 33% of tenured faculty, 31% of non-tenured faculty, and 38% of campus leadership fall into these categories. Tenured and non-tenured faculty and campus administration is overwhelmingly white.



Machine readable text description of preceding graphic.

The authors discuss why these statistics are problematic:

College leaders set the tone, values, and direction of their institutions and when that leadership is not reflective of the diversity of the student population, student success suffers. When campuses are inclusive and reflective of the student population, the culture, practices and policies align with the needs of the students. Students experience a greater sense of belonging and have more role models who understand and validate their experiences (executive summary, 2018, p. 4).

The authors call on the state and college and university leadership to commit to racial equity in higher education, including examining hiring practices and establishing both statewide and campus-wide goals to close equity gaps.

The executive summary was used to write this section and is linked in the citation. The full title at the beginning of this page links to the full report.

Other Readings

The rest of the readings for this week come from other voices that I want you to hear. The first is from a student who attends a predominantly white school. The second discusses the tenure process at four-year colleges and universities. And, the third is a letter from faculty members who once taught at a predominantly white institution. I have included them this week so that you can better understand what is happening in higher education and how it affects the information that is created and consumed.

Black Students in White Spaces

This article appeared in 2018 on the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) website. It is written from the student's perspective and what it's like to be a Black student in a predominantly white school. She describes her experiences at independent schools, but I'm certain that students at public schools often have similar experiences.

Reading One: From the National Association of Independent Schools Website: Being Black in White Spaces by Kalah Brown

A Call to Change the Tenure System

This essay appeared in 2014 in Inside Higher Education. The author outlines the current measures of promotion in most 4-year institutions, argues what's wrong with the system, and offers some suggestions on how to change it. I've included it this week so that you have a better idea of how professors are hired and promoted at transfer institutions and why some people feel these systems need to be revisited.

Reading Two: From Inside Higher Education Website: Change the Tenure System by KerryAnn O'Meara

Black and Brown Faculty in Predominantly White Spaces

The last reading for this week is a letter published in 2016 on the Huffington Post website. It was written by people of color who were formerly employed by the University of Missouri (known as Mizzou). This is the perspective of one group from one institution. However, some of the experiences they had at this predominately white school (especially related to relationships with fellow faculty and administrators), are experiences that are well documented at many colleges and universities.

This letter hits at the concept of white privilege, a phrase that can often stir emotions or confusion. Emotions because some equate the phrase, white privilege, with racism; it is not the same. Confusion because some equate the phrase solely with socioeconomic status - "I'm white, but live in poverty - how can I be privileged?" But, it is about more than socioeconomic status. It is about what activist, Peggy McIntosh calls "unearned advantage." If you are not familiar with the nuances of white privilege or the phrase is stirring emotion or confusion, I encourage you to read McIntosh's short 1989 essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" before you dive into this final reading.

The faculty of four-year colleges and universities tend to be even less diverse than community colleges. This letter outlines some major problems and offers some suggestions to make higher education more inclusive and diverse.

Reading Three: From Huffington Post Website: As People of Color Formerly Employed by Mizzou, We Demand Change by Bryana H. French, Ph.D., Dr. Zakiya R. Adair, and Kevin Cokley, Ph.D.

Whiteness of Librarianship

I think it's important for me to acknowledge that my own profession struggles with this issue; librarians across the country are overwhelming middle-aged white females.

The articles I've listed below are not part of your required reading this week, but I'm including them here for the curious and to show that I am aware of this issue. I take this information very seriously and am trying to do my part to create a more inclusive world of information experts.

Further Reading:

Bourg, C. (3, March 2014). The unbearable whiteness of librarianship [Blog post]. https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship/

Hathcock, A. (7, October 2015). White librarianship in blackface: Diversity initiatives in LIS. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

References

Campaign for College Opportunity. (March 2018). *Left out: How exclusion in California's colleges and universities hurts our values, our students, and our economy: Executive summary.* https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2018-Left-Out-Executive-Summary-Final.pdf

This page titled 9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description

The graphic shows demographic statistics from the 2016-17 school year for California Community Colleges.

For Students by Race

- 14% identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- 5% identify as African American
- 44% identify as Latinx
- 4% identify as other
- 5% identify as unknown
- 27% identify as White

For Tenured Faculty by Race

- 10% identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- 6% identify as African American
- 15% identify as Latinx
- 2% identify as other
- 7% identify as unknown
- 61% identify as White

For Non-Tenured Faculty by Race

- 11% identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- 5% identify as African American
- 13% identify as Latinx
- 2% identify as other
- 9% identify as unknown
- 60% identify as White

For Campus Senior Leadership by Race

- 9% identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- 12% identify as African American
- 17% identify as Latinx
- 1% identify as other
- 3% identify as unknown
- 59% identify as white

This page titled 9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.10: INFORMATION VALUE AND PRIVILEGE

9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details

9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege

9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic

9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic

This page titled 9.10: Information Value and Privilege is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 10: Information Value and Privilege by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details

Why Are We Reading This?

This week's readings take up where last week's readings left off. We know from last week that not all voices are being heard in academia. This leads directly to the value and privilege of information. There is a value placed on academic information (both monetary and societal value). And in academia especially, only a privileged few have access to certain types of scholarly writings.

What is Information Privilege?

The idea that status impacts your access to information is nothing new. What is relatively new is that librarians and others are critically talking about it as it relates to higher education. There is an excellent 2018 academic paper on this topic that I will link to at the bottom, but honestly it's more information than you really need to be able to understand this concept.

Instead, I'm going to ask you to read the Wikipedia entry on Information Privilege, which is well-written and researched and actually includes information from the paper I referenced above.

Reading One: From Wikipedia: Information Privilege

Digital Divide

We are active users of technology - I am teaching and you are learning online. When we're submerged in this kind of environment, it's sometimes easy to forget that what's known as the digital divide still exists. Our access to technology gives us advantages in accessing information that many around the world do not have. This information graphic from the International Monetary Fund illustrates that:

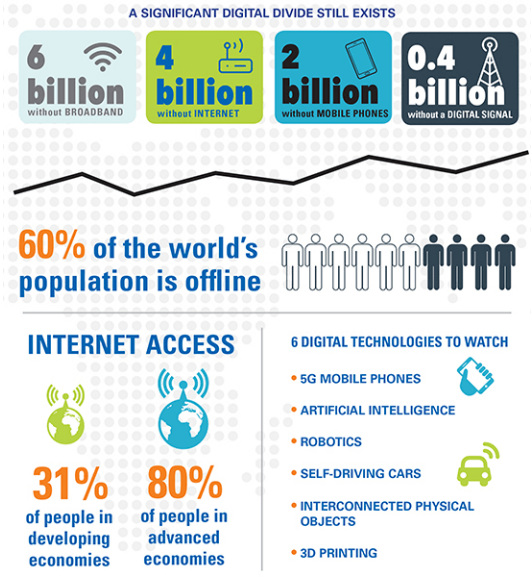
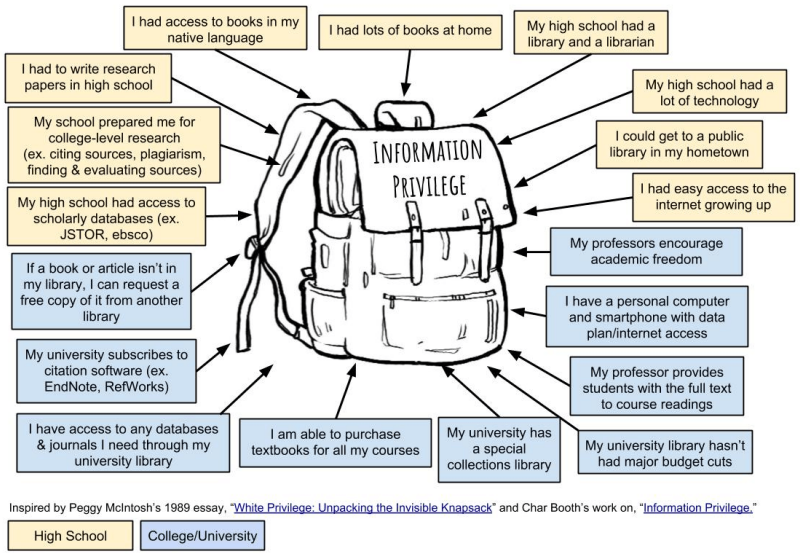


Image prepared by Natalie Ramírez-Djumena. Text and charts are based on World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividend, published by The World Bank in January 2016.

Machine readable text description of preceding graphic

Information Privilege in High School & College

Students, even those in high school, enjoy information privileges that aren't afforded to the general public. This graphic created by Duke University Library helps you understand this privilege more fully:



Machine readable text description of preceding graphic

The Monetary Value of Academic Publishing

Academic publishing is big business. These companies are making billions of dollars. You've undoubtedly been directly impacted by this; you've likely faced decisions on whether to buy a $100+ textbook that is required for a course. When you learn more about how the system is working, it can make you very angry with the publishers. The good news is that academics, librarians, and even the government are pushing for more open access to academic material.

This first reading is designed to introduce you to the system in which academic journals and other original research content is published.

Reading one: From Footnote website: The Exploitative Economics of Academic Publishing by Samuel Gershman

Profits by Industry

This graphic is meant to illustrate the incredible profits experienced by academic publishers. You can see that scholarly publishing is far more profitable than being one of the biggest retailers in the world (Amazon).

Profit	Company	Industry
3% Of $232.9 million	amazon	Retail
7% Of $97.5 million	BMW	Automobile
22% Of $265.6 million		Computing
23% Of $136.8 million	Google	Technology
37% Of €2538 million	ELSEVIER	Academic Publishing
37% Of €533.2 million		Academic Publishing

Figures came from company websites. For more information, read an explanation of how these profits were calculated and from what sources the information came.

Machine readable text description of preceding graphic

University of California Cuts Ties with Elsevier

I mentioned that academics have been pushing for more open access. This fight came to a head recently with the University of California system and one of the largest academic publishers, Elsivier. This article outlines UC's unprecedented decision

Reading two: UC terminates subscriptions with world's largest scientific publisher in push for open access to publicly funded research from the UC Office of the President

Your Academic Privilege

After reading all of this information, I thought you might be interested in how much the Los Rios Community College District pays for students to have access to the library's research databases and other library resources.

For database content alone, including access to things such as Academic Search Premiere, The EBSCO Ebook Collection, Films on Demand, and other specialized databases, the district pays about $285,000/year. On top of this, each college is afforded a local budget to purchase additional books and resources that are housed locally at the campus. Cosumnes River College has received about $75,000/year to acquire these additional resources, though our budget was cut this year because of the COVID-19 crisis and the financial impact it has had across the state.

This is why librarians and your instructors are constantly asking you to take advantage of your academic privilege by using the library databases.

My hope is that someday more academic information will be freely available. Until then - we should all be part of this fight.

Further Reading

Hare, S. & Evanson, C. (2018). Information privilege outreach for undergraduate students. *College & Research Libraries, 79*(6), 726-736. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.6.726

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative

Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Profits by Industry table [Image file]. (Updated to 2018), but inspired by Duke University Libraries, “Profit Margin Table" and Alex Holcombe’s profit margin tables, https://alexholcombe.wordpress.com/2015/05/21/scholarly-publisher-profit-update/

References

Ramerez-Djumena, N. (September 2016). *A significant digital divide still exists* [Image file]. https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/09/picture.htm

Rozear, A. (n.d.) Invisible knapsack: Information privilege [Image file]. *Duke University Libraries* https://sites.duke.edu/library101_instructors/2018/08/13/information-privilege/

This page titled 9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege

The image shows a backpack with the words "Information Privilege" on the back.

Around the backpack are text boxes with arrows pointing to the backpack.

Information privileges identified for high school students in text boxes include:

- My high school had access to scholarly databases (example: JSTOR, EBSCO).
- My high school prepared me for college-level research (example: citing sources, plagiarism, finding & evaluating sources).
- I had to write research papers in my high school.
- I had access to books in my native language in high school.
- I had lots of books at home.
- My high school had a library and a librarian.
- My high school had a lot of technology.
- I could get to a public library in my hometown.
- I had easy access to the internet growing up.

Information privileges identified for college students in text boxes include:

- If a book or article isn't in my college library, I can request a free copy of it from another library.
- My college subscribes to citation software (note, this isn't true at CRC).
- I have access to many databases and journals through my college library.
- I am able to purchase textbooks for all of my courses.
- My college has a special collections library.
- My college library hasn't had major budget cuts.
- My professors often provide students with the full text to course readings.
- I have a personal computer and/or smartphone with a data plan and internet access.
- My professors encourage academic freedom.

This page titled 9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic

A significant digital divide still exists in the world:

- 6 billion people live without broadband
- 4 billion people live without internet
- 2 billion people live without mobile phones
- 0.4 billion people live without a digital signal
- 60% of the world's population is offline

In relation to internet access:

- Only 31% of people in developing economies have access
- While 80% of people in advanced economies have access

Six digital technologies to watch:

- 5G mobile phones
- Artificial intelligence
- Robotics
- Self-driving cars
- Interconnected physical objects
- 3D printing

This page titled 9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic

The graphic is a chart showing the profit, company name and logo, and industry.

Profit	Company	Industry
3%	Amazon	Retail
7%	BMW	Automobile
22%	Apple	Computing
23%	Google	Technology
37%	Elsevier	Scholarly Publishing
37%	Taylor & Francis	Scholarly Publishing

This page titled 9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles

What is Being Filtered Out of Your Search?

The idea of filter bubbles was introduced nearly ten years ago by Eli Pariser. The idea is that information providers are tracking your online activity in order to target what *they* have determined are *your* information needs.

Even almost ten years later, many people still haven't heard of filter bubbles. If you haven't, you might find the information a bit unnerving. This is Pariser's TED Talk from 2011.



Where Are We Now?

A few years ago, Eli Pariser was interviewed by *Wired* magazine to discuss how Pariser's warning of filter bubbles had evolved over time.

Reading one: From Wired website: Eli Pariser Predicted the Future. Now He Can't Escape It by Jesse Hempel

How We Confirm Our Own Beliefs

Filter bubbles are outside forces that affect the information we take in. But, there's also a lot of stuff going on in our own brains that influences the way we take in and interpret information. This is called confirmation bias.

The next reading from Scientific American explores how people can be exposed to scientific evidence, but still have doubts. It's a good introduction to confirmation bias in this context.

Wikipedia also has an extensive entry on confirmation bias that is well researched and has a lot of suggested readings if you want to explore this concept further. I included a link to it at the bottom of the page in further reading.

[NOTE TO USERS OF THIS TEXTBOOK: The following reading is not freely available online. The link goes to the Los Rios Libraries MASTERfile database. You will need to see if your databases include access to this article and if not, find an alternative.]

Reading two: Scientific American: The Science of Antiscience Thinking: Convincing people who doubt the validity of climate change and evolution to change their beliefs requires overcoming a set of ingrained cognitive biases By: Kenrick, Douglas T., Cohen, Adam B., Neuberg, Steven L., & Cialdini Robert B.

Bias in News

I am a former journalist. My bachelor's degree is in journalism and I worked as a television news producer for nearly ten years before switching careers. I have been stunned to see how much the journalistic landscape has shifted in the last twenty years. Journalists used to be highly respected and objectivity was paramount.

Now, many news outlets openly discuss and tout their political leanings. It has created an environment that makes understanding our confirmation biases even more difficult.

There is a lot of information out there about media bias. One website I've been particularly impressed with is called AllSides.com. I often encourage students to seek out the same story from several different news outlets to see how it has been covered. AllSides.com does that for you, showing the same story and its coverage from left, center, and right leaning news sources.

I encourage you to check out the website and click around. Read a story that interests you to see how it has been covered in the three areas. We'll be exploring this more next week.

Further Reading

Wikipedia. (2019, March 22). *Confirmation bias*.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias

 This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

References

Pariser, E. (2011). Beware online “filter bubbles” [Video file]. *TED* *https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles*

This page titled 9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.12: Misinformation and Fake News

This Week's Content

I'll be honest - there is so much information out there on this topic, it was hard for me to narrow down what I thought were some of the best sources so you can get a well-rounded picture of misinformation and fake news. I've picked sources that I found interesting and informational. I'll include a "Further Reading" list at the end of the reading section in case you want to explore more on your own.

Types of Misinformation

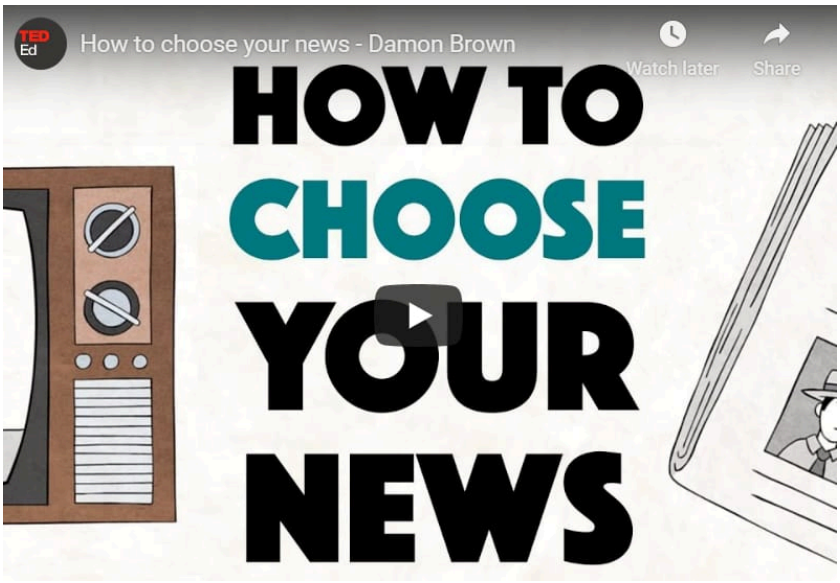
There are different types of misinformation and different reasons for spreading it. I want to start this week with a few definitions so we're all on the same page.

Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, an assistant professor of communication and media at Merrimack College, Melissa Zimdars, started an online resource with tips on spotting fake news and misinformation. This resource also included a vast list of websites. She and her students tagged each website with labels identifying the type of content it shared. These are the tags she identified and act as good definitions for the kinds of misinformation that are out there:

- **Fake News**: Sources that entirely fabricate information, disseminate deceptive content, or grossly distort actual news reports.
- **Satire**: Sources that use humor, irony, exaggeration, ridicule, and false information to comment on current events.
- **"Extreme" Bias**: Sources that come from a particular point of view and may rely on propaganda, decontextualized information, and opinions distorted as facts.
- **Conspiracy**: Sources that are well-known promoters of kooky conspiracy theories. Examples: 9/11 conspiracies, chem-trails, lizard people in the sewer systems, birther rumors, flat earth 'theory,' fluoride as mind control, vaccines as mind control etc.
- **Rumor**: Sources that traffic in rumors, gossip, innuendo, and unverified claims.
- **State News**: Sources in repressive states operating under government sanction.
- **Junk Science**: Sources that promote pseudoscience, metaphysics, naturalistic fallacies, and other scientifically dubious claims.
- **Hate News**: Sources that actively promote racism, misogyny, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination.
- **Clickbait**: Sources that provide generally credible content, but use exaggerated, misleading, OR questionable headlines, social media descriptions, and/or images. These sources may also use sensational language to generate interest, clickthroughs, and shares, but their content is typically verifiable.

It doesn't appear that the list is still being updated, but it contains 1001 websites, which is a bit alarming. Also in 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries picked "post-truth" as its International Word of the Year. Oxford defines post-truth as *"relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."* I find that pretty scary. You'll often hear people say, "We're living in a post-truth era."

So how did we get here? This TedEd video by Damon Brown helps explain it:



How Does it Happen?

There is evidence that Russian operatives interfered with the 2016 presidential election, and the US Office of National Intelligence says it's not just Russia, but several other countries that continued to sow doubt in the 2020 election season. See the August 2020 press release from the NCSC Director. But, it's not only foreign actors who are spreading misinformation and fake news. The New York Times has done an excellent job with its video coverage in explaining how it's happening.



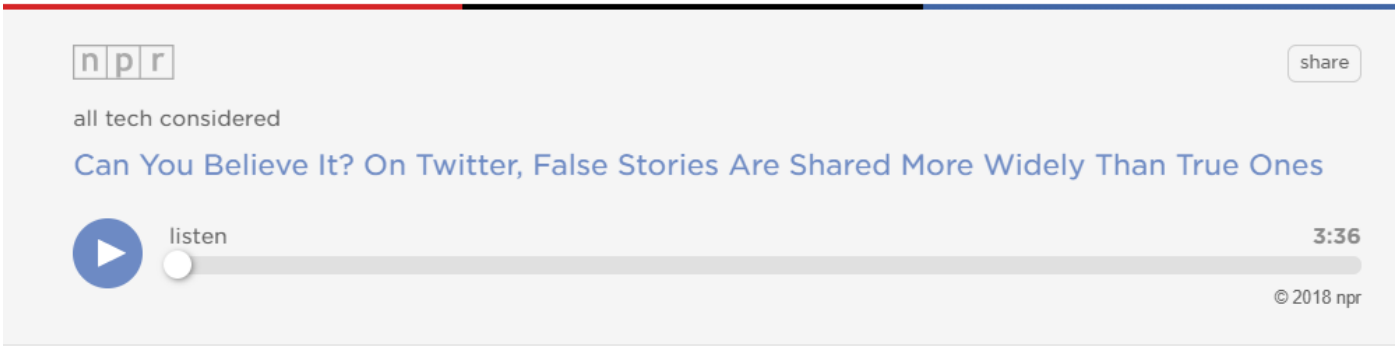
This article from the New York Times describes how one Maryland man fabricated stories from his own home on a regular basis and made a lot of money doing it.

Reading One: From New York Times: From Headline to Photograph, A Fake News Masterpiece by Scott Shane

Fake News Can't Compete with the Truth

In 2018, researchers at MIT published some alarming findings after studying news on Twitter. They looked at a massive amount of data from nearly ten years and found that 126,000 rumors were spread by more than 3 million people. The study appears in the journal Science. It is available for free online, but is quite technical so I'm including a news story on the study instead.

This audio file is from National Public Radio. If you'd prefer, you can also read the story transcript, it's also linked in the source citations below. The actual study is linked in the Further Reading section.



It's Not Just Social Media

We can't blame all of this on Social Media. These stories that are shared have to originate somewhere. In this video, Noah Tavlin explains what's known as the circular media phenomenon.



Conspiracy Theories: How Seemingly Outlandish Information Gets Believed

Conspiracy theories have been around forever. Our increasingly connected society means that information and theories that were once relatively hidden and believed by a small group can now be spread rapidly to a huge number of people. Political scientist and conspiracy theory researcher, Eric Oliver says that most people can be put into one of two groups of thinkers: intuitionists or rationalists.

The rationalists look at logic, deduction, and facts and Oliver describes this thinking as pretty transparent. But the intuitionists' thinking is much more tied to emotion. When the intuitionist is feeling scared or anxious, they go in search of answers that can explain this emotional feeling. Oliver explains his theory further in the Big Brains podcast episode: The Science of Conspiracy Theories and Political Polarization with Eric Oliver.

This same idea is explored in this video from The New York Times opinion section. The video explores the two types of thinkers, how each type reacts to each other, and what we can do to help bridge some of the divides that have happened.



Operation Infektion

The New York Times opinion section has created an excellent 3-part video series called Operation Infektion - which explains the Russian tactic of spreading misinformation; it's a different kind of warfare that's happening not only in the United States, but around the world. I have put links to the series in the Further Readings and Resources section of this chapter (last page in the reading). I encourage you to check it out.

Why Should We Care About Fake News?

It's easy to become cynical and throw up our hands. When I'm doing library instruction for classes that are working on a specific assignment, I often hear students say things like, "You can't trust any media." This is our new reality and in order to be productive contributors to our society, we must care about these things and we must be armed with the tools to recognize when something seems off.

Here are the reasons I think we all should care:

Fake news creates threatening situations

In our information rich world, you ***deserve*** accurate and comprehensive information. Encountering lies and biased information by deceptive means is frustrating, time consuming, and sows seeds of mistrust. We have seen misinformation and fake news threaten democracy (political mistrust) and even threaten public health (COVID-19 crisis). A 2019 Pew Research Study found that Americans view fake news as a greater threat than violent crime, climate change, and even terrorism. Everyone deserves the truth.

Fake news can be physically dangerous

We've seen how misinformation can pit people with differing views against each other. In some cases, fake news has led to physical violence. The Operation Infektion video mentioned the Pizzagate story, in which a man showed up at a Washington D.C. pizza restaurant with several loaded guns. He was acting on fake news stories and could have caused real physical harm if he hadn't have been stopped. The spreading of lies and deceit creates hostility and tensions that can lead to physical violence.

Fake news can damage your reputation

On a personal level, the sharing of fake news or using it to support an argument diminishes your standing and credibility among your friends, peers, and colleagues. If you encounter someone spreading fake news, don't be afraid to set the facts straight. You've learned tools in this class to help you do that.

Fake news creates distrust in all news

Accusations made against credible news organizations cause mistrust in those organizations. These accusations can lead to a general mistrust of all media sources, including quality media outlets with high journalistic standards. The same Pew Research Study mentioned before shows that most Americans don't blame journalists for fake news, but they do expect journalists to help fix the problem (Mitchell, A., et al., 2019). That's a tall order given the mistrust that many have of the media.

I've heard students say in class before, "You can't trust the New York Times." Yet this newspaper has won more Pulitzer Prizes in Journalism than any other newspaper and its editorial standards are readily available.

How to Spot Fake News

The Crash Course series we've watched this semester and other readings and assignments have armed you with some great tools to evaluate information. There are many other resources available to help you gain these skills. I've selected two that I think are useful:

- Reading one: From NPR: A Finder's Guide to Facts by Steve Inskeep
- Reading two: From the TED-Ed Blog: How to Tell Fake News from Real by Laura McClure

Further Readings

This is simply a list of other stories and information I came across while looking for content for this week. If this is a topic that fascinates you, here are some other sources you might be interested in exploring further:

- How to Spot Fake News from FactCheck.org
- The Spread of True and False News Online from Science
- The Chain Email Your Friend Sent You is (Likely) Bogus. Seriously. from FactCheck.org
- When Seeing is No Longer Believing: Inside the Pentagon's race against deepfake videos - CNN
- Snopes Field Guide to Fake News Sites
- Verification Handbook: An Ultimate Guideline on Digital Age Sourcing for Emergency Coverage. Edited by Craig Silverman - free PDF ebook.
- The Honest Truth about Fake News and How Not to Fall For It - KQED
- "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning" - Executive Summary, Stanford History Education Group
- The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics
- Facticious - Spot Fake News game

Operation Infektion: 3-part Series from The New York Times Opinion Section

- Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News
- The Seven Commandments of Fake News
- How Disinformation is Taking over the World

Fact Checking Sites:

- Associated Press (AP) Fact Check
- FactCheck.org (nonprofit & nonpartisan)
- Snopes
- Hoax-Slayer
- PolitiFact.com (for American political news)

This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Brown, D. (2014, June 5). *How to choose your news* [Video file]. https://youtu.be/q-Y-z6HmRgI Note: This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the TED-ed YouTube channel.

Niu, I., Eaton, A. & Bracken, K. (2020, October 26). How homegrown disinformation could disrupt this US election [Video file]. https://youtu.be/_gNcYdvF1Co Note: This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the NY Times YouTube channel.

Rand, P. (Host). (2019, May 20). The science of conspiracy theories and political polarization with Eric Oliver. On Big Brains [Audio podcast]. University of Chicago News. https://news.uchicago.edu/podcasts/big-brains/science-conspiracy-theories-and-political-polarization-eric-oliver Note: This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the University of Chicago News website.

Sydell, L. (2018, March 12). Can you believe it? On Twitter, false stories are shared more widely than true ones [Audio file]. *National Public Radio*. https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=592885660 This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the NPR website.

Tavlin, N. (2015, August 27). How false news can spread [video file]. *TED-Ed*. https://youtu.be/cSKGa_7XJkg This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the TED-ed YouTube channel.

The New York Times. (2020, October 27). What can you do about QAnon? [Video file]. New York Times Opinion Section. https://youtu.be/4lg6cZmfpeM Note: This source is not licensed under a CC, but is freely available on the NY Times YouTube channel.

Zimdaris, M. (2016). *False, misleading, clickbait-y, and/or satirical "news" sources*. https://docs.google.com/document/d/10eA5-mCZLSS4MQY5QGb5ewC3VAL6pLkT53V_81ZyitM/preview Note: This source is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License CC BY 3.0

This page titled 9.12: Misinformation and Fake News is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 12: Misinformation and Fake News by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.13: Professional Conversations

Writing in the Workplace

You probably know someone who has said, “I’m a lousy writer, but it doesn’t matter since I don’t write for a living and I’m not an English teacher.” You might have even made such a comment yourself. In reality, good writing can help you from the moment you apply for a job and throughout your time in the workforce. And regardless of whether you are writing in academic or professional settings, good writing involves an awareness of voice, audience, and message.

You will find that many of the skills you have learned in this class will serve you well in the workplace. Presenting a well researched and reasoned argument in your writing can be pivotal to achieving goals.

One of this week's assignments is to write a persuasive email in the workplace. I have pulled a few sections from a writing text (linked in citation) to guide you. This first section discusses etiquette for writing a workplace email. However, there is a lot of good information on professional writing in this chapter that may come in handy in other classes or as you search for employment, so you might want to bookmark it for future use.

Using Email in the Workplace

Emailing started small in the 1960s and became more widespread by the 1990s. Today the idea of going a day without emails is incomprehensible to many people, both professionally and personally.

Even though most working people in the United States have both personal and work email, workplace email guidelines make the two quite different. Failing to follow these guidelines for workplace emails can have a range of ramifications from mild embarrassment to termination from your job.

The following guidelines are general and most of them will apply in most workplaces. You are likely to find, however, that your workplace has its own guidelines that you will need to learn and follow.

Here are some general workplace email guidelines:

- Make sure your writing has no grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors and no typos. Any email, whether it is sent internally or externally, reflects not only on the person sending it, but also on the organization employing that person.
- Use standard wording, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Do not use any of the abbreviated, casual text that is common in personal online communications and texting.
- Use a subject line that targets the key point of the email so that the subject line can be a helpful sorting or searching tool. Adjust the subject line if you're replying to an email and your reply is on a completely different topic.
- Be concise.
- Be courteous.
- Use jokes sparingly since they are often misunderstood.

Effective Workplace Writing

You'll find that writing in the workplace often mimics academic writing. You should be aware of your voice, audience, and message, and which appeal will work best (ethos, logos, pathos). Avoid fallacies and use solid evidence to back up your arguments.

If you need a refresher on persuasive appeals, reasoning, or fallacies, I would recommend reviewing Chapter 6: Persuasive Appeals.

The article linked in this week's reading is about writing a workplace memo, but the steps outlined could just as easily be used in other forms of workplace writing, including a persuasive email, which is one of your assignments this week.

There is one misstep in the article in which the author links to the website of a historian to guide you in writing a thesis statement. Though the website could be valuable (it does have a lot of information on doing historical research and writing), it doesn't really

go into writing thesis statements. If you need some guidance in that area, I suggest checking out the Purdue Online Writing Lab section on developing a thesis statement.

Reading: From Forbes Website: How To Write A Memo That Pep People Will Actually People Will Actually Read by David Teten


This chapter was compiled, reworked, and/or written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Original sources used to create content (also licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 unless otherwise noted):

Joining the conversation. (2012). *The writer's handbook, v.1.* https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/writers-handbook/s08-02-recognizing-the-rhetorical-sit.html NOTE: This title is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

This page titled 9.13: Professional Conversations is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 13: Professional Conversations by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors

Using Crash Course: Navigating Digital Information for Class Discussions

This excellent series provides concise, credible information to help students learn to navigate and evaluate digital information. I used every video in the 10-part series for discussion assignments. Sometimes, I utilized Studio in Canvas to allow students to comment directly on the video. Other times, there were specific prompts to help students practice what they had learned from the video.

The following Discussion Prompts are available for your use.

All Class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #1

One of my favorite authors, John Green, along with his brother, Hank, started an educational YouTube series several years ago called Crash Course. In one of the newest additions to the series, they're tackling digital information and I think it has some great tie-ins to this course. We'll be watching several videos over upcoming weeks.

I am utilizing a tool that allows you to comment directly in the video. When something seems interesting or makes you think, post a comment. Your classmates can comment on your comments as well.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think more deeply about how we are consuming information. This discussion isn't directly tied to a unit outcome, but is a good introduction to the series, which will become more relevant as we move forward.

What to Do:

Because this video is basically an introduction to the series, there's no formal prompt or grading rubric - just comment in at least two places in the video. You can also add to or respond to your classmates comments, though that's not a requirement for this week's assignment. We'll get more into a discussion atmosphere in future videos in the series.

Posting a Comment in the Video:

To post a comment in the video, follow these steps:

1. Watch the Video: Introduction to Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #1
2. Pause the video when you're ready to comment on the section
3. Type your comment in the text box just below the video
4. Click the blue Comment at xx:xx:xx box to post the comment

Crash Course Digital Information #2: Facts about Fact Checkers

In this second episode, John Green starts getting into the skills that are needed to evaluate information. Most of what he's talking about applies to the information you'll find on the open web - through a search engine or in a social media feed. We'll be digging deeper into evaluating sources in our next unit.

I am utilizing a tool that allows you to comment directly in the video. When something seems interesting or makes you think, post a comment. Your classmates can comment on your comments as well.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think more deeply about how we are consuming information.This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

Students will be able to recognize the 5 Ws of source evaluation. (Note - we haven't actually reviewed this content yet, but this video is a nice introduction.)

What to Do:

There is no formal prompt or grading rubric - just comment in at least two places in the video. You can also add to or respond to your classmates comments, though that's not a requirement for this week's assignment.

Posting a Comment in the Video:

To post a comment in the video, follow these steps:

1. Watch the Video: Facts about Fact Checking
2. Pause the video when you're ready to comment on the section
3. Type your comment in the text box just below the video
4. Click the blue Comment at xx:xx:xx box to post the comment

Crash Course Digital Information #3: Lateral Reading

In this third episode, John Green brings up some additional questions to ask yourself when evaluating digital information. Most of what he's talking about applies to the information you'll find on the open web - through a search engine or in a social media feed, but because we gather so much information online for our own personal reasons, it's vital to think about these question and know how to spot things that seem questionable.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think more deeply about how we are consuming information.This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

Students will be able to apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility.

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Lateral Reading
2. Use Google or another search engine to find a website that appears to support a cause you believe in. It could be related to a hobby, or a charity, or even a professional organization that's connected to your current or future career. Take some time to explore the website and do some lateral reading as described in the video. Then, contribute to the discussion:
    1. Provide the name of the website and paste the URL
    2. What did your lateral searching and reading reveal about who is behind the website? In other words, who made it and why?
    3. Where did you go to find the answer to b above?
    4. After practicing lateral reading to learn more about the website you chose, do you trust the information this organization is providing on its website? Why?

Responses to Classmates due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Comment on the analysis of at least two of your classmates' posts. Did you use any of the same sources when practicing

lateral reading to evaluate your websites? Other observations?

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #4: Who Can You Trust

In the fourth episode, John Green discusses the issue of trust. How can we trust the digital information we find? This has become a real problem in our information overloaded society. You'll see that he acknowledges that even well-respected sources can sometimes make mistakes, but it's how they deal with those mistakes that matters.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and critical reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcomes:

Students will be able to

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility.
- Demonstrate critical reading skills.

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Who Can You Trust?
2. Use the source you identified as your "Good" web source this week and answer the questions John posed in the video:
    1. What is the author or authors' professional background?
    2. What is the process the source used to produce this information?
    3. What systems are in place to catch mistakes and correct them. If you find a specific written policy on the website, paste the URL.

Responses to at least one Classmate due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Comment on the analysis of at least two of your classmates' posts. Do you agree they have found a "good" web source? Why?

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #5: Using Wikipedia

In the fifth episode, John Green takes a dive into Wikipedia. I'll be honest, I was worried about what he would say in this video, but I have to say after watching it, this is exactly how I instruct students to use Wikipedia. It is a great place to start to get some basic information about a topic and a great jumping-off point. I'll be interested to read your responses to the discussion this week.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and critical reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcomes.

Students will be able to:

Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility.

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Using Wikipedia
2. Go to Wikipedia's main page
3. You will see a linked menu in the left-hand column. Click the fifth item down from the top in that left column that says Random Article. If you get an article that is only a few sentences long, keep clicking the Random Article link until you get an article that has some substantial information. Explore and read the article and look at the list of references, then provide answers to these prompts:
    1. Tell your classmates what article you landed on, give a short summary (in your own words), and provide the URL.
    2. Is the article about something you're familiar with or is it about something new to you?
    3. Based on the references listed, how well-researched do you think this entry is?
    4. Click on the "Talk" tab that John described in the video - What kind of "talk" has taken place about this article?
    5. Finally - tell the rest of the class your experiences with the communication you get from other instructors about the use of Wikipedia. Has any instructor ever said it's OK to use it as a starting or jumping-off point?

Responses to at least one Classmate due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Comment on at least two of your classmates' posts. Do you agree with their assessment of the Wikipedia entry they discussed? Why?

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #6: Evaluating Evidence

In the sixth episode, John Green reinforces our lessons on evaluating information and the importance of recognizing fallacies in arguments by stressing that credible sources should base their claims on evidence - and that evidence should be coming from reliable sources.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and critical reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility (unit 2).
- Identify rhetorical appeals and fallacies in reasoning (unit 2).

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Evaluating Evidence. In the video, John talks about irrelevant evidence and misinformation - when someone tries to bring evidence into the conversation, but that evidence isn't relevant to the argument that's being made - meaning the logic is flawed (a fallacy). This happens all the time and can often be found in social media posts or comments.
2. Do a Google search (or use a search engine of your choice), or search one of your social media feeds and find an example of someone using flawed logic. The topic can be anything you like, and the example might be someone's tweet or social media post, a comment on an article/post or a social media post, a blog, or an actual article.
3. In the Padlet space below, click the plus sign or double click anywhere to add your details. Follow these instructions and answer to these prompts:
    1. Title your post with your name and the name of the fallacy being used. If you need a refresher, look at last week's reading on fallacies, or look at the Your Logical Fallacies website.
    2. Click the chain link symbol and provide a link to your example.
    3. In the "Write-something" area tell your classmates why this is an example of the fallacy you identified.
        1. I've provided an example to get you started.

Responses to at least two Classmates due by 11:59 pm Monday

4. Add your name and comment on at least two of your classmates' posts in the comment area down below their Padlet post. Make sure you sign your name so you get credit for your response. Do you agree with their assessment of the use of irrelevant evidence or misinformation and the fallacy they've identified? Why?

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #7: Evaluating Photos & Video

In the seventh episode, John Green takes on photos and video. These are perhaps the most effective tools for misinformation because we naturally want to believe what we can see. But, there are steps you can take to make sure what you're seeing is coming from a reliable source.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and lateral reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility. (unit 2)
- Use information responsibly (seeking accurate and reliable sources while respecting intellectual property).

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Evaluating Photos and Videos. In the video, John talks about doing a reverse image search using Google or TinEye. You're going to practice that.
2. Find an image that could be taken out of context if it was posted just by itself or find an example of an image on social media or some other web-based source that has fooled you. Provide answers to these prompts.
3. In the Padlet space below, click the plus sign or double click anywhere to add your details Follow these instructions and answer to these prompts:
    1. Title your post with your name.
    2. Click the picture of the chain link to paste the URL to the image/video/social media post, etc.
    3. Do a reverse image search using Google or TinEye to try to find the origin of the image. (John demonstrates how to do this in the video.) In the "Write Something" area Tell your classmates what information you found about the image?
    4. If it was an image that originally fooled you, tell your classmates about your experience and how you confirmed it wasn't real.

Responses to at least two Classmates due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Add your name and comment on at least two of your classmates' posts in the comment area down below their Padlet post. Make sure you include your name so you get credit for your response. Have you had similar experiences?

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #8: Data & Infographics

In the eighth episode, John Green takes a look at data and infographics. We know from his previous episodes that people often equate graphics with good sources, but we need to pay attention to the sources that were used to make those graphics and the way the information is presented.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and lateral reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility. (Unit 2)
- Use information responsibly (seeking accurate and reliable sources while respecting intellectual property).

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Data and Infographics. In it, John talks about the importance of paying attention to **source** and **context** while viewing information graphics or data online. Once again, your lateral reading skills should be put into play for this discussion.
2. Pick one of the following infographics and analyze it using the prompts:

- The Healing Power of Cat Purrs
- Cannabis Law: The Past, Present, and Future
- Olympic Gold Medal Winners
- Why Does Bacon Smell So Good?
- UFO Sightings
- What Makes Health Care So Expensive?
- U.S. Police Brutality

1. Tell your classmates which infographic you picked and provide a link.
2. Is the data accurate and relevant?
3. Does the information include any fallacies in logic? If yes, what kind?
4. Is the source used for the graphic reliable?
5. Is the information presented in an honest way?

Responses to at least two Classmates due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Respond to at least two classmates who picked ***different*** infographics.

    1. Do you support their findings? Why?

All Class Discussion - Crash Course Digital Information #9: Click Restraint

In episode nine, John Green discusses the concept of click restraint - restraining from the urge to click on one of the first few results in your internet search. This episode didn't lend itself for specific tasks, so instead, I'm utilizing the tool that allows you to comment directly in the video.

When something seems interesting or makes you think, post a comment. Your classmates can comment on your comments as well.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue thinking about evaluation and lateral reading. This video and commenting is related to the following unit learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Use information responsibly (seeking accurate and reliable sources while respecting intellectual property).

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility (Unit 2).

What to Do:

Video comments due by 11:59 pm Sunday

Because this video didn't lend itself to practicing a specific task, there's no formal prompt or grading rubric - just comment in at least two places in the video. You can also add to or respond to your classmates comments, though that's not a requirement for this week's assignment.

Posting a Comment in the Video:

To post a comment in the video, follow these steps:

1. Watch the Video: Click Restraint
2. Pause the video when you want to comment on something he says
3. Type your comment in the text box just below the video
4. Click the blue Comment at xx:xx:xx box to post the comment

All-class Discussion: Crash Course Digital Information #10: Social Media

In this last episode, John Green takes on social media. Some of the concepts he talks about were introduced last week, including filter bubbles and confirmation bias.

Goal

The goal of this assignment is to continue practicing evaluation and lateral reading skills. This discussion is related to the following unit learning outcome:

- Apply evaluation techniques to determine a source's relevancy and credibility (Unit 2).
- Use information responsibly (seeking accurate and reliable sources while respecting intellectual property) (Unit 4).

What to Do:

Watch Video and Initial Discussion Post due by 11:59 pm Sunday

1. Watch the video: Social Media. Think about the "gatekeepers" of social media - as John mentions, there are no filters in what is posted. Filtering might be happening after things are posted - but not before a small group of people has already seen it. You must also remember the importance of using lateral reading skills **before** reposting information from a friend or followed source. Think of these things as you formulate your original post.
2. Think of a time when a friend, family member, or someone you follow shared fake or misleading information on social media. Follow these prompts:

1. Describe the misinformation and share a link to the source if you can find it.
2. Did you respond to the person who posted it? If not, why? If you did, how did you respond?

Responses to at least two Classmates due by 11:59 pm Monday

3. Respond to at least two classmates.

    1. Look at the story they relayed. If they didn't respond, give them an example of how one might respond to a post like that. If they did respond, are there any ways you think their response could have been more effective? Explain in detail.

This supplementary material written by Andi Adkins Pogue and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

This page titled 9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 14: Assignment Resources for Instructors by Andi Adkins Pogue is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

10: Popular Culture + Literacy

DID YOU KNOW?[58]

Literacy rates continue to increase in the U.S., as do the number of words people read and write every year, thanks to the rise in online writing. In university classrooms, as Stanford University's Andrea Lunsford demonstrates in her research, undergraduate writing students are not only writing longer papers in their courses today, they are making fewer errors of usage and style. Clearly, popular culture has not led to a generation of illiterate people. What's more, popular culture is not, in itself, the cause of poor writing and when young people engage with popular culture they are learning valuable rhetorical concepts and skills.

The reason students read popular culture with facility and enthusiasm, including complex and sophisticated forms, is not a matter of simplicity, it's a matter of practice. Learning how to navigate any genre takes time and practice to figure out how it works. Think about the first time you tried to figure out something in a genre with which you had little practice, whether it was a legal contract, poem, opera, or heavy metal. It probably slowed you down, was a bit confusing, and was neither pleasurable nor confidence building. Yet, if you had more practice, your familiarity and facility would increase. There is no doubt that, for the great majority of students, they have much, much more practice reading and making sense of popular culture than they do with academic articles or textbooks. Although, it is also the case that, for every student, there are genres of popular culture they do not have much experience with and are not able to make sense of easily. When I talk with students about popular culture, it is not long before they'll tell me of a form or genre that they just think is weird or that they don't get, whether it's hip hop or country music or horror films or Twitter. It is practice with reading and interpreting genres that has developed their skills in reading, movies, popular music, television, computer games, social media, and more. They read with ease, but not because the content is always easy.

The ease with which students can interpret a form of popular culture has developed with practice, which at some point included struggle, help from others, and accumulating knowledge—in other words, learning. Another myth about popular culture and writing is that people learn nothing from it. Students learn a tremendous amount about rhetoric and communication from their engagement with popular culture, most notably about rhetorical concepts such as genre, audience, and style. When researchers talk with students about their popular culture reading, the students talk knowledgeably and even critically about these rhetorical aspects. Students may talk about a romantic comedy in terms of genre conventions, for example, discussing the kinds of character types that typically show up, whether as protagonists or sidekicks. Or, ask students to discuss the people who frequent an online popular culture discussion forum and they will be able to describe the audience there, as well as the kinds of posts that are viewed positively or negatively. Young people may not always discuss these elements using the specific terms we use in academic settings, but they are familiar with these key rhetorical concepts.

Questions:

Review the highlighted pieces in this chapter – do you agree with them?

---

[58]Snippet from = Williams, Bronwyn T. "Popular Culture is Killing Writing." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

This page titled 10: Popular Culture + Literacy is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Sybil Priebe (Independent Published) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 9.1: Popular Culture + Literacy by Sybil Priebe is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CaBmAii8dMa6I-ZolNrSSCNoAiVR3NP0.

11: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Learning Outcomes

- Understand a research paper assignment prompt
- Choose, evaluate, and integrate sources from a wide variety of publications including academic journals
- Narrow a research topic.
- Use correct MLA format for essays and in-text citations.

11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment

11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

11.5: Types of Sources

11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles

11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

11.10: MLA Essay Format

11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages



Image courtesy of Keira Burton from Pexels.com under the Pexels License.

This page titled 11: The Research Process is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 41 sec):

Reasons to be excited about the research paper

Why are research papers assigned so often in college? Why is the research paper the focus of most writing courses?

It's really not because instructors are sadists. Quite the contrary! The process of writing a research paper can help us learn about a complex topic and come up with our own informed perspective. It's a way to find clarity when the world is complicated. We immerse ourselves in others' ideas and then come to our own conclusion.

We might consider that in writing a research paper we are fully joining the academic conversation. As Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein put it in *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, the research paper is "the highest expression of the conversational approach to writing...it is a chance to practice a set of skills that you can use the rest of your life: going out into the community, finding a space for yourself, and making a contribution of your own" (219).



A research paper brings together many voices on a topic. Image by Marc Wathiew on Flickr, licensed CC BY NC 2.0.

Earlier chapters of this book have focused on responding to other people's arguments. Summary, assessment, and response essays and compare-and-contrast essays require us to write about the things someone else considers important. As we start the research paper, we can enjoy a bit more freedom. We can find multiple perspectives on the same topic and decide how much of each to include.

Many students, after some initial anxiety, ultimately find the research paper to be empowering and meaningful. Here are a few reasons to celebrate this kind of assignment:

- We become relative experts on one micro subject.
- We build our own argument and choose our focus.
- We are free to choose a variety of sources; we don't have to use what a teacher selects.
- We don't have to cover everything. We have flexibility about which ideas to include and how to narrow our topic.
- We can choose a personally meaningful topic that connects to an area of interest, experience, or career plans.

- We get to teach the teacher and our classmates something they may enjoy learning.

We build on existing skills for responding to sources

Thus far we have focused on skills for close reading and summary of one text (Chapters 2 and Chapter 3), assessment of that text (Chapter 4), and then original responses to the text (Chapter 5). All these skills will be useful as we work with multiple texts in the research paper, but we won't need to be as thorough with each source. We'll focus more on summarizing, assessing, and responding to main ideas rather than examining all the twists and turns of each argument.

Which new skills do we need? Since we are going to be finding our own sources, we need to know where to look. We need to know which sources are credible. Since there are many kinds of sources, from academic studies to newspaper articles, to interviews, videos, and social media posts, we need to see which kinds of sources can be useful for which purposes. The rest of this chapter will give guidance on choosing sources.

In essays that focus on summary, assessment, and response, the structure is to a large extent determined by the text we are responding to. With the research paper, we have a lot more freedom, so we may need new organizational strategies. How do we come up with a central idea for our paper that builds on a bunch of different sources? Conversely, how do we mention multiple sources in different paragraphs and use them to support a central idea? Chapter 7 sections on definition, evaluation, causal, and proposal arguments will offer ideas for organization based on the argument's purpose.

This page titled 11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 6.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (1 min, 51 sec):

Before getting started on a research paper, spending some time with the prompt will help keep us from becoming overwhelmed. A research essay **prompt** is the instructor's description of the assignment. It will answer many of the questions we may have about the requirements, such as the following:

1. How many sources will we need?
2. What types of sources (see Section 6.5: Types of Sources)?
3. Do the sources need to be found somewhere specific, like the college library?
4. How long does the research essay need to be?
5. Is there a specific structure we are supposed to follow?

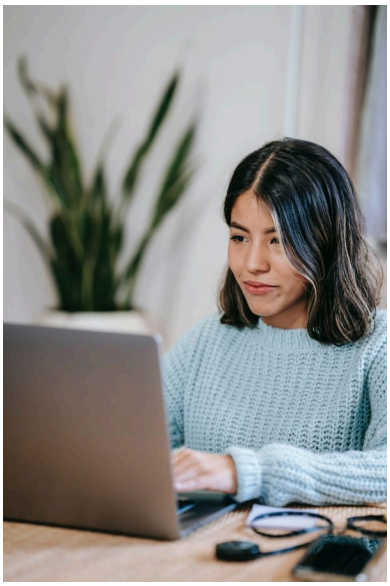


Photo by Liza Summer on Pexels under the Pexels License.

The steps below will help us analyze the essay prompt to get a clear picture of what the finished paper should include.

- First, circle or highlight all of the most important verbs in the prompt. Verbs are action words that often communicate the most important tasks in the assignment, like *analyze*, *evaluate*, *describe*, and so on.
- Then, create a chart that lists each verb in its own row on the left and the rest of the sentence it occurs in on the right. This will contain the most important components of the assignment, so you can use it later to review your draft.
- Is one of these writing tasks more the focus of the essay than the others? For example, an assignment might ask you to summarize a problem but spend more of the essay describing a proposed solution. In that case, you could put a star next to the task of describing the solution.
- Underline or highlight any words or requirements you don't understand, and ask your professor to clarify.
- Summarize the research essay prompt aloud by telling a friend or classmate what your assignment is about and what the basic requirements are.

Chapter 6 will describe what authoritative sources are, where to find them, and how to choose them. However, you can find your instructor's specific approach in the assignment description, so keep their instructions in mind as you read other advice on the research process.

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY NC SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

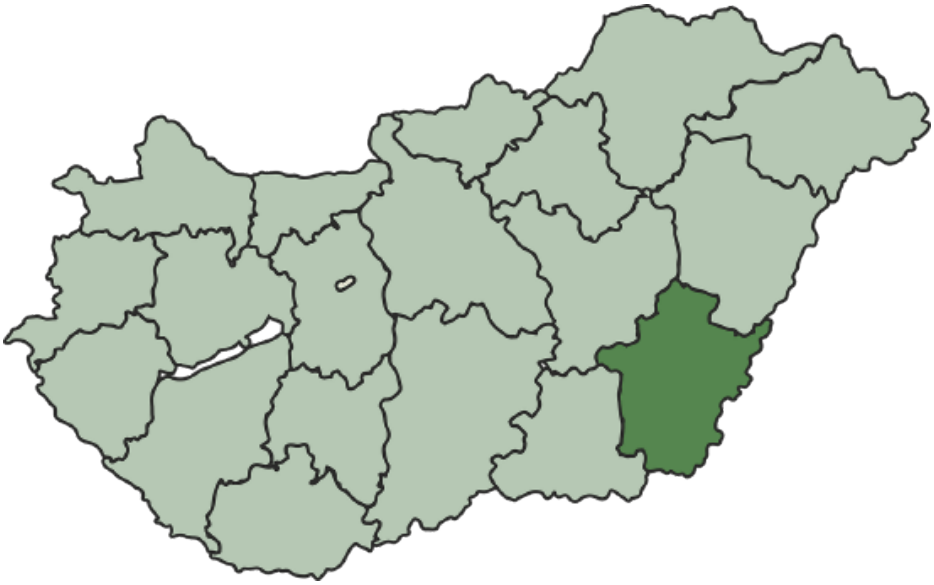
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 46 sec):

Choosing a Focused Topic

We can start with any general area of interest within the guidelines of the research essay prompt. See Section 11.3: Brainstorming on ways to come up with ideas. In most cases, as we research we will want to narrow our topic from this general beginning in order to be able to really dive into the conversation on the topic and consider multiple perspectives and counterarguments. We will likely learn about many subtopics as we explore our initial topic. If we read an overview of the initial topic, we can often identify subtopics by the way that overview is organized into sections. Though Wikipedia is not a scholarly source, it can be very helpful for this phase of the research process. Along the way, we can decide which we are interested in, research some more, and possibly narrow the topic yet further — all before attempting a rough draft.



Just as this map highlights one province within a country, a good research paper often focused on a limited aspect of a larger topic. Image by timacs on Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Let's take the example of solar energy as a general area of interest. As we research solar energy, we will see that there are different ways of harnessing the energy--from the sun's light and from the sun's heat. These correspond to the subtopics of solar photovoltaic energy and solar thermal energy. Say may decide we are more interested in solar thermal energy. We research that topic further and find that the sun's heat can be used to heat water in buildings or to heat the ventilation system, but they can also be used to generate electricity in large solar thermal power plants using a technique called Concentrated Solar Power, or CSP. Let's say that last use intrigues us. However, as we start to read the technical details of how these power plants work, we realize we are more interested in the potential of these plants than in their engineering. We are excited to read about the largest existing solar thermal power plant, the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility in the Mojave Desert of California, and we wonder how that facility can serve as a model for others. So the sequence of topics as we narrow it down goes like this:

1. Solar energy
2. Solar thermal energy
3. The Concentrated Solar Power technique for using solar thermal power to generate electricity
4. The potential renewable energy contribution of Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants
5. Ivanpah Solar Power Facility as a model for renewable electricity through large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants

If you are finding it hard to be specific about a topic, take a break from defining it and keep researching and brainstorming.

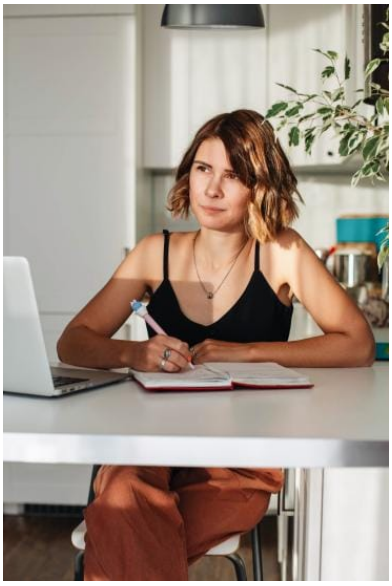


Photo by Anna Alexes from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Developing a research question

Knowing what question we are trying to answer can help us research efficiently. Before we start, we can use our focused topic to articulate a **research question**.

If we already have a guess as to what our answer is likely to be, we may want to articulate that as well in what is sometimes called a **working thesis**. We can come up with a hypothesis that we will test against the information you find in sources as we research. Keep in mind, we may want to modify the question and the hypothesis as we learn more.

A good research question will be challenging or potentially arguable. It will suggest the need for further investigation. Here are three possible research questions related to the topic above:

- Should we build more large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility?
- What are the environmental and social benefits of a large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plant like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility?
- Under what circumstances will large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility be cost-effective choices for clean energy?

As we research, we can revisit our research question from time to time to see if we are on track to answer it or if we need to change the question or the research.

> **Practice exercise** 11.3.1
>
> Write a phrase to describe a general area of interest you would like to investigate. Then do some preliminary online research using Wikipedia to identify subtopics. Choose one subtopic, do some research on it, and identify an even narrower subtopic. Create a list of at least three increasingly specific topics. Use the list above that started with solar energy as your model.

Attributions

Written by Natalie Peterkin and Anna Mills and licensed CC BY NC 4.0.

This page titled 11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.3: Choosing a Focused Topic is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 52 sec):

Before we start talking about how to choose search terms and where to search for sources, it can help to get a sense of what we're hoping to get out of the research. We might think that in order to support a thesis we should only look for sources that prove an idea we want to promote. But since writing academic papers is about joining a conversation, what we really need is to gather the sources that will help us situate our ideas within that ongoing conversation. What we should look for first is not support but the conversation itself: who is saying what about our topic?

The sources that make up the conversation may have various kinds of points to make and ultimately may play very different roles in our paper. After all, as we have seen in Chapter 2, an argument can involve not just evidence for a claim but limits, counterarguments, and rebuttals. Sometimes we will want to cite a research finding that provides strong evidence for a point; at other times, we will summarize someone else's ideas in order to explain how our own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation.

As you find sources on a topic, look for points of connection, similarity and difference between them. In your paper, you will need to show not just what each one says, but how they relate to each other in a conversation. Describing this conversation can be the springboard for your own original point.



Photo by Fabio Bracht on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Here are five common ways research papers can build on multiple sources to come up with an original point:

1. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a larger summary argument.** You might find that none of the sources you're working with specifically claim that early 20th-century British literature was preoccupied with changing gender roles but that, together, their findings all point to that broader conclusion.

2. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a claim about their implications.** You might review papers that explore various factors shaping voting behavior to argue that a particular voting-reform proposal will likely have positive impacts.

3. **Identify underlying areas of agreement.** You may argue that the literature on cancer and the literature on violence both describe the unrecognized importance of prevention and early intervention. This similarity will support your claim that

insights about one set of problems may be useful for the other.

4. **Identify underlying areas of disagreement.** You may find that the controversies surrounding educational reform—and its debates about accountability, curricula, school funding—ultimately stem from different assumptions about the role of schools in society.

5. **Identify unanswered questions.** Perhaps you review studies of the genetic and behavioral contributors to diabetes in order to highlight unknown factors and argue for more in-depth research on the role of the environment.

There are certainly other ways authors use sources to build theses, but these examples illustrate how original thinking in academic writing involves making connections with and between a strategically chosen set of sources.

Here's a passage of academic writing (an excerpt, not a complete paper) that gives an example of how a writer can describe a conversation among sources and use it to make an original point:

> Willingham (2011) draws on cognitive science to explain that students must be able to regulate their emotions in order to learn. Emotional self-regulation enables students to ignore distractions and channel their attention and behaviors in appropriate ways. Other research findings confirm that anxiety interferes with learning and academic performance because it makes distractions harder to resist (Perkins and Graham-Bermann, 2012; Putwain and Best, 2011). Other cognitive scientists point out that deep learning is itself stressful because it requires people to think hard about complex, unfamiliar material instead of relying on cognitive short-cuts.
>
> Kahneman (2011) describes this difference in terms of two systems for thinking: one fast and one slow. Fast thinking is based on assumptions and habits and doesn't require a lot of effort. For example, driving a familiar route or a routine grocery-shopping trip are not usually intellectually taxing activities. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is what we do when we encounter novel problems and situations. It's effortful, and it usually feels tedious and confusing. It is emotionally challenging as well because we are, by definition, incompetent while we're doing it, which provokes some anxiety. Solving a tough problem is rewarding, but the path itself is often unpleasant.
>
> These insights from cognitive science enable us to critically assess the claims made on both sides of the education reform debate. On one hand, they cast doubt on the claims of education reformers that measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education. For example, the Center for Education Reform promotes "the implementation of strong, data-driven, performance-based accountability systems that ensure teachers are rewarded, retained and advanced based on how they perform in adding value to the students who they teach, measured predominantly by student achievement." The research that Willingham (2011) and Kahneman (2011) describe suggests that frequent high-stakes testing may actually work against learning by introducing greater anxiety into the school environment.
>
> At the same time, opponents of education reform should acknowledge that these research findings should prompt us to take a fresh look at how we educate our children. While Stan Karp of Rethinking Schools is correct when he argues that "data-driven formulas [based on standardized testing] lack both statistical credibility and a basic understanding of the human motivations and relationships that make good schooling possible," it doesn't necessarily follow that all education reform proposals lack merit. Challenging standards, together with specific training in emotional self-regulation, will likely enable more students to succeed.

In that example, the ideas of Willingham and Kahneman are summarized approvingly, bolstered with additional research findings, and then applied to a new realm: the current debate surrounding education reform. Voices in that debate were portrayed as accurately as possible, sometimes with representative quotes. Most importantly, all references were tied directly to the author's own interpretative point, which relies on the source's claims.

As you can see, there are times when you should quote or paraphrase sources that you don't agree with or do not find particularly compelling. They may convey ideas and opinions that help explain and justify your own argument. Whether or not we agree with a source, we can focus on what it claims and how exactly its claims relate to other sources and to our own ideas.

[1]Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009).

[2]The sources cited in this example:

- Daniel T. Willingham, “Can teachers increase students’ self control?” American Educator 35, no. 2 (2011): 22-27.
- Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.
- Suzanne Perkins and Sandra Graham-Bermann, “Violence exposure and the development of school-related functioning: mental health, neurocognition, and learning,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 1(2012): 89-98.
- David William Putwain and Natalie Best, “Fear appeals in the primary classroom: Effects on test anxiety and test grade,” *Learning and Individual Differences* 21, no. 5 (2011): 580-584.

Practice Exercise 11.4.1

Browse the website TheConversation.com and select an article that interests you. Read it and reflect on how it uses sources. Which of the five ways of using sources listed above best describes its approach? Next, reread it looking for sentences that stand out. Select one memorable phrase or sentence that you would quote if you were writing an essay about this piece. Explain why you chose it. Select another point that you would paraphrase and explain why that one doesn't need to be quoted.

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY NC SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.5: Types of Sources

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 55 sec):

You probably know by now that if you cite Wikipedia as an authoritative source, the wrath of your professor shall be visited upon you. Why is it that even the most informative Wikipedia articles are still often considered illegitimate? And what are good sources to use? The table below summarizes types of secondary sources in four tiers. All sources have their legitimate uses, but the top-tier ones are preferable for citation.



Just as different fruits have different internal structures, different kinds of sources have different characteristics and uses.
Photo by Deon Black on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Types of Sources

Tier	Type	Content	Uses	How to find them
1	Peer-reviewed academic publications	Rigorous research and analysis	Provide strong evidence for claims and references to other high-quality sources	Google Scholar, library catalogs, and academic article databases
2	Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources	Well researched and even-handed descriptions of an event or state of the world	Initial research on events or trends not yet analyzed in the academic literature; may reference important Tier 1 sources	Websites of relevant agencies, Google searches using (site: *.gov or site: *.org), academic article databases
3	Short pieces from newspapers or credible websites	Simple reporting of events, research findings, or policy changes	Often point to useful Tier 2 or Tier 1 sources, may provide a factoid or two not found anywhere else	Strategic Google searches or article databases including newspapers and magazines
4	Agenda-driven or uncertain pieces	Mostly opinion, varying in thoughtfulness and credibility	May represent a particular position within a debate; more often provide keywords and clues about higher quality sources	Non-specific Google searches

Tier 1: Peer-reviewed academic publications

These are sources from the mainstream academic literature: books and scholarly articles. Academic books generally fall into three categories: (1) textbooks written with students in mind, (2) monographs, long documents which give an extended report on a particular research project, and (3) edited volumes in which each chapter is authored by different people. Scholarly articles appear in academic journals, which are published multiple times a year in order to share the latest research findings with scholars in the field. They're usually sponsored by some academic society. To get published, these articles and books had to earn favorable anonymous evaluations by qualified scholars. Who are the experts writing, reviewing, and editing these scholarly publications? Your professors. I describe this process below. Learning how to read and use these sources is a fundamental part of being a college student.

Tier 2: Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources

Some events and trends are too recent to appear in Tier 1 sources. Also, Tier 1 sources tend to be highly specific, and sometimes you need a more general perspective on a topic. Thus, Tier 2 sources can provide quality information that is more accessible to non-academics. There are three main categories. First, official reports from government agencies or major international institutions like the World Bank or the United Nations; these institutions generally have research departments staffed with qualified experts who seek to provide rigorous, even-handed information to decision-makers. Second, feature articles from major newspapers and magazines like *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The London Times*, or The Economist are based on original reporting by experienced journalists (not press releases) and are typically 1500+ words in length. Third, there are some great books from non-academic presses that cite their sources; they're often written by journalists. All three of these sources are generally well-researched descriptions of an event or state of the world, undertaken by credentialed experts who generally seek to be even-handed. It is still up to you to judge their credibility. Your instructors and campus librarians can advise you on which sources in this category have the most credibility.

Tier 3. Short pieces from periodicals or credible websites

A step below the well-developed reports and feature articles that make up Tier 2 are the short tidbits that one finds in newspapers and magazines or credible websites. How short is a short news article? Usually, they're just a couple paragraphs or less, and they're often reporting on just one thing: an event, an interesting research finding, or a policy change. They don't take extensive research and analysis to write, and many just summarize a press release written and distributed by an organization or business. They may describe things like corporate mergers, newly discovered diet-health links, or important school-funding legislation. You may want to cite Tier 3 sources in your paper if they provide an important factoid or two that isn't provided by a higher-tier piece, but if the Tier 3 article describes a particular study or academic expert, your best bet is to find the journal article or book it is reporting on and use that Tier 1 source instead. If the article mentions which journal the study was published in, you can go right to that journal through your library website. Sometimes you can find the original journal article by putting the scholar's name and some keywords into Google Scholar.

What counts as a credible website in this tier? You may need some guidance from instructors or librarians, but you can learn a lot by examining the person or organization providing the information (look for an "About" link). For example, if the organization is clearly agenda-driven or not up-front about its aims and/or funding sources, then it definitely isn't something you want to cite as a neutral authority. Also look for signs of expertise. A tidbit about a medical research finding written by someone with a science background carries more weight than the same topic written by a policy analyst. These sources are sometimes uncertain, which is all the more reason to follow the trail to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 source whenever possible.

Tier 4. Agenda-driven or pieces from unknown sources

This tier is essentially everything else, including Wikipedia.[4] These types of sources—especially Wikipedia—can be hugely helpful in identifying interesting topics, positions within a debate, keywords to search on, and, sometimes, higher-tier sources on the topic. They often play a critically important role in the early part of the research process, but they generally aren't (and shouldn't be) cited in the final paper. Throwing some keywords into Google and seeing what you get is a fine way to get started, but don't stop there. Start a list of the people, organizations, sources, and keywords that seem most relevant to your topic. For example, suppose you've been assigned a research paper about the impact of linen production and trade on the ancient world. A quick Google search reveals that (1) linen comes from the flax plant, (2) the scientific name for flax is *Linum usitatissimum,* (3) Egypt dominated linen production at the height of its empire, and (4) Alex J. Warden published a book about ancient linen trade in 1867.

Similarly, you found some useful search terms to try instead of “ancient world” (antiquity, Egyptian empire, ancient Egypt, ancient Mediterranean) and some generalizations for linen (fabric, textiles, or weaving). Now you’ve got a lot to work with as you tap into the library catalog and academic article databases.

Practice Exercise 11.5.1

Choose a topic that interests you and find one source related to it in each of the four tiers. What could you learn from each source? What are the limitations of each source?

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY NC SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.5: Types of Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.5: Types of Sources is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 2 sec):

Most of the Tier 1 sources available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic periodical after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Their origin explains both their basic structure and the high esteem they have in the eyes of your professors.

Many journals are sponsored by academic associations. Most of your professors belong to some big, general one (such as the Modern Language Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the International Association for Statistical Computing, or the Slavic and East European Folklore Association). There are also generalist organizations organized by region of the country or state, such as the Eastern Sociological Society or the Southern Management Association. Each of these associations exists to promote the exchange of research findings and collaboration in their disciplines. Towards this end, they organize conferences, sponsor working groups, and publish one or more academic journals. These journals are meant to both publicize and archive the most interesting and important findings of the field.

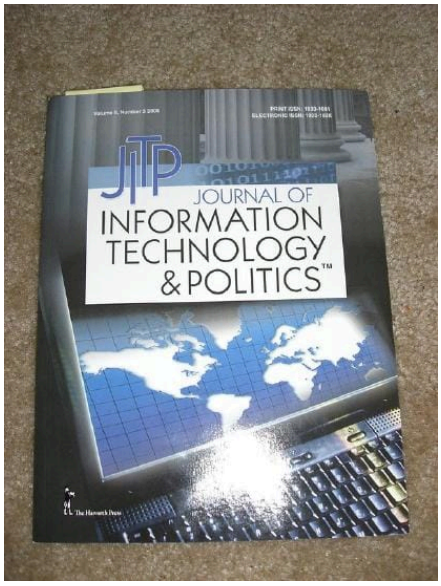


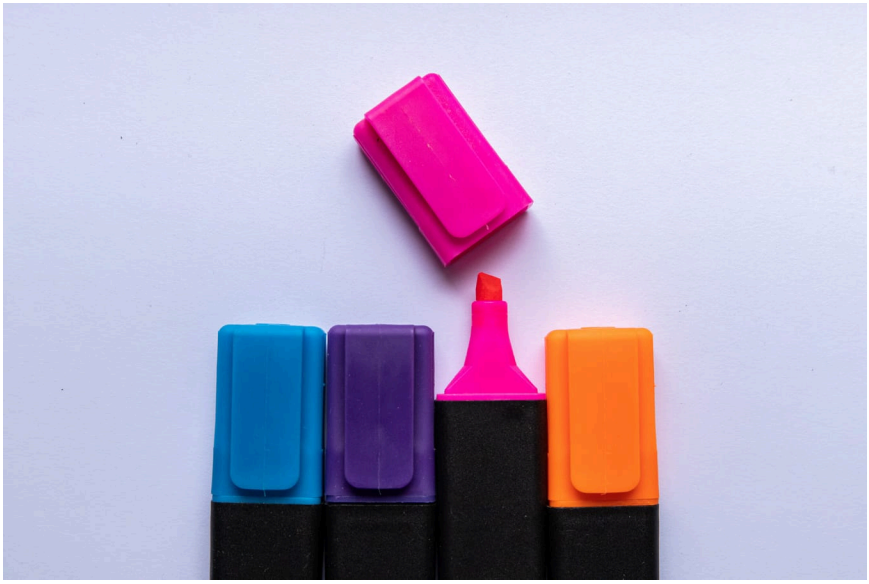
Photo by justgrimes on Flickr, licensed CC BY-SA 2.0.

Academic papers are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Thus, in a lot of fields they often have a structure reminiscent of the lab reports you've written for science classes:

1. **Abstract:** A one-paragraph summary of the article: its purpose, methods, findings, and significance.
2. **Introduction:** An overview of the key question or problem that the paper addresses, why it is important, and the key conclusion(s) (i.e., thesis or theses) of the paper.
3. **Literature review:** A synthesis of all the relevant prior research (the so-called "academic literature" on the subject) that explains why the paper makes an original and important contribution to the body of knowledge.
4. **Data and methods:** An explanation of what data or information the author(s) used and what they did with it.
5. **Results:** A full explanation of the key findings of the study.
6. **Conclusion/discussion:** Puts the key findings or insights from the paper into their broader context; explains why they matter.

Not all papers are so “sciencey.” For example, a historical or literary analysis doesn’t necessarily have a “data and methods” section; but they do explain and justify the research question, describe how the authors’ own points relate to those made in other relevant articles and books, develop the key insights yielded by the analysis, and conclude by explaining their significance. Some academic papers are review articles, in which the “data” are published papers and the “findings” are key insights, enduring lines of debate, and/or remaining unanswered questions.

Scholarly journals use a peer-review process to decide which articles merit publication. First, hopeful authors send their article manuscript to the journal editor, a role filled by some prominent scholar in the field. The editor reads over the manuscript and decides whether it seems worthy of peer review. If it’s outside the interests of the journal or is clearly inadequate, the editor will reject it outright. If it looks appropriate and sufficiently high quality, the editor will recruit a few other experts in the field to act as anonymous peer reviewers. The editor will send the manuscript (scrubbed of identifying information) to the reviewers who will read it closely and provide a thorough critique. Is the research question driving the paper timely and important? Does the paper sufficiently and accurately review all of the relevant prior research? Are the information sources believable and the research methods rigorous? Are the stated results fully justified by the findings? Is the significance of the research clear? Is it well written? Overall, does the paper add new, trustworthy, and important knowledge to the field? Reviewers send their comments to the editor who then decides whether to (1) reject the manuscript, (2) ask the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript, or (3) accept it for publication. Editors send the reviewers’ comments (again, with no identifying information) to authors along with their decisions. A manuscript that has been revised and resubmitted usually goes out for peer-review again; editors often try to get reviews from one or two first-round reviewers as well as a new reviewer. The whole process, from start to finish, can easily take a year, and it is often another year before the paper appears in print.



Highlighting is just one strategy for reading academic journal articles strategically.
Photo by Mitchell Luo on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Understanding the academic publication process and the structure of scholarly articles tells you a lot about how to find, read and use these sources:

1. **Find them quickly.** Instead of paging through mountains of dubious web content, go right to the relevant scholarly article databases in order to quickly find the highest quality sources.
2. **Use the abstracts.** Abstracts tell you immediately whether or not the article you’re holding is relevant or useful to the paper you’re assigned to write. You shouldn’t ever have the experience of reading the whole paper just to discover it’s not useful.
3. **Read strategically.** Knowing the anatomy of a scholarly article tells you what you should be reading for in each section. For example, you don’t necessarily need to understand every nuance of the literature review. You can just focus on why the authors claim that their own study is distinct from the ones that came before.
4. **Don’t sweat the technical stuff.** Not every social scientist understands the intricacies of log-linear modeling of quantitative survey data; however, the reviewers definitely do, and they found the analysis to be well constructed. Thus, you can accept the findings as legitimate and just focus on the passages that explain the findings and their significance in plainer language.
5. **Use one article to find others.** If you have one really good article that’s a few years old, you can use article databases to find newer articles that cited it in their own literature reviews. That immediately tells you which ones are on the same topic and offer newer findings. On the other hand, if your first source is very recent, the literature review section will describe the

other papers in the same line of research. You can look them up directly.

Students sometimes grumble when they're ordered to use scholarly articles in their research. It seems a lot easier to just Google some terms and find stuff that way. However, academic articles are the most efficient resource out there. They are vetted by experts and structured specifically to help readers zero in on the most important passages.

Practice Exercise 11.6.1

Enter a topic into a general subscription database that has both scholarly and non-scholarly sources (such as Academic Search Complete or Academic OneFile); browse the first few hits and classify each one as scholarly or not-scholarly. Look at the structure of the piece to make your determination.

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY NC SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles

Media Alternative

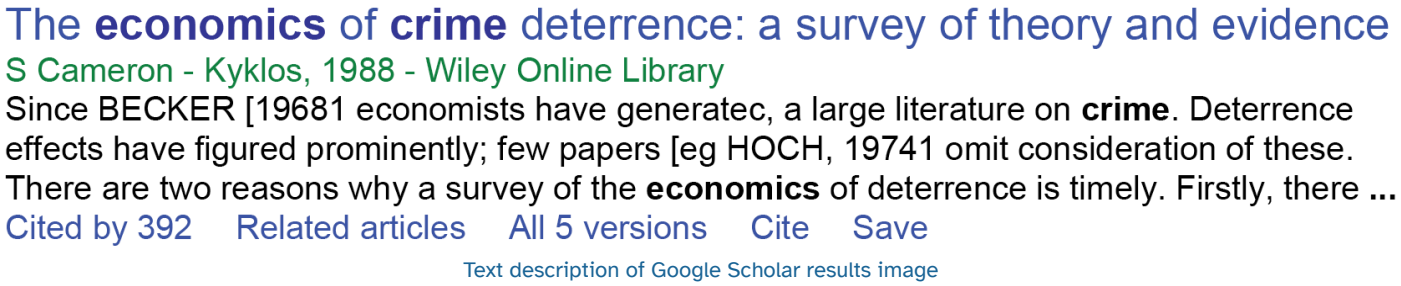
Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 43 sec):

Your campus library pays big money to subscribe to databases for Tier 1 articles. Some are general-purpose databases that include the most prominent journals across disciplines, such as Academic Search Premier (by EBSCO), Academic Search Complete (by EBSCO), Academic OneFile (by Cengage), General OneFile (by Cengage), ArticleFirst (by OCLC), and JSTOR (by ITHAKA). Some are specific to a particular discipline, such as PsycINFO (for psychology), CINAHL (for nursing), Environment Complete (for environmental science), Historical Abstracts (for history). Often they have the full-text of the articles right there for you to save or print. We won't go over particular databases here because every campus has different offerings. If you haven't already attended a workshop on using the resources provided by your library, you should. A one-hour workshop will save you many, many hours in the future. If there aren't any workshops, you can always seek advice from librarians and other library staff on the best databases for your topic. Many libraries also have online research guides that point you to the best databases for the specific discipline and, perhaps, the specific course. Librarians are eager to help you succeed with your research—it's their job and they love it!—so don't be shy about asking.

An increasingly popular article database is Google Scholar. It looks like a regular Google search, and it aspires to include the vast majority of published scholarship. Google doesn't share a list of which journals they include or how Google Scholar works, which limits its utility for scholars. Also, because it's so wide-ranging, it can be harder to find the most appropriate sources. However, if you want to cast a wide net, it's a very useful tool.

Here are three tips for using Google Scholar effectively:

1. **Add your field** (economics, psychology, French, etc.) as one of your keywords.
   If you just put in "crime," for example, Google Scholar will return all sorts of stuff from sociology, psychology, geography, and history. If your paper is on crime in French literature, your best sources may be buried under thousands of papers from other disciplines. A set of search terms like "crime French literature modern" will get you to relevant sources much faster.
2. **Don't ever pay for an article.**
   When you click on links to articles in Google Scholar, you may end up on a publisher's site that tells you that you can download the article for $20 or $30. Don't do it! You probably have access to virtually all the published academic literature through your library resources. Write down the key information (authors' names, title, journal title, volume, issue number, year, page numbers) and go find the article through your library website. If you don't have immediate full-text access, you may be able to get it through inter-library loan.
3. **Use the "cited by" feature.**
   If you get one great hit on Google Scholar, you can quickly see a list of other papers that cited it. For example, the search terms "crime economics" yielded this hit for a 1988 paper that appeared in a journal called *Kyklos*:


The **economics** of **crime** deterrence: a survey of theory and evidence
S Cameron - Kyklos, 1988 - Wiley Online Library
Since BECKER [19681 economists have generatec, a large literature on **crime**. Deterrence effects have figured prominently; few papers [eg HOCH, 19741 omit consideration of these. There are two reasons why a survey of the **economics** of deterrence is timely. Firstly, there **...**
Cited by 392 Related articles All 5 versions Cite Save

Text description of Google Scholar results image

1988 is nearly 30 years ago; for a social-science paper you probably want more recent sources. You can see that, according to Google, this paper was cited by 392 other sources. You can click on that "Cited by 392" to see that list. You can even search within that list of 392 if you're trying to narrow down the topic. For example, you could search on the term "cities" to see which of those 392 articles are most likely to be about the economic impact of crime on cities.

Practice Exercise 11.7.1

Choose a research topic, enter it into Google and then into Google Scholar and then into your library's biggest database search engine. Compare your results.

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY NC SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (5 min, 33 sec):

Finding good sources is a much more creative task than it seems on the face of it. It's an extended problem-solving exercise, an iterative cycle of questions and answers. Go ahead and use Wikipedia to get broadly informed if you want. It won't corrupt your brain. But use it, and all other sources, strategically. You should eventually arrive at a core set of Tier 1 sources that will enable you to make a well informed and thoughtful argument in support of your thesis. It's also a good sign when you find yourself deciding that some of the first sources you found are no longer relevant to your thesis; that likely means that you have revised and specified your thinking and are well on your way to constructing the kind of self-driven in-depth analysis that your professor is looking for.

Browsing for topics

Imagine you've been assigned a research paper that can focus on any topic relevant to the course. Imagine further that you don't have a clue about where to start and aren't entirely sure what counts as an appropriate topic in this discipline. A great approach is to find the top journals in the specific field of your course and browse through recent issues to see what people are publishing on. For example, when I assign an open-topic research paper in my Introduction to Sociology course, I suggest that students looking for a topic browse recent issues of *Social Problems* or *American Journal of Sociology* and find an article that looks interesting. They'll have a topic and—booyah!—their first source. An instructor of a class on kinesiology might recommend browsing *Human Movement Science*, the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, or *Perceptual and Motor Skills*.

Choosing keywords for your topic

When you have a topic and are looking for a set of sources, your biggest challenge is finding the right keywords. You'll obviously start with words and phrases from the assignment prompt, but you can't stop there. One strategy is to brainstorm keywords and keep track of what you have tried in a table like this one:

Coming up with Alternate Keywords

	Initial keywords	Alternate word or phrase	Alternate word or phrase	Related Terms
Example	iPhones and privacy	iPhone: Apple, smart phone, android	privacy: security, liberty, surveillance	data, data sharing, data harvesting, data economy, data privacy, data collection, digital footprint, informed consent, privacy policy

	Initial keywords	Alternate word or phrase	Alternate word or phrase	Related Terms
Fill-in your topic & keywords as you work				

As explained above, lower-tier sources (such as Wikipedia) or the top-tier sources you already have are great for identifying alternative keywords, and librarians and other library staff are also well-practiced at finding new approaches to try. Librarians can also point you to the best databases for your topic as well.

Returning to find more sources

As you assess your evidence and further develop your thesis through the writing process, you may need to seek additional sources. For example, imagine you're writing a paper about the added risks adolescents face when they have experienced their parents' divorce. As you synthesize the evidence about negative impacts, you begin to wonder if scholars have documented some positive impacts as well. You go back and search until you find a fairly recent article such as Ilana Sever, Joseph Gutmann, and Amnon Lazar, "Positive Consequences of Parental Divorce Among Israeli Young Adults", Marriage and Family Review 42, no. 4 (2007): 7-28. Thus you delve back into the literature to look for more articles, find some more concepts and keywords (such as "resiliency"), assess new evidence, and revise your thinking to account for these broader perspectives. Your instructor may have asked you to turn in a bibliography weeks before the final paper draft. You can check with your professor, but he or she is probably perfectly fine with you seeking additional sources as your thinking evolves. That's how scholars write.

Practice Exercise 11.8.1

You can download the keywords worksheet or copy the Google doc keywords worksheet to complete the exercise.

1. Start with a phrase to describe a topic that interests you. Use a keywords table like the one above to generate alternate and related search terms.
2. Do a search on your original phrase and list the three best sources you come up with. Then do five additional searches, each one for a different related term or combination of terms taken from your keywords table. For each search, copy the titles and links for any good sources you find.
3. Reflect on which phrases led you to the sources that most interest you. Did you learn anything about how your topic is most commonly described? Do any alternate keywords suggest new ways to focus your topic?

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence* by Amy Guptill, published by Open SUNY Textbooks, licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

This page titled 11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 3 sec):

Overview

Instructors often assign an annotated bibliography, a useful tool to beginning a research paper which allows you to evaluate and cite your sources. Most often, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources on a particular topic that includes a brief summary of what each source is about, an assessment of the source's reliability, and an overview of how you will use the source in your essay. Here is an example:

Sample annotated bibliography entry

Morey, Darcy F. "Burying Key Evidence: the Social Bond between Dogs and People." *Journal of Archaeological Science*, vol. 33, no. 2, Feb. 2006, pp. 158–175., doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2005.07.009.

In this article, Morey documents the widespread human practice of burying domesticated dogs and questions what this practice can reveal about relationships between the two. He argues that dog burials have been more frequent and more consistent than burials of other types of animals, suggesting that humans have invested dogs with spiritual and personal identities. Morey also demonstrates that the study of dog burials can help scholars to more accurately date the domestication of dogs; thus, he challenges scholars who rely solely on genetic data in their dating of domestication to consider more fully the importance of archaeological finds. To support his arguments, Morey provides detailed data on the frequency, geographic and historical distribution, as well as modes of dog burials and compares the conclusions he draws from this data to those found by scholarship based on genetic data. He is also a well-known anthropology scholar and Ph.D candidate at the University of Wyoming. This article is useful to a literature review on the domestication of dogs because it persuasively shows the importance of using burial data in dating dog domestication and explains how use of this data could change assessments of when domestication occurred. I will likely use it to develop my first body paragraph.

Sections of each annotated bibliography entry

Annotated bibliography entries have two parts. The top of the entry is the **citation**. It is the part that lists information like the name of the writer, where the evidence appeared, the date of publication, and other publishing information. Composition classes typically use MLA format, but other formats like APA and Chicago are popular in other disciplines. To learn more about MLA format and how to make a perfect citation, check out the section on MLA format and works cited pages (add link).

The second part of the entry is the **summary** and **evaluation** of the evidence being cited. A good annotation provides enough information to help you and others understand what the research is about, why it is (or isn't) reliable, and how you may use it in your essay.

Summary

Summaries can be challenging when we are trying to write them about longer and more complicated sources of research. Review Chapter 3: Writing a Summary of Another Writer's Argument to review best practices for summary writing. Chapter 3 mostly focuses on extended summaries of shorter texts, but in an annotated bibliography, we will often find yourself needing to put a large text into a few sentences. How can we do so?

Keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Keep your summary short.** Good summaries for annotated bibliographies are not "complete" summaries; rather, they

provide the highlights of the evidence in as brief and concise a manner as possible.

- **Summarize what you find helpful**. You definitely won't need to quote every part of an academic journal in your essay. For that reason, your summary only needs to include what is most relevant to your research essay topic.
- **No need to quote from what you are summarizing.** Summaries will be more useful to you if you write them in your own words. Instead of quoting directly what you think is the point of the piece of evidence, try to paraphrase it.
- **Use abstracts to help you, but paraphrase them in your own words.** Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library's computer system include abstracts of articles. Of course, copying the exact words from the abstract would be plagiarism. Paraphrasing in your own words in the annotated bibliography will help you understand and explain in preparation for writing your paper.

Sample summary

In this article, Morey documents the widespread human practice of burying domesticated dogs and questions what this practice can reveal about relationships between the two. He argues that dog burials have been more frequent and more consistent than burials of other types of animals, suggesting that humans have invested dogs with spiritual and personal identities. Morey also demonstrates that the study of dog burials can help scholars to more accurately date the domestication of dogs; thus, he challenges scholars who rely solely on genetic data in their dating of domestication to consider more fully the importance of archaeological finds.

Evaluation

The evaluation aspect of an annotation can help you decide if a text has any fallacies, reasons, or assumptions that impact the reliability. Chapter 4: Assessing the Strength of an Argument provides many useful templates for beginning your assessment of a source's reliability.

Sample evaluation

To support his arguments, Morey provides detailed data on the frequency, geographic and historical distribution, as well as modes of dog burials and compares the conclusions he draws from this data to those found by scholarship based on genetic data. He is also a well-known anthropology scholar and Ph.D candidate at the University of Wyoming.

Connection to the essay

Once you summarize and evaluate the source, very briefly show the reader how you intend to use the source. Consider the following:

- What parts of the source connect to your particular topic and argument?
- Where might you incorporate this source?
- Does the source support a particular idea you want to promote or refute?

Sample connection to the essay

This article is useful to a literature review on the domestication of dogs because it persuasively shows the importance of using burial data in dating dog domestication and explains how use of this data could change assessments of when domestication occurred. I will likely use it to develop my first body paragraph.

Annotated bibliography template

You may want to use this annotated bibliography template, created by Andrew Gurevich, to format your annotated bibliography.

Here are the steps to use it:

1. Make sure you are signed in to Google.
2. Open the template.
3. Go to “File” in Google docs and select “Make a copy.”
4. Enter your own title and change the text in the template to fit your own topic and sources.

Practice exercise

In a small group or by yourself, cite and annotate “The Relationship Between Cell Phone Use and Academic Performance in a Sample of U.S. College Students” by Andrew Lepp, Jacob E. Barkley, and Aryn C. Karpinski. Then, discuss each part of the annotation, including the summary, evaluation, and connection to the larger topic of technology and social issues.

Attributions

Adapted by Natalie Peterkin and Anna Mills from the following sources:

- The Process of Research Writing by Steven D. Krause, licensed CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.
- Introduction to Professional Communications (Ashman), presented by BCcampus, licensed CC BY-NC-SA.

This page titled 11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

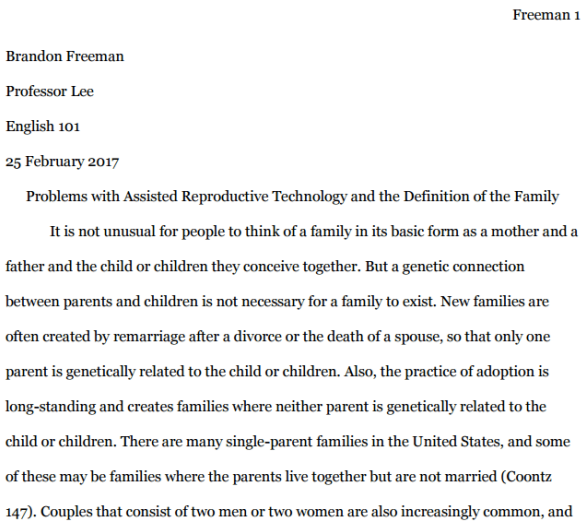
11.10: MLA Essay Format

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 27 sec):

One of the ways we can create a sense of being part of one larger academic conversation is by adopting an agreed-upon, consistent and uniform way of presenting academic material. By following these conventions, we build our credibility because we signal to readers that we are part of the larger conversation and aware of its customs. For English classes and a variety of humanities disciplines, the agreed-upon style is called MLA. For other classes, you may also be asked to format your papers in APA or Chicago Style.

The following sample paper shows how the first page of a paper written in MLA is formatted. Note the header information in the upper-left corner, the last name and page numbers in the upper-right corner, the double-spaced text, and indentations that begin each paragraph:



Freeman 1

Brandon Freeman

Professor Lee

English 101

25 February 2017

Problems with Assisted Reproductive Technology and the Definition of the Family

It is not unusual for people to think of a family in its basic form as a mother and a father and the child or children they conceive together. But a genetic connection between parents and children is not necessary for a family to exist. New families are often created by remarriage after a divorce or the death of a spouse, so that only one parent is genetically related to the child or children. Also, the practice of adoption is long-standing and creates families where neither parent is genetically related to the child or children. There are many single-parent families in the United States, and some of these may be families where the parents live together but are not married (Coontz 147). Couples that consist of two men or two women are also increasingly common, and

Text description of the MLA-formatted sample paper

Use a Template

The simplest way to get the format right is to use a template. You can download this MLA format essay template and open it in any word processing program. (You can also make a copy of the Google Docs template rather than downloading.) Then just replace the text with your own name, title, and essay. A slightly different way is to create a new document in Google Docs, Pages, or Microsoft Word and use the built-in template for MLA essays. You'll want to choose the option to create a new document from a template and then search the template gallery for "MLA," which may be categorized under "Education."

General MLA Formatting Rules

If you prefer not to use a template, you can also manually format your essay.

- **Font**: Your paper should be written in 12-point text. Whichever font you choose, MLA requires that regular and italicized text be easily distinguishable from each other. Times and Times New Roman are often recommended.
- **Line Spacing**: All text in your paper should be double-spaced.
- **Margins**: All page margins (top, bottom, left, and right) should be 1 inch. All text should be left justified.

- **Indentation**: The first line of every paragraph should be indented 0.5 inches.
- **Page Numbers**: Create a right-justified header 0.5 inches from the top edge of every page. This header should include your last name, followed by a space and the page number. Your pages should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3...) and should start with the number 1 on your title page. Most word-processing programs have the ability to automatically add the correct page number to each page so you don't have to do this by hand.
- **Use of Italics:** In MLA style, you should italicize (rather than underline) the titles of books, plays, or other standalone works (shorter works such as articles or speeches should be in quotation marks with no italics). You should also italicize (rather than underline) words or phrases you want to lend particular emphasis—though you should do this rarely.
- **The first page:** Like the rest of your paper, everything on your first page, even the headers, should be double-spaced. The following information should be left justified in regular font at the top of the first page (in the main part of the page, not the header):
  - on the first line, your first and last name
  - on the second line, your instructor's name
  - on the third line, the name of the class
  - on the fourth line, the date
- **The title:** After the header, the next double-spaced line should include the title of your paper. This should be centered and in title case, and it should not be bolded, underlined, or italicized (unless it includes the name of a book, in which case just the book title should be italicized).

Additional resources

Visit the **Modern Language Association website** to see an example of a student paper following MLA guidelines. You can also read more on the MLA website about correctly **formatting your document.**

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from English Composition I: MLA Document Formatting, provided by Lumen Learning and licensed *CC BY-SA*.

This page titled 11.10: MLA Essay Format is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 6.10: MLA Essay Format is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 22 sec):

When we refer to other texts in a college paper, what information do we need to provide and in what format? We need to help readers

- differentiate between our words and ideas and our sources' words and ideas and
- locate the original source.

MLA guidelines outline how to provide just enough information when we quote or paraphrase in the course of the essay so that readers can look up the full description of the source in the Works Cited page. In-text citations should appear at the end of the quoted or paraphrased material.

What goes in the in-text citation?

In parentheses after the quotation or paraphrase, we need to include the author's name or abbreviated title and the page number.

Author's name or abbreviated title

In parentheses after the quotation or paraphrase, we put the first listed information from the Works Cited entry. Usually that will be the author's last name (Lastname).

Example 11.11.1

Some scholars have found that gig worker satisfaction varies greatly depending on the particular employer's policies (Myhill and Richards).

If there is no listed author, then an abbreviated version of the work's title goes in the parentheses in quotation marks ("Abbreviated Title").

Example 11.11.2

Other scholars emphasize the differences in gig workers' objectives and resources ("What are the experiences of gig workers?").

Note

In MLA style, titles of long works like books are italicized while shorter works are placed in quotation marks. Hence a newspaper article like "Hurricane Wendy Hits the Texas Coast" would be in quotation marks while a book title like *Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* would be italicized.

Including this minimal information should enable readers to locate the Works Cited entry where they will find more data on the original source material. It also gives credit to the original author, which is not only ethical but also legally required as a means to avoid copyright infringement. However, there is an exception! If we have just mentioned the author's last name or the abbreviated title in the sentence leading up to the quotation or paraphrase, we should not repeat it in the parentheses. MLA conventions ask us to be efficient in this way.

Example 11.11.3

Myhill and Richards have found that gig worker satisfaction varies greatly depending on the particular employer's policies.

Page number or paragraph number, if available

To help readers find the original location of the quotation or the idea paraphrased, we should also add the page number, if any, in parentheses: (Lastname 21) or ("Abbreviated Title" 21). If the source is a website that does not otherwise have page numbers, including the paragraph number will help readers find the information quickly. That being said, for internet web pages and websites, even without a paragraph or page number, readers will be able to use "Control-F" to search on the author's last name or the abbreviated title of the work to find the original source for the quotation or paraphrase.

Example 11.11.4

Writing in *Labor Today,* Thibodeaux argues that platforms like Amazon's Mechanical Turk treat gig workers like robots (par. 3).

Every in-text, parenthetical citation should point readers towards a more detailed Works Cited page entry. And every Works Cited page entry should match at least one in-text, parenthetical citation. If one or the other is missing, this is a form of **plagiarism**. Why? Because if a student is missing a Works Cited entry, there is no way for readers to find the original information. It is like a broken link on the internet.

Attributions

Adapted by Natalie Peterkin and Anna Mills from Writing and Critical Thinking through Literature by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap, ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative, licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

This page titled 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo and Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 6.11: MLA In-Text Citations by Heather Ringo and Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

In MLA style, each source cited in the text of your paper refers readers to the list of works cited, a complete list of all the sources you quoted, paraphrased, or summarized. Every source cited in the text of your paper must be included in the works-cited list, and every source in the works-cited list must be cited in the text of your paper.

Format of the Works Cited list

After the last page of the paper, start a new page with the centered title “Works Cited” at the top. Create an entry for each source using the following guidelines and examples:

- Begin each entry at the left margin, and indent subsequent lines one-half inch. (In Microsoft Word, you can also highlight the entire page when you are finished and select “Hanging” from the Special options on the Indentation section of the Paragraph menu.)
- Alphabetize the entries according to authors’ last names. If two or more authors have the same last name, alphabetize by first name or initial. Alphabetize sources with unknown authors by the first word of the title, excluding *a*, *an*, or *the*.
- Double-space the entire page.

Core elements

Each entry in the list of works cited consists of core elements:

- **Author.** Who is responsible for the work?
- **Title.** What is the work called?
- **Publication information.** Where can the work be found so that others can consult it? Publication information includes the date of publication and any larger work, which MLA calls a “container,” in which a shorter work is published, such as a journal, magazine, newspaper, database, streaming service, and so on.
  A note on access dates. Although access dates for online sources are not required, MLA acknowledges that an access date can indicate the version of a source you consulted. If you add an access date, place it at the end of the works-cited entry in this format: “Accessed 4 Apr. 2020.” Ask your instructors whether they require access dates.

Works Cited tools and templates

Tools

Online tools can generate works cited entries automatically; just be sure to double-check that the entries are correct according to the MLA rules. Most have free versions.

- Citation Machine
- EasyBib
- Zbib
- KnightCite
- NoodleTools (check if your college subscribes by going to your college library website)

Templates

You can also make a copy of Columbia College's Word MLA template, Google docs MLA template, or Google docs MLA Works Cited template, and then put in your own content.

How to list different types of authors and contributors

General rules

- **Authors.** Give the author's last name, a comma, the author's first name and any middle name or middle initial, and then a period. For works with more than one author, an organization as an author, or an unknown author, see the models below.
- **Contributors.** People who contributed to the work in addition to the author are called contributors. Refer to them by their role in a phrase such as "adapted by," "directed by," "edited by," "illustrated by," "introduction by," "narrated by," "performance by," and "translated by." (See Models 19, 20, 21, 30, and 58 for examples.)

Specific cases

Book: one author

Sotomayor, Sonia. *My Beloved World*. Vintage Books, 2013.

Book: two authors

Kristoff, Nicholas D., and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Book: three or more authors

Barlow, David H., et al. *Abnormal Psychology: An Integrative Approach*. 8th ed., Cengage Learning, 2017.

Book: two or more works by the same author

When you cite two works by the same author, use three hyphens in place of the author's name, and alphabetize the works by title:

Trethewey, Natasha. *Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir*. Ecco, 2020.

---. *Native Guard: Poems*. Mariner Books, 2007.

Book author and editor

Add the editor's name after the title:

Hemingway, Ernest. *Conversations with Ernest Hemingway*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli, UP of Mississippi, 1986.

Book author and translator

Add the translator's name after the title:

Ferrante, Elena. *My Brilliant Friend*. Translated by Ann Goldstein, Europa Editions, 2012.

If you are citing the work of the translator, place the translator's name in the author position:

Goldstein, Ann, translator. *My Brilliant Friend*. By Elena Ferrante, Europa Editions, 2012.

Book author and illustrator

Add the illustrator's name after the title. If you are citing the work of the illustrator, place the illustrator's name in the author position, as shown in the preceding example:

Fasler, Joe. *Light in the Dark: Writers on Creativity, Inspiration, and the Artistic Process*. Illustrated by Doug McLean, Penguin Books, 2017.

Work by an organization, a government, a corporation, or an association

If the author and publisher are *not* the same, start with the author:

United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration. *Healthy Living Resource Guide*. Government Printing Office, 2020.

If the author and the publisher *are* the same, give the title of the work in place of the author, and list the organization as the publisher:

MLA Handbook. 8th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

"This Is Who We Are." *U.S. Forest Service*, United States Department of Agriculture, Mar. 2019, www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/This-is-Who-We-Are.pdf.

Unknown author

If no author is given, start with the title.

"The Most Beautiful Battalion in the Army." *Grunt Magazine*, 1968, pp. 12-15.

Articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers

Articles, reviews, editorials, and other short works are published in journals, newspapers, and magazines. They appear in print, on databases, and on websites (though often through a paywall). As a student, you are likely to access many articles and other short research sources primarily through databases available through your library.

Basic format for a journal article in a database

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, volume number, issue number, Date of Publication, page numbers. *Title of Database*, DOI or URL.

- **Author.** Give the last name, a comma, the first name, and any middle name or initial. Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD*. End with a period.
- **Title of the article.** Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. Capitalize all significant words in the title. Put the title of the article in quotation marks. End with a period inside the closing quotation mark.
- **Title of the journal.** Put the title of the journal in italics. Capitalize all significant words in the title. End the title with a comma.
- **Volume and issue numbers.** Use the abbreviations *vol.* and *no.* followed by the number and a comma.
- **Publication date.** Give the month or season and the year of publication, if available. Use the following abbreviations for months: *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Mar.*, *Apr.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.*, and *Dec.* Do not abbreviate May, June, or July.
- **Page numbers.** Give p. (singular) or pp. (plural) and the page number or numbers of the article, followed by a period.
- **Title of the database.** Put the database title in italics, followed by a comma.
- **Location.** Give a DOI if available, and end with a period. If there is no DOI, give a URL, preferably a permalink, without http://.

Article in an academic journal

- Database
  Daddis, Gregory A. "Out of Balance: Evaluating American Strategy in Vietnam, 1968–72." *War & Society*, vol. 32, no. 3, Oct. 2013, pp. 252-70. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1179/0729247313Z.00000000026.
- Print
  Daddis, Gregory A. "Out of Balance: Evaluating American Strategy in Vietnam, 1968–72." *War & Society*, vol. 32, no. 3, Oct. 2013, pp. 252-70.
- Online
  Squires, Scot. "Do Generations Differ When It Comes to Green Values and Products?" *Electronic Green Journal*, no. 42, 2019, escholarship.org/uc/item/6f91213q.
  The journal in the example numbers issues only, so no volume number is given.

Article in a weekly or biweekly magazine

To cite an article in a weekly or biweekly magazine, give the author, title of the article, title of the magazine, publication date (day,

month, year), and page numbers. If you found the article through a database, add the title of the database and a DOI or URL. If you found the article online, add the URL.

- Database
  Sanneh, Kelefa. “The Color of Money.” *The New Yorker*, 8 Feb. 2021, pp. 26-31. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=aph&AN=148411685&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Print
  Sanneh, Kelefa. “The Color of Money.” *The New Yorker*, 8 Feb. 2021, pp. 26-31.
- Online
  Ferrer, Ada. “My Brother’s Keeper.” *The New Yorker*, 22 Feb. 2021, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/ 03/01/my-brothers-keeper.

Article in a monthly or bimonthly magazine

To cite an article in a monthly or bimonthly magazine, give the author, title of the article, title of the magazine, publication month and year, and page numbers. If you found the article through a database, add the title of the database and a DOI or URL. If you found the article online, add the URL.

- Database
  Sneed, Annie. “Giant Shape-Shifters.” *Scientific American*, Sept. 2017, pp. 20-22. *EBSCOhost*, *doi:10.1038/scientificamerican1017-20*.
- Print
  Sneed, Annie. “Giant Shape-Shifters.” *Scientific American*, Sept. 2017, pp. 20-22.
- Online
  Stewart, Jamila. “A Look Inside the Black Designers of Canada Initiative.” *Essence*, July 2020, www.essence.com/fashion/black-designers-of-canada-digital-index/.

Article in a newspaper

To cite an article in a newspaper, give the author, title of the article, title of the newspaper, publication date (day, month, year), and the page numbers. If you found the article through a database, add the title of the database and a DOI or a URL. If you found the article online, add the URL.

- Database
  Krueger, Alyson. “When Mom Knows Best, on Instagram.” *The New York Times*, 27 Nov. 2019, pp. B1-B4. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType =aph&AN=139891108&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Print
  Krueger, Alyson. “When Mom Knows Best, on Instagram.” *The New York Times*, 27 Nov. 2019, pp. B1-B4.
- Online
  Smith, Doug. “They’re Building Affordable Housing for the Homeless—Without Government Help.” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Feb. 2021, www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-02-10/theyre-building-affordable-housing-for-the-homeless-without-government-help.

Editorial or letter to the editor

An editorial may or may not have an author’s name attached to it. If it does, give the author’s name first. If it does not, start with the title. In both situations, add the designation Editorial or Letter to the Editor after the title.

“For Better Elections, Copy the Neighbors.” Editorial. The Wall Street Journal, 16 Feb. 2021, www.wsj.com/ articles/for-better-elections-copy-the-neighbors-11613518448.

Review

To cite a review of a book, film, television show, or other work, give the name of the reviewer and title of the review, add *Review of* before the title of work being reviewed, and give the name of the work’s author, director, or creator after the title.

Girish, Devika. “Refocusing the Lens on Race and Gender.” Review of *Test Pattern*, directed by Shatara Michelle Ford. *The New York Times*, 18 Feb. 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/02/18/movies/test-pattern-review.html.

Books and parts of books

Use the following guidelines for books and parts of books, such as a selection from an anthology, an article in a collection, a published letter, and so on.

Basic entry for a book

Author's Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year of Publication.

- **Author.** Give the last name, a comma, the first name, and any middle name or initial. Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD*. End with a period.
- **Title of the book.** Put the book's title in italics. Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. Capitalize all significant words in the title, even if the book's cover does not use conventional capitalization. End the title with a period.
- **Publisher.** List the publisher's name without words such as "Inc." or "Company." Shorten "University Press" to "UP." End with a comma.
- **Year of publication.** Provide the publication date, and end with a period.

Print book

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Vintage Books, 2010.

E-book formatted for a specific reader device or service

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Kindle ed., Vintage Books, 2010.

Book, anthology, or collection with an editor

Add the abbreviation *ed.* or *eds.* (if more than one) after the editor's first name:

Lunsford, Andrea, ed. *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1995.

Work in an anthology or chpater in an edited collection

After the author and title of the work, give the title of the anthology or edited collection, name of the editor, publication information, and page numbers of the work:

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "To Call a Thing by Its True Name: The Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells." *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea Lunsford, U of Pittsburgh P, 1995, pp. 167-84.

Two or more works in an anthology or edited collection

When you cite two or more selections from the same anthology or edited collection, list the anthology separately under the editor's name. In the entries for the selections you cite, include the editor's name and the page numbers on which the selections appear:

Lipscomb, Drema R. "Sojourner Truth: A Practical Public Discourse." Lunsford, pp. 227-46.

Lunsford, Andrea, ed. *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1995.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "To Call a Thing by Its True Name: The Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells." Lunsford, pp. 167-84.

Revised or later edition

For a book published in an edition other than the first, give the edition number after the title:

Strunk, William, Jr., and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed., Pearson, 2019.

Multi-volume work

For a book published in more than one volume, give the total number of volumes after the title:

Klinger, Leslie S. *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. 2 vols., W. W. Norton, 2005.

One volume of a multi-volume work

Klinger, Leslie S. *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. Vol. 2, W. W. Norton, 2005.

When each volume of a multi-volume set has an individual title, list the volume's full publication information first, followed by series information (number of volumes, dates). When separate volumes were published in different years, give inclusive dates:

Churchill, Winston S. *Triumph and Tragedy*. Houghton Mifflin, 1953. Vol. 6 of *The Second World War*. 6 vols. 1948-53.

However, if the volume you are using has its own title, you may cite the book without referring to the other volumes as if it were an independent publication.

Book in a series

Add the title of the series at the end of the entry:

Thaiss, Christopher. *Language across the Curriculum in the Elementary Grades*. WAC Clearinghouse, 2011, wac.colostate.edu/books/landmarks/thaiss/. Landmark Publications in Writing Studies.

Republished book

Give the original publication date after the title and the date the book was republished after the publisher:

Evans, Elizabeth E. G. *The Abuse of Maternity*. 1875. Arno, 1974.

Sacred text

Give the complete title of the version you consulted followed by the name of the editor and/or translator, the edition, the publisher, and the publication date:

The Bible. Authorized King James Version. Edited by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, Oxford UP, 2008.

The Koran. Translated by N. J. Dawood, rev. ed., Penguin Books, 2015.

Introduction, preface, foreword, or afterword

Start with the author of the introduction, preface, foreword, or afterword, followed by a description of the work you are citing, such as "Foreword." Give the author of the work after the title:

Offill, Jenny. Foreword. *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, Penguin Classics, 2021, pp. vii-xiv.

Published letter

Roosevelt, Theodore. Letter to Upton Sinclair. 15 Mar. 1906. *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, edited by Louis Auchincloss, 2004, pp. 310-11.

Conference paper

Killi, Stainer, and Andrew Morrison. "Could the Food Market Pull 3D Printing Appetites Further?" *Industry 4.0—Shaping the Future of the Digital World: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Sustainable & Smart Manufacturing*, edited by Paulo Bartolo et al., CRC Press, 2021, pp. 197-203.

Websites and parts of websites

Use the following guidelines for works that are published *only* online and do not have an overarching publication, such as a journal, newspaper, magazine, or database.

Basic format for a short work or page on a website

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Short Work." *Title of Website*, Publisher, Publication Date, URL.

- **Author.** Give the last name, a comma, the first name, and any middle name or initial. Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD.* End with a period.
- **Title of the short work.** Put the title in quotation marks. Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. Capitalize all significant words in the title. End with a period inside the closing quotation mark.
- **Title of the website.** Put the title of the website in italics. Capitalize all significant words in the title. End the title with a comma.
- **Publisher.** If the publisher of the website is different from the title of the website (as shown in Model 48), give it next, followed by a comma. If they are the same (as shown in Model 47), give only the title of the website.
- **Publication date.** Give the day, month, and year the work was posted, if available. Use the following abbreviations for months: *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Mar.*, *Apr.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.*, and *Dec.* Do not abbreviate May, June, and July.
- **URL.** Give the URL, without "http://."

Short work or page on a website

Shetterly, Margot Lee. "Katherine Johnson Biography." *NASA*, 24 Feb. 2020, www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography.

If the source you are citing has no author listed, start with the title. If the page has no title, give the name of the site and a descriptive label, such as "Home page" or "Blog post."

Blog post

Blazich, Frank A. "The Cold Morning of the Day After." Smithsonian Voices, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 5 Feb. 2021, www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-history/2021/02/05/cold-morning-day-after/.

Entire website

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale U, 2021, beinecke.library.yale.edu/.

If the website lists an editor, give the person's name as you would an author, followed by a comma and *ed.*

Wiki

"Coronavirus." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Feb. 2021, en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus.

Social media

Basic format for a social media post

Author. "Text of untitled post" or "Title of post" or Descriptive label. *Title of Site*, Date of Post, Time of Post, URL.

- **Author.** Give the author's handle and name. End with a period.
- **Text, title, or description of post.** Match the capitalization exactly, add quotation marks, and end with a period inside the closing quotation mark.
- **Title of the social media site.** Put the title of the site in italics, ending with a comma.
- **Publication date and time.** Give the day, month, year, and time of the post. Use the following abbreviations for months: *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Mar.*, *Apr.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.*, and *Dec.* Do not abbreviate May, June, and July.
- **URL.** Give the URL, without "http://."

Social media post

@Holleratcha (James Holler). "People go out and vote tomorrow!" *Twitter*, 2 Nov. 2020, 2:08 p.m., twitter.com/ holleratcha/status/ 1270432672544784384.

Death Valley National Park. "What does it mean to protect something you love?" *Facebook*, 23 Feb. 2021, 5:01 p.m., www.facebook.com/DeathValleyNPS/posts/4108808255810092.

Online forum post

@Duckpond318. “Turkeys in the arboretum.” *Reddit*, 15 Mar. 2021, 11:22 a.m., www.reddit.com/r/Wildlife/ comments/lqlbo3/ turkeys_in_the_arboretum/. Accessed 4 Feb. 2021.

Online comment

AKJersey. Comment on “Can We Stop Fighting about Charter Schools?” *The New York Times*, 22 Feb. 2021, www.nytimes.com/ 2021/02/22/opinion/charter-schools-democrats.html#commentsContainer.

Personal communication

Use the following guidelines to cite email, text messages, and letters that you sent or received.

Email

Roberts, Jeffrey. “Study results.” Received by Kenneth Berg, 21 Oct. 2020.

Text message

Roberts, Jeffrey. “Study results.” Received by Kenneth Berg, 21 Oct. 2020.

Personal letter

Atwood, Margaret. Letter to the author. 11 Mar. 2007.

Video, audio, and other media sources

Use the following guidelines to cite various media sources.

Film

Begin with the title, followed by the director, the studio, and the year released.

Casablanca. Directed by Michael Curtiz, Warner Brothers, 1942.

You may also cite other contributors and their roles after the title (as illustrated below). If your paper is concerned with a particular person’s work on a film, such as the director, an actor, or someone else, begin with that person’s name and arrange all other information accordingly. For a film you stream, add the title of the streaming service and the URL:

Moonlight. Directed by Barry Jenkins, performances by Mahershala Ali, Naomie Harris, and Trevante Rhodes. A24, 2016. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/watch/80121348?trackId=13752289&tctx=8%2C.

Online video

NASA. “Apollo 11 Moonwalk – Original NASA EVA Mission Video.” 20 July 1969. *YouTube*, 17 July 2014, www.youtube.com/ watch?v=S9HdPi9Ikhk.

Television series or episode

- TV Series
  The Good Place. Michael Schur, creator. NBC, 2016-20.
- Streamed TV episode
  “Jason Mendoza.” *The Good Place*, season 1, episode 4, NBC, 2016. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/watch/ 80191852?trackId=13752289&tctx=%2C%2C.

Advertisement

- Print
  XOFLUZA. Flu medication advertisement. *The New Yorker*, 8. Feb. 2021, pp. 5-6.

- Online
  General Motors. “Will Ferrell Super Bowl Ad.” *YouTube*, 3 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/ watch?v=mdsPvbSpB2Y&t=24s.

Cartoon or comic

If the source you cite appears in a local newspaper, give the city and state in brackets after the name of the newspaper if the city is not part of the newspaper’s name.

- Print
  Davis, Jim. “Garfield.” Cartoon. *Courier* [Findlay, OH], 17 May 1996, p. 18.
- Online
  Gauld, Tom. “Waiting for Godot to Join the Zoom Meeting.” *You’re All Just Jealous of My Jetpack*, 31 Jan. 2021, myjetpack.tumblr.com/.

Painting or other visual artwork

If the city is not part of the name of the museum, add it after museum. For example, if the work you viewed was at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, you would end the entry as follows: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

- Original work
  Rivera, Diego. *Detroit Industry Murals*. 1932-33. Detroit Institute of Art.
- Reproduction
  Neel, Alice. *Elenka*. 1936. *Alice Neel: People Come First*, by Kelly Baum and Randall Griffey, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021, p. 142.
- Online
  Basquiat, Jean-Michel. *Untitled*. 1983. *Museum of Modern Art*, www.moma.org/collection/works/63997?artist_id=370&page=1&sov_referrer=artist. Accessed 24 Sept. 2020.

Map, chart, or diagram

- Print
  Everglades National Park. National Geographic Society Maps, 2019.
- Online
  “Map: Expedition of Lewis and Clark.” *National Park Service*, 2 Jan. 2018, nps.gov/subjects/ travellewisandclark/map.htm.

Sound recording

Sound recordings include songs, albums, and spoken word. If you stream a sound recording or watch a performance online, add the name of the streaming service, such as Spotify, Apple Music, or Amazon Music, after the date. If you access the recording online, add the name of the website and the URL after the date.

- Album
  Prince. *Purple Rain*. Warner Brothers, 1984.
- Song
  The Supremes. “Baby Love.” *Where Did Our Love Go*, Motown, 1964. Spotify.
- Online
  Gorman, Amanda. “The Hill We Climb.” 20 Jan. 2021, *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055ilIiN4.

Radio

The Road to Higher Ground. Hosted by Jonathan Overby. WPR, 9 Jan. 2021.

If you listened to the radio program online, add the URL after the date.

Podcast

McEvers, Kelly, host. “This Is Not a Joke.” *Embedded*, season 9, episode 2, NPR, 7 Nov. 2019, Apple Podcasts.

If you listened to the podcast on the web, add the URL instead of the podcast service.

Interview

- Broadcast
  Wilkerson, Isabel. Interview. *Fresh Air*, NPR, 4 Aug. 2020.
- Online
  Sowell, Thomas. Interview. *Hoover Institution*, 3 Jan. 2015, www.wsj.com/video/uncommon-knowledg-thomas-sowell-basic-economics/51837CB6-9FF2-305AE55D179A.html.
- Personal interview
  Wong, Diana. Personal interview. 12 Sept. 2020.

Video game, software, or app

Houser, Dan, et al., writers. *Grand Theft Auto V*. Rockstar Games, 2013. Xbox 360.

Other sources

Live lecture, speech, address, or reading

Diaz, Shanna. "Your Dazzling Brain: The Symphony of Sleep." Community Lecture Series, University of New Mexico Health Science and the City of Albuquerque, 13 Mar. 2018, Albuquerque Academy.

Live performance

Hamilton. By Lin-Manuel Miranda, directed by Thomas Kail, 11 Mar. 2018, CIBC Theater, Chicago.

If you watch a video of a performance online, cite it as you would cite an online video.

Letter in an archive

Mucklestone, Ada. Letter to Maj. Gen. Ralph J. Olson. 6 Nov. 1958. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-66, 1715, Box 13.

Dissertation

- Database
  Park, Eun Jung. *Korean American Artists and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots*. 2013. U of California, San Diego, PhD dissertation. ProQuest, www.proquest.com/doc-view/1425303659.
- Print
  Boothby, Daniel W. *The Determinants of Earnings and Occupation for Young Women*. 1978. U of California, Berkeley, PhD dissertation.

Pamphlet

"Facts about Fallout." Civil Defense Administration, 1961.

Attributions

Adapted by Anna Mills from Writing Guide with Handbook by Michelle Bachelor Robinson, Maria Jerskey, featuring Toby Fulwiler, published by OpenStax in 2021 and licensed CC BY.

This page titled 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

- 21.4: MLA Documentation and Format is licensed CC BY 4.0.
- 6.12: MLA Works Cited Pages is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources

Need a good way to evaluate a source? Take a look at its “craap”!

The C.R.A.A.P. method is a way to determine the validity and relevance of a source. C.R.A.A.P. stands for

- **C**: Currency. When was the information published?
- **R**: Relevance. How relevant to your goals is the information?
- **A**: Authority. How well does the author of the information know the information?
- **A**: Accuracy. How reliable is the information?
- **P**: Purpose. Why does this information exist in this way?

If the source you’re looking at is fairly current, relevant, and accurate, it’s probably a good source to use. Depending on the aim of your paper, you’ll be looking for an authority and purpose that are unbiased and informative.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Evaluating Sources. **Provided by**: iWriting. **Located at**: https://iwriting.wikispaces.com/Evaluating+sources. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*
- How Library Stuff Works: How to Evaluate Resources (the CRAAP Test). **Authored by**: McMaster Libraries. **Located at**: https://youtu.be/_M1-aMCJHFg. **License**: *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License

This page titled 12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SUNY/Lumen Learning via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 6.10: Tools for Evaluating Sources by SUNY/Lumen Learning has no license indicated. Original source: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ecc-guidetowriting/.

12.2: Researching

WHAT IS GOOD RESEARCH?

Selecting good research involves supporting your ideas with credible sources which means being able to evaluate the quality of outside sources. Doing good research also involves using smart search strategies.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- You will lose credibility and not be convincing if your sources are questionable or not reputable.
- You could end up presenting false information which will mislead your argument, your reader and yourself.
- You will save yourself a lot of time if you learn how to search effectively using focused and systematic approaches.
- You will engage in a larger academic community that will broader your thinking, understanding of, and connection to the issues and topics you are investigating.

HOW DO I DO IT?

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT KIND OF SOURCE TO LOOK FOR?

When you write a research paper, you need to support your thesis by using academic quality sources. Sources come in many shapes and formats but some of **the most common include:**

- articles from magazines, newspapers or journals,
- books (either print or e-books),
- web pages
- other media (e.g. video or audio sources)
- personal interviews
- non-published documents (e.g. letters, flyers, handouts, etc.)

Before you begin to search for sources to support your ideas, you need to learn how to decide what are credible, academic-quality sources. Often the easiest sources to dig up won't pass muster as valid sources for a college research paper.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A SOURCE IS TRUE, ACCURATE AND OF REASONABLE QUALITY?

To evaluate any source you find, you first need to find out the identity of the author or group that wrote or created the source, as well as the names(s) of the organization that published or produced the source. If you cannot identify these, stop here! Only sources that can be identified can be determined to be credible, right? ***You should not use any source whose author/ organization cannot be identified.***

If you *can* identify both the author and the publisher of the source, you'll want to find out something more about them to determine whether they have the expertise or qualifications to produce a credible source for a college research paper. Here is a good question to ask yourself: ***Is the author of my source an expert in his/her field?***

HOW DO I EVALUATE A SOURCE ONCE I HAVE VERIFIED IT?

Here are some important criteria to use in evaluating the quality of a source:

Criteria 1: Length and substance of the text: Does this source provide a substantive, in-depth discussion of the topic, or merely a cursory, superficial overview? Is this a brief "sound-bite," or a longer, more in-depth analysis? (In general, for web pages with less than about 10 medium-length paragraphs of text would be considered brief.)

Criteria 2: Author's purpose: Is this a straightforward summary or overview of the topic, such as you would find in an encyclopedia article? Or is the author presenting a new interpretation, view, or explanation of the topic?

Criteria 3: Academic quality and reading level of the text: Is this a serious, complex, detailed, academic treatment of the topic, or is it lighter "popular" discussion geared for the general public?

Criteria 4: Originality of the text: Is this original writing, or is it copied and compiled from other sources? For a web site, is this primarily a list of links?

Criteria 5: Objectivity: Is the text primarily personal opinion rather than an objective discussion? If the text is primarily opinion, is this clearly stated, i.e. is the author clear about the fact that he/she is presenting a *subjective* view of the topic? Does the author acknowledge that there might be *other* worthy points of view?

Criteria 6: Sources & Documentation: Where did the author gather the information presented? Was it from original research, experiments, observation, interviews, books and documents? If lots of factual information is given, does the author cite his/her sources? Verify that the author used authoritative sources to back up his/her arguments and conclusions.

HOW DO I EVALUATE MAGAZINE, NEWSPAPER OR JOURNAL ARTICLES?

Magazine, newspaper and journal articles are typically reviewed and edited by publishers, editorial boards and copy editors before they are published. However, it's still important to evaluate articles on your own using the same criteria we've discussed. Remember to:

- Check the article's **author(s)** just as for other types of sources, and
- Check the **publication** (magazine, newspaper or journal) in which the article is published. If you're not certain if the publication is valid for research, check the publication's website to find out more about it. See if the publication has a Wikipedia article that might give some background on the publication. Is the publication linked to an educational institution or professional organization?
- Has the author **cited** his/her sources in footnotes or at the end of the article?
- Additionally, check the **date** of the publication. Is the research presented recent enough to be useful to your topic?

HOW DO I EVALUATE A WEB PAGE?

Web pages *can* contain valuable information for your research. However, information that you find on the web must be evaluated *even more carefully* than information found in books or articles. Why? In contrast to books and articles (which are reviewed for accuracy and quality by publishers, editorial boards or reviewers before they can be published), *anyone can create a web page* with no screening at all. Therefore, it's especially important that you carefully evaluate information from the Internet if you intend to use it for your research.

When you evaluate a web source, you'll need to ask yourself a few essential questions:

1. **What do you know about the author of the site?**

Is the author an expert in his/her field --or just someone with an opinion? Remember: If you can't identify a reputable author and/or organization responsible for the page, you should not cite it for college research.

a. **Web pages by/for individual authors**

If an **individual** has written the page and/or site, determine the author's qualifications by asking:

- Is biographical information about the author available?
- What is his/her background in terms of education, experience, occupation, position, affiliation, publications, etc.
- Why does or doesn't this make him/her an expert?

Tip: Do a Google search to see if the author's name comes up in other web pages. Can you find reliable information about the person and determine his/her credibility?

b. **Web pages by organizations**

If an **organization** has authored the page and/or site, is information available about that organization, including its purpose or history? **Tips:**

- Look for a link such as "Who we are", “About Us”, "Philosophy," "Background," etc. on the page or the site home page.
- Is it an impartial group (like a university) or a group established to promote an idea or point of view (like the National Rifle Association or a political party or a religious group)?
- Do a Google search to see if the institution's name comes up in other web pages. Can you find reliable information about the organization?

2. **What is the basic purpose of the site**?

Knowing the author’s reason for providing the information is key to evaluating it. It’s the same kind of common sense you use to make decisions every day. Understanding the purpose of the site will help you judge its validity for your research. Which type of site would you think is most objective? Would you trust a commercial site to provide objective information when you know the organization’s goal is to make a profit? Is the site:

- **Scholarly?** It’s written by researchers or experts in the field See: popular magazines vs. academic journals.
- **Professional?** It’s written by and primarily for those in a specific profession.
- **Popular?** It’s written for the general public. See: popular magazines vs. academic journals.
- **Advocating?** It’s promoting particular opinions/causes, including **blogs**
- **Commercial?** It’s promoting/selling services or products, or including advertisements for products or services.

3. **What type of site is it?**

Identifying the domain type within the URL will give you additional clues about the type of site you’ve found, and therefore about your source of information. Ask yourself: which type of site do you think is most likely to provide information that is objective? Of high academic quality?

Some of the most common domain types are:

.edu: an educational institution (often reliable, but can be anything from scholarly research to students’ personal pages)

.gov: a government body (usually dependable)

.org: a non-profit organization (may or may not be biased), may be relatively objective or may present any political point of view

.com: a commercial enterprise (may be trying to sell or promote a product or service)

.**net**: originally for networking organizations, such as internet service providers, but now often used as an alternative to .com

HOW DO I EVALUATE INFORMATION FROM BOOKS?

Not surprisingly, to evaluate information from books, you can reuse your six criteria. Most importantly:

- Check the book’s **author(s)** just as for other types of sources,
- Check the **publisher** (the company or organization that edited, designed, printed and distributed the book) of the book. What to look for?
  - Some publishers are known for publishing particular types of books and have reputations for producing a certain level of quality in content and academic level. For example, a university press is a publisher closely affiliated with a university. University press books are considered to be highly respectable and reputable. They are often identified by (you’ll never guess) the words "university" and "press" in their names. Example: University of California Press.
  - Various academic and professional organizations also publish books which can be extremely valuable for researchers because the materials tend to be written by experts in a field.
  - Be careful about using self-published books! These books are less likely to have been reviewed by professionals in the field for the accuracy of the information presented.

You're ready to start searching. But hold on! Though it's natural to want to dive right in, you'll save a lot of time and effort by devising a strategy before you do.

WHAT'S THE BEST STRATEGY TO SEARCH FOR MY SOURCES?

Before you begin searching for the perfect information on your topic, you should prepare for your search.

1. **Divide the research topic into "concepts" (different subtopics or elements).** Concepts should **not** include question words, e.g. "who", "what", "why", nor words describing the relationship of different concepts, e.g. "effect of", "impact on." For example, a specific research question might be: *How did **Frederick Douglass** regard **women's rights** with respect to the **abolition movement**? Were his views on these topics contradictory?*

Look at the words in your research topic and identify the main ideas or "concepts."

This research question can be divided into two or three "concepts":

1. Frederick Douglass
2. women's rights
3. abolition movement

2. **Next, for each of the three concepts, think of other search words or phrases that might be used for the same idea.**

Place an "OR" between each search word for the same concept. (The "OR" tells the search engine to look for documents with at least one of the words in each concept). For example,

1. Frederick Douglass
2. women's rights OR women's suffrage OR suffragist*
3. anti-slavery OR abolition* OR "abolition movement"

HOW DO I USE ARTICLE DATABASES?

The best way to find good quality sources for college research papers will almost always be to use an **article database accessible through the college library website**.

On the Skyline College Library homepage, the "Quick Article Search" box will allow you to search for articles in tens of thousands of magazines, journals and newspapers, as well as eBooks, in the EbscoHost premium databases. Searches from the Quick Article Search box *do not* provide the full searching capabilities of the EbscoHost databases. To do a more precise search, you should use the "Advanced Search" mode by clicking the "***Advanced Search***" link. You can email yourself the articles you find in your search.

To access this and other article databases from home or off-campus, you will need a **PLS library card**, which is available for free from Skyline College Library (or any public or community college library in San Mateo County. Remember to access the database links from the Skyline Library homepage).

You can see a list of all of the databases available by clicking on the "**Select a Database by Subject/Title**" pull-down menu. To select a database to search, click on any title from the menu and then click the "**GO**" button.

HOW CAN I USE GOOGLE TO FIND ACADEMIC SOURCES?

Let's strategize. How can we use Google to search for information on our topic?

*How did **Frederick Douglass** regard **women's rights** with respect to the **abolition movement**?*

When using Google, it is most effective to put quotation marks (" ") around any ***search phrases***-- any group of more than one word that should be searched together in a specific order. For example, for our topic, **"women's rights"** and **"abolition movement"** are search phrases.

Also place an ***OR*** between each search term or search phrase for the same concept (The ***OR*** tells Google to look for documents

with at least one of the words in each concept). So a Google search for our topic would look like this: "*Frederick Douglass*" *AND "women's rights" OR "women's suffrage" AND "abolition movement*"

HOW CAN I LIMIT MY GOOGLE SEARCH FOR BETTER RESULTS?

1. **Limit your Google search to a specific domain**

   When searching the Web, it can be very useful to limit your search to just websites with a particular domain type, such as **.edu** for college or university sites, **.gov** for government sites or **.org** for organization sites. These domains will commonly have better quality sites than .com sites.

   In *Google*, you can use the powerful ***site:*** command to limit the search to a specific domain. To limit the search to just .edu sites, for example, you would add: ***site:.edu*** to your search. To limit the search to just .org sites, add: ***site:.org*** to your search, or to search for just .gov sites, add: ***site:.gov*** to your search.

   Here is an example of how we limited our search to only .edu sites by adding: ***site:.edu*** to the search:
   "Frederick Douglass" AND "women's rights" OR suffrage AND "abolition movement" ***and site:edu***

2. **Use Google's Similar option**

   Another useful Google feature is the "Similar" option. When you find one page in a Google results page that provides very good information on your topic, you can find other pages that have similar information by clicking on the pull-down symbol to the right of the web address for that page (just below the title of the page on the Google results list) and then click on the "Similar" link. Google will then display a list of similar web pages.

3. **Limit Google to News Articles**

   A basic Google search will find all types of web pages, but you can limit Google searches in various ways to improve your search results. One easy way to limit on Google is **Google News**, which includes only newspaper articles. To limit to Google News after doing a general Google Web search, click on the ***News*** button on the Google task bar below the search box on the results page (or if the ***News*** button is not shown, click on the ***More*** pull-down menu bar below the search box on the results page and select ***News*** from the menu). After clicking the News button, the results change--from web pages to news articles.

4. **Using Google Scholar**

   When you *only* want to find information written by academics, Google Scholar - Google's academic search engine - is a good place to go. Instead of searching for websites, Google Scholar searches a wide range of academic articles and books from academic publishers, professional societies, online repositories, and universities. In many cases, the **sources are only abstracts** (summaries) of articles, which do not provide the full-text of the article (or a significant charge is required for the full article), however you may usually be able to retrieve the full-text of these articles by using the Skyline College Library Article Delivery Service (if you are a Skyline College student doing research for a class assignment.) Go to: scholar.google.com

---

This page titled 12.2: Researching is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 11.4: Researching by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

13: INTEGRATING SOURCES

13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing
13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations
13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper
13.4: Using Multiple Sources
13.5: Defining Plagiarism
13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism

This page titled 13: Integrating Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 11: Integrating Sources by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing

WHAT IS QUOTING AND PARAPHRASING?

When you are asked to write about or analyze text(s), you will use quotes and paraphrases from them. What is the difference between quoting and paraphrasing?

- **Quoting:** Is using the direct language from another person either in full sentences or groups of words and putting the borrowed language between quotation marks.
- **Paraphrasing:** Is putting the ideas or arguments of another person entirely into your own words.

WHY QUOTE VERSUS PARAPHRASE?

Before you use a quotation, decide if you can use your own words (paraphrase) to express the author's ideas. If you include too many quotations, readers form the impression that you cannot think for yourself. However, in text-based writing, you will want to include some quotes, so you keep your analysis of the text central to your discussion.

Use quotations when...

- **the original language is as important as the ideas it contains**, that is, when the author's words are so articulate or expressive that they deserve to be preserved.
- **the original language is concise,** and a paraphrase would be too wordy.
- **the original language is from an established authority** who could lend extra credibility to your claims.
- **the original language itself is the object of analysis**, a situation that happens most commonly when writing about literature.

HOW DO I PROPERLY QUOTE AND PARAPHRASE?

- **When you quote,** you want to enclose all borrowed language between quotation marks and then provide an in-text citation that cites the source. In MLA formatting, the in-text citation generally includes the author's last name and the page number in parenthesis after the quote (Garcia 21). See Chapter 5: MLA Conventions for more detail.
- **When you paraphrase,** you are deciding that an author's ideas but not his/hers exact words are important to your point. A paraphrase should not change the ideas, but it can eliminate or change words, often in order to condense a long sentence that contains details unnecessary to your point. Even though you are not quoting, you still need to credit the source you are paraphrasing by making it clear in the context of your discussion or by citing it as you would a quote.

Example: Quoting and Paraphrasing

Original: The solidarity that characterizes communities does not mean, however, that all is unity and harmony within. Many commentators err, I think, by insisting that absence of conflict, like the family conflict we all know, is real, though it differs from, say, market competition, in being mediated by emotional bonds. (from "The Meanings of Community" by Thomas Bender, page 67.)

Quote: According to Bender, "The solidarity that characterizes communities does not mean, however, that all is unity and harmony within" (67).

Paraphrase: While some people believe a lack of conflict characterizes community, Bender asserts that some communities may have and need conflict.

Partial Paraphrase: Unlike other forms of conflict, though, Bender believes that family conflict is "mediated by emotional bonds" (67).

Practice: QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND PARTIAL PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

In writing you will use a mixture of direct quotations, paraphrases and partial paraphrases. Using the original quotations below, create one of each type:

Quote 1: "In my teaching I never concealed my political views: my detestation of war and militarism, my anger at racial inequality, my belief in a democratic socialism, in a rational and just distribution of the world's wealth. I made clear my abhorrence of any kind of bullying, whether by powerful nations over weaker ones, governments over their citizens, employers over employees, or by anyone on the Right or Left, who thinks they have a monopoly on the truth." (from Howard Zinn's book *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, page 7).

Quote:

Paraphrase:

Partial Paraphrase:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Quote 2: "The eye-for-an-eye philosophy, the impulse to defend oneself when attacked, has always been held as the highest measure of American manhood. We are a nation that worships the frontier tradition, and our heroes are those who champion justice through violent retaliation against injustice. It is not simple to adopt the credo that moral force has as much strength and virtue as the capacity to return a physical blow; or that to refrain from hitting back requires more will and bravery than the automatic reflexes of defense." (from Martin Luther King's book *Why We Can't Wait*, page 24).

Quote:

Paraphrase:

Partial Paraphrase:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice: QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND PARTIAL PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

Potential answers for QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND PARTIAL PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

Quote 1: Howard Zinn

Quote: Howard Zinn conveys to his students his strong convictions that no one has the right to oppress another under any circumstance, “I made clear my abhorrence of any kind of bullying, whether by powerful nations over weaker ones, governments over their citizens, employers over employees, or by anyone on the Right or Left, who thinks they have a monopoly on the truth” (7).

Paraphrase: Zinn shares his support of equality for all people and his anti-oppression viewpoints with his students.

Partial Paraphrase: Zinn fearlessly shares his controversial political views such as his “detestation of war and militarism” (7).

Practice: QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND PARTIAL PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

Potential answers for QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND PARTIAL PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

Quote 2: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Quote: King looks to our historical background in the U.S. to understand why we are a people so driven by violence: **“**We are a nation that worships the frontier tradition, and our heroes are those who champion justice through violent retaliation against injustice” (24).

Paraphrase: King asserts it is harder to practice non-violence in the U.S. where we admire people who are willing to commit violence.

Partial Paraphrase: King sadly observes that the “highest measure of American manhood” (24) is a person’s willingness to commit violent revenge.

This page titled 13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 11.2: Quoting and Paraphrasing by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SMOOTHLY INTEGRATE QUOTATIONS?

When you are incorporating the direct language of others into your own writing, you want that integration to be fluid and seamless. You don't want your reader to get lost or confused as you transition from your voice and ideas to another person's. You want to use quotations in a way that clarify, support, and strengthen your writing.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Readers can better understand the relevance of smoothly integrated quotations.
- Readers can clearly see the connection between an integrated quotation and what it is trying to prove or illustrate.
- Readers can be better convinced by evidence presented in smoothly integrated quotations.
- Readers don't experience being lost or frustrated by quotations that appear unrelated, inappropriate, or off topic.

HOW DO I SMOOTHLY INTEGRATE QUOTATIONS?

A dropped quote is a quote from someone else that is placed in your writing but it stands alone and is not introduced and not integrated into a sentence of your own. A dropped quote **interrupts the flow** of your writing, as the reader must jump abruptly from your words to someone else's and back again. Also, if you're not integrating direct quotations into your own writing, you're probably **not giving your reader the context** they need to understand the quote.

Think of a quote as a helium balloon that needs an anchor to hold it down in your essay:

Fixing Dropped Quotes



Dropped quote: A number of journalists have been critical of genetic engineering. "The problem is, no one really knows the long-term effects of such complex genetic manipulation—and the potential dangers to humans and the environment are substantial" (Turner 21).	In order to successfully integrate quotations into your writing, you need to introduce or in some way lead into the quotation so that readers know whose words are being quoted or why the quotation is important.	**Integrated quote:** A number of journalists have been critical of genetic engineering. Lisa Turner, in an article for the magazine *Better Nutrition*, targets the unpredictable nature of this new technology: "The problem is, no one really knows the long-term effects of such complex genetic manipulation—and the potential dangers to humans and the environment are substantial" (21).

		
The quote stands on its own, and it's not clear who Turner is or why this person is quoted. The relevance of the quote is not anchored so floats away in the reader's mind.	Tie a string to your balloon! In writing, that means creating a phrase that introduces, connects and anchors the quote to what you are discussing.	In this sentence, the quote is anchored. We know who said it and why she is an authority, and it now flows in the logic of the sentence.

Connect quotes to phrases that introduce them

Here are a few approaches for creating introductory phrases for quotes:

1. **Identify the speaker and context of the quote**
   Example: Dee protests to her mother that her sister does not know the true value of the quilts, "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use" (Walker 490).
2. **Lead in with your own idea**
   Example: Miss Emily Grierson's house is a reflection of her being out of sync with the times: "But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores" (Faulkner 459).
3. **Formulas**

- In (title of source), (author) writes/ argues/ explains/ describes, "quote" (#).

Example: In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou writes, "In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really absolutely know what whites looked like" (20).

- According to (author) in (title), "quote" (#).

To avoid monotony, try to vary your formulas. The following models suggest a range of possibilities:

In the words of researcher Herbert Terrace, "..."
Jason Applegate, Smith's trainer, points out, "..."
"...," claims linguist Noam Chomsky.
Psychologist H.S. Terrace offers an odd argument for this view, "..."

Also, by choosing an **appropriate verb**, you can make your stance clear and the description more alive and engaging:

Active verbs list

acknowledges	condemns	distinguishes	observes	thinks
adds	confirms	emphasizes	objects	writes
admits	contends	endorses	points out	wonders
agrees	contrasts	explains	reasons	
argues	criticizes	grants	refutes	
asserts	declares	identifies	rejects	
believes	defends	illustrates	reports	
characterizes	demonstrates	implies	responds	
claims	denies	insists	shows	
comments	describes	justifies	suggests	
compares	disputes	notes	supports	

Practice: Integrating Quotes using introductory Phrases

For each quote below, create a sentence that smoothly integrates the quote. Try a few different methods:

Method #1: Identify the speaker and context of the quote:

Quote: "On this island, you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs on what side"

Background information: From *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat, the speaker is Senora Valencia, page 304. Senora Valencia is referring to the island of Hispanola, which the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic share. She is speaking during the times that the dictator Trujillo had many Haitians murdered in and exiled from the Dominican Republic.

Quote integrated into a sentence:

Method #2: Lead in with your own idea:

Quote: "They did not have the tanates to go up north and break through the wall of electric fences and enter the land of plenty, the U.S. of A., a land so rich that what garbage they throw away in one day could feed entire pueblos."

Background information: From *Macho!* By Victor Villasenor, page 31. The book tells the story of a young man named Roberto from Michoacán who risks himself to go north to California to work as an illegal alien picking fruit in California.

Quote integrated into a sentence:

Method #3: Formula (try using a good and dynamic verb):

Quote: "Racial targeting and abuse by police is costly. U.S. taxpayers have paid tens of millions of dollars in police brutality lawsuits. Between 1992 and 1993, Los Angeles county alone paid more than $30 million to citizens victimized by police brutality."

Background information: From *The Color of Crime* by Katheryn K. Russell, page 45 who writes about the ways in which

African-Americans are misrepresented by the media and mistreated within the criminal system.

Quote integrated into a sentence:

Answer available at the end of this section.

Follow quotes with an explanation of their significance.

After the quote, provide your own reasoning and analysis explaining the significance and relevance of the quote.

Here are a few approaches to ensure the inclusion of analysis and significance for the quotes you select:

SAY, MEAN, MATTER?

"Say, Mean, Matter" is a 3-step approach to select good quotes, understand them, and then analyze them.

Practice

Practice

SAY: What does the text say?	MEAN: What does it mean?	MATTER: Why does it matter?
Find one or more significant quotations from the text. Write the quote(s) word for word in this column.	Using your own words paraphrase/ summarize what the quote(s) mean.	Comment on why the quote(s) matter to you and what significance they have in the world. Explain how the excerpt(s) advance the author's message as well as how they connect to an argument you could make based on them.

Answers

Practice: Integrating Quotes using introductory Phrases

Potential answers for INTEGRATING QUOTES USING INTRODUCTORY PHRASES EXERCISE

Method #1: Identify the speaker and context of the quote:

Senora Valencia describes the severe division that exists in her homeland of Hispanola due to Trujillo's bloody dictatorship, "On this island, you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs on what side" (Danticat 304).

Method #2: Lead in with your own idea:

Villasenor captures the decadence of the United States through the hungry eyes of Roberto, a young boy who risks going north to work illegally, "They did not have the tanates to go up north and break through the wall of electric fences and enter the land of plenty, the U.S. of A., a land so rich that what garbage they throw away in one day could feed entire pueblos" (31).

Method #3: Formula (try using a good and dynamic verb):

In *The Color of Crime*, Katheryn K. Russell exposes: "Racial targeting and abuse by police is costly. U.S. taxpayers have paid tens of millions of dollars in police brutality lawsuits. Between 1992 and 1993, Los Angeles county alone paid more than $30 million to citizens victimized by police brutality" (45).

This page titled 13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 11.3: Smoothly Integrating Quotations by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper

Within the pages of your research essay, it is important to properly reference and cite your sources to avoid plagiarism and to give credit for original ideas.

There are three main ways to put a source to use in your essay: you can quote it, you can summarize it, and you can paraphrase it.

Quoting



Direct quotations are words and phrases that are taken directly from another source, and then used word-for-word in your paper. If you incorporate a direct quotation from another author's text, you must put that quotation or phrase in quotation marks to indicate that it is not your language.

When writing direct quotations, you can use the source author's name in the same sentence as the quotation to introduce the quoted text and to indicate the source in which you found the text. You should then include the page number or other relevant information in parentheses at the end of the phrase (the exact format will depend on the formatting style of your essay).

Summarizing

Summarizing involves condensing the main idea of a source into a much shorter overview. A summary outlines a source's most important points and general position. When summarizing a source, it is still necessary to use a citation to give credit to the original author. You must reference the author or source in the appropriate citation method at the end of the summary.

Paraphrasing

When paraphrasing, you may put any part of a source (such as a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or chapter) into your own words. You may find that the original source uses language that is more clear, concise, or specific than your own language, in which case you should use a direct quotation, putting quotation marks around those unique words or phrases you don't change.

It is common to use a mixture of paraphrased text and quoted words or phrases, as long as the direct quotations are inside of quotation marks.



Sources that are not properly integrated into your paper are like “bricks without mortar: you have the essential substance, but there’s nothing to hold it together, rendering the whole thing formless” (Smith).

Providing Context for Your Sources

Whether you use a direct quotation, a summary, or a paraphrase, it is important to distinguish the original source from your ideas, and to explain how the cited source fits into your argument. While the use of quotation marks or parenthetical citations tells your reader that these are not your own words or ideas, you should follow the quote with a description, in your own terms, of what the quote says and why it is relevant to the purpose of your paper. You should not let quoted or paraphrased text stand alone in your paper, but rather, should integrate the sources into your argument by providing context and explanations about how each source supports your argument.[1]

---

1. Smith, Matt. "Putting It All Together: Thesis Synthesis." Web log post. Walden University Writing Center, 12 Apr. 2013. Web. 04 Apr. 2016. ↵

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Incorporating Your Sources Into Your Paper. **Provided by**: Boundless. **Located at**: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-writing/. **Project**: Boundless Writing. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Public domain content

- Image of bricks. **Authored by**: Tasja. **Located at**: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berg_van_stenen.jpg. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*
- quotation marks. **Authored by**: Cuahl. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2009-04-13/Dispatches#/media/File:Cquote2.svg. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

This page titled 13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SUNY/Lumen Learning via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 6.11: Using Sources in Your Paper by SUNY/Lumen Learning has no license indicated. Original source: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ecc-guidetowriting/.

13.4: Using Multiple Sources

Sources are a great help for understanding a topic more deeply. But what about when sources don't quite agree with one another, or challenge what you have experienced yourself?

This is where your skill of **synthesis** comes into play, as a writer. Synthesizing includes comparison and contrast, but also allows you to combine multiple perspectives on a topic to reach a deeper understanding.

This video explains the process of synthesis in action.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Video: Using Multiple Sources. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

All rights reserved content

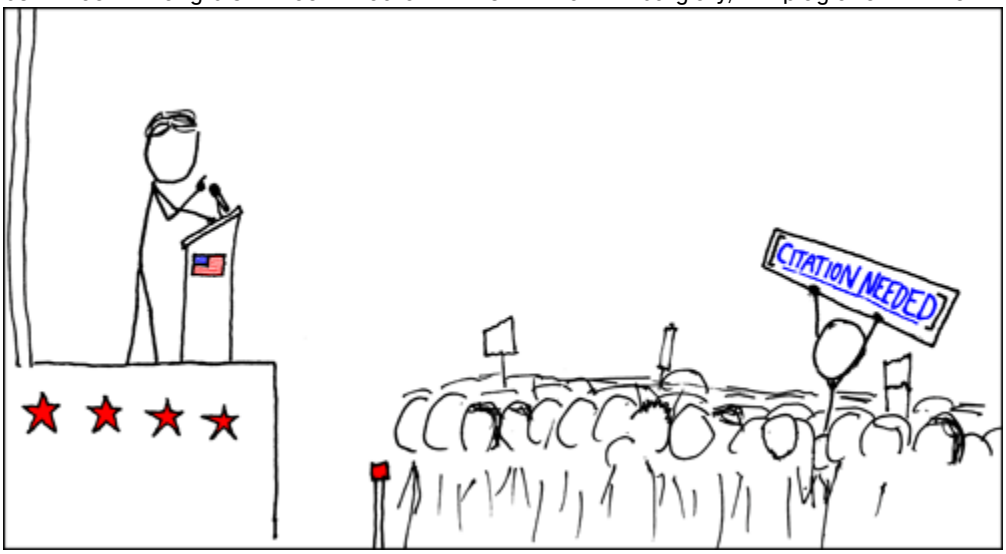
- Synthesizing Information. **Authored by**: GCFLearnFree.org. **Located at**: https://youtu.be/7dEGoJdb6O0. **License**: *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License

This page titled 13.4: Using Multiple Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SUNY/Lumen Learning via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 6.12: Using Multiple Sources by SUNY/Lumen Learning has no license indicated. Original source: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ecc-guidetowriting/.

13.5: Defining Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unauthorized or uncredited use of the writings or ideas of another in your writing. While it might not be as tangible as auto theft or burglary, plagiarism is still a form of theft.



Examples of plagiarism include:

- Turning in someone else's paper as your own
- Using the exact words of a source without quotation marks and/or a citation
- Taking an image, chart, or statistic from a source without telling where it originated
- Copying and pasting material from the internet without quotation marks and/or a citation
- Including another person's idea without crediting the author

In the academic world, plagiarism is a serious matter because ideas in the forms of research, creative work, and original thought are highly valued. Chances are, your school has strict rules about what happens when someone is caught plagiarizing. The penalty for plagiarism is severe, everything from a failing grade for the plagiarized work, a failing grade for the class, or expulsion from the institution.

You might not be aware that plagiarism can take several different forms. The most well known, **intentional or purposeful plagiarism**, is handing in an essay written by someone else and representing it as your own, copying your essay word for word from a magazine or journal, or downloading an essay from the Internet.

A much more common and less understood phenomenon is **unintentional or accidental plagiarism**. Accidental plagiarism is the result of improperly paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, or citing your evidence in your academic writing. Generally, writers accidentally plagiarize because they simply don't know or they fail to follow the rules for giving credit to the ideas of others in their writing.

Both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are wrong, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not knowing the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an *explanation*, but it is not an excuse.



Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Examples of plagiarism. **Provided by**: CUNY Academic Commons. **Located at**: http://bacwritingfellows.commons.gc.cuny.edu/plagiarism/. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism. **Authored by**: Steven D. Krause. **Provided by**: The Process of Research Writing. **Located at**: http://www.stevendkrause.com/tprw/chapter3.html. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- Wikipedian Protestor. **Authored by**: Randall Munroe. **Located at**: http://xkcd.com/285/. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- What is plagiarism? An informative chart.. **Provided by**: EasyBib. **Located at**: http://www.easybib.com/guides/students/research-guide/what-is-plagiarism/. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

This page titled 13.5: Defining Plagiarism is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SUNY/Lumen Learning via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 6.14: Defining Plagiarism by SUNY/Lumen Learning has no license indicated. Original source: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ecc-guidetowriting/.

13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism

How to Avoid Plagiarizing

Tip #1: Make Sure You Are Very Certain about What Is and is Not Plagiarism

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Tip #2: Give Yourself Plenty of Time to Complete an Assignment

Running out of time on an assignment is a main cause of plagiarism. Rushing to meet a deadline can result in carelessness (leading to unintentional plagiarism – see the next tip) and the desire to find a quick, easy solution such as copying someone else's work. Don't give in to that temptation! Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and the chance of being caught (which is likely) is not worth it.

Avoid this situation entirely by starting your assignment far ahead of time and planning out when you will complete each phase of the writing process. Even if your teacher does not require you to turn in materials for each stage of the writing process (i.e. brainstorming, creating a thesis statement, outlining, drafting, revising, etc.), set your own personal deadlines for each step along the way and make sure to give yourself more than enough time to finish everything.

Tip #3: Document Everything

Plagiarism isn't always a conscious choice. Sometimes it can be unintentional, typically resulting from poor documentation of one's sources during the research phase. For example, sometimes students will write down an idea from a source using words identical to or very close to those in the original, but then when they go to write their paper forget that the material was not already in their own words. Adopting good research habits can prevent this type of plagiarism.

Print, photocopy, or scan the relevant pages of every source you are using (including the title and copyright pages, since they have the information you need for a bibliographic citation). When taking notes by hand (or typed into a file), list the bibliographic information for each source you use. Make sure to put quotation marks around any wordings taken directly from the source (and note the page where you found it), and remember to put everything else into your own words right away, so there is no danger of forgetting something is a quote. Documenting where all of your ideas, information, quotations, and so on come from is an important step in avoiding plagiarism.

Tip #4: Don't Include Too Much Material Taken from Other Sources



Tips for integrating sources into your research.

Writing assignments are about your ideas, your interpretations, and your ability to synthesize information. You should use relevant sources to support your ideas using evidence such as quotes, paraphrases, and summaries, as well as statistics and other data. But don't lose sight of the fact that your argument is central! Including too much material from other sources can result in a paper that feels like it has been pasted together from a variety of authors, rather than a cohesive essay. Such papers also run a much higher risk of setting off plagiarism warnings in SafeAssign or other plagiarism-detecting software. Try to find a balance: use enough evidence from credible sources to prove your points but don't let the ideas of others take the place of your own thoughts.

Tip #5: When in Doubt, Give a Citation

There are certain types of information – typically referred to as common knowledge – that don't require a citation when you include them in your writing. These are facts that are widely known and can be easily found in a number of sources. They are not ideas that originated with one particular source. Examples include scientific facts (for example, that solid, liquid, and gas are three states of matter), general historical information (for example, that George Washington was the first US president), or even information commonly known to certain groups of people but not others (for example, most musicians know that a C major triad includes the notes C, E, and G, even though many non-musicians would have no idea what a C major triad is).

For everything else, you need to include a citation, regardless of whether you are quoting directly from the source, paraphrasing it, or giving a summary. If you are at all unsure whether something qualifies as common knowledge or not, give a citation. You can also consult a more experienced figure in your field, such as your instructor, to find out if something counts as common knowledge or not.

In academic writing, the **"Quote Sandwich" approach** is useful for incorporating other writers' voices into your essays. It gives meaning and context to a quote, and helps you avoid plagiarism. This 3-step approach offers your readers a deeper understanding of what the quote is and how it relates to your essay's goals.

1. **Step 1***:* Provide context for the source. If you haven't used it yet in the essay, tell us the source's title and author (if known), and any other information that's relevant, like the purpose of the organization that published it, for instance.
2. **Step 2:** Provide the quote itself. Be sure to format correctly and use quotation marks around exact language.
3. **Step 3:** Provide a summary and/or analysis of what the quote says, and how it relates to the subject matter of your essay and your thesis.

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- Integrating sources image. **Authored by**: Kim Louie for Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Plagiarism. **Provided by**: CUNY Academic Commons. **Located at**: http://bacwritingfellows.commons.gc.cuny.edu/plagiarism/. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

All rights reserved content

- What is Plagiarism?. **Authored by**: Virtual High School. **Located at**: https://youtu.be/t5dRz6ZEkj8. **License**: *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License

This page titled 13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SUNY/Lumen Learning via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- 6.15: Avoiding Plagiarism by SUNY/Lumen Learning has no license indicated. Original source: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ecc-guidetowriting/.

14: RESPONDING TO AN ARGUMENT

Learning Outcomes

- Distinguish between assessing the strength of an argument and offering an original idea
- Generate relevant and original responses to others' arguments
- Demonstrate the ability to suggest an exception to an argument
- Demonstrate the ability to extend an argument with an original point
- Demonstrate the ability to suggest an alternative argument.

14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

14.6: Common Response Phrases

14.7: Sample Response Essays

14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing



Image courtesy of ICSA from Pexels.com under the Pexels License.

This page titled 14: Responding to an Argument is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (2 min, 42 sec):

A chance to express ourselves

Our voices matter. Much of this book thus far has focused on how to summarize and evaluate other people's arguments, but those are only first steps. Other people's arguments help us develop our own. Writing summaries and assessments can inspire us to come up with our own original points. Academic writing gives us the chance to join a worldwide conversation about what is true on every subject under the sun.

To many, academic writing seems elitist. In the past, it certainly was controlled by the people in power in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and wealth. It amplified the voices of the elites. But many historically marginalized people today seek to use academic writing for their own empowerment.

Just as there are many ways to respond when a friend tells us something, there are many ways to respond in writing to a written argument. We don't have to have all the answers; there are many ways to contribute without being experts. In this chapter, we lay out various options for response. By making these moves, we can help move the larger discussion toward greater insight.



Photo by WOCinTech Chat on Flickr, licensed CC BY 2.0.

Uses in college, work, and life

Many college writing assignments call for responses that go beyond agreeing or disagreeing with an argument. The response can be a place to bring in opinion and personal experience as they relate to the argument. Even if an assessment assignment doesn't specifically ask for a recommendation, it often makes sense to add one to a conclusion. Whether we agreed or disagreed with the argument, pointing toward a next step for the larger conversation on the issue can give the essay a sense of momentum and purpose.

The response moves described in this chapter are not just for academic writing. They can also help us respond to classmates' work in live discussions or online comments on other people's posts. They're key in professional settings too; we often need to respond to an argument such as a proposal, a memo, or a case study and show that we have something to add. Social media

platforms like Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc all encourage responses; we read a post and then add our own comment as we react, reply, share, or retweet. Of course email, texting, messageboards, forums, blogs and some news media also invite original commentary. Practicing academic response writing, then, can enrich our repertoire of responses in everyday life.



Photo by Jonas Kakaroto on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

This page titled 14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.1: The Beauty of Response Writing by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (2 min, 58 sec):

If we are uncertain about the argument we are responding to, we can still add to the conversation by pinpointing what makes us uncertain. What is it we need to know in order to form our opinion of the argument? Does the writer need to clarify what they mean? Or do we need more information that could come out of research or new studies?

Call for clarification

If one of the problems is vagueness or ambiguity, we probably want to call for greater clarity. We can suggest that the writer specify what they mean by a particular word or phrase. Or we may want to ask that they explain a murky point further.

We can call for clarification with phrases like the following:

- X should specify whether they mean _____ or _____.
- X should explain what they mean by _____.
- X should elaborate on the concept of _____.



Photo by Zen Chung from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Call for additional support or study

The process of analyzing the argument will often lead us to see what it is that we do not know. It may expose areas of uncertainty or contradiction that are intriguing. If we have called into question a reason or an assumption, we may want to recommend further research or support. Perhaps we are not ready to accept something without more evidence. In that case, we might describe the kind of study or investigative journalism that could uncover a reason.

If we have thought of exceptions, then maybe the reason needs more support to show that the exceptions are not common. For example, we might suggest that the writer should present some statistical evidence, like a survey, to show what the norm is,

rather than just a few examples. The following sample sentence summarizes and assesses an argument and then moves on to recommend additional support:

> While Swigart is right that porous borders pose a security risk and that illegal immigration challenges the rule of law, her argument would have been strengthened if she had added statistics linking gang violence to human trafficking across the U.S.-Mexico border.

We can call for support and research with phrases like the following:

- Further research on _____ could show us _____.
- A study of _____ might show whether _____.
- Is it really the case that _____? We need more information about _____.
- An investigation of _____ could help us determine the role of _____ in _____.

> **Exercise** 14.2.1
>
> Choose an argument about immigration that you think needs further development, such as "The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart, "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border" by Anna Mills, or another of your choosing. Write down a call for clarification, additional support, or further study. Consider using a phrase suggested in this section.

This page titled 14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.3: “Yes, if...”- Suggest a way to limit the argument

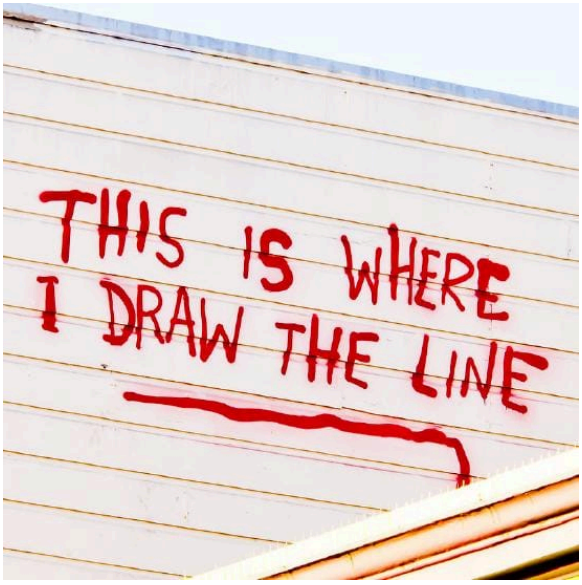
Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (1 min, 28 sec):

Maybe, in our assessment of the argument, we found exceptions to it or a whole set of circumstances under which it doesn’t hold up. We can advance the conversation by qualifying or limiting the original argument. One way to do so is to state that the argument only applies in a certain set of cases. Another way is to acknowledge one or more individual exceptions to it. Limiting an argument often helps to defend it against a counterargument.

Here are a few phrases for suggesting limits:

- We should recognize that this pattern is limited to cases where _____.
- The argument holds true in situations where _____.
- It is important to note that this claim only applies to _____.
- _____ is a notable exception because _____.
- We should note that this claim is certainly not true of _____.



"This Is Where I Draw the Line" by Thomas Hawk on Flickr is licensed CC BY NC 2.0.

Exercise 14.3.1

How would you suggest limiting each of the following arguments? Can you point out an exception? Does the claim only apply under specific circumstances?

- People are more comfortable with video meetings now than they were before the pandemic.
- Education should be free.
- Love is a force for good.
- People should not share videos of others without permission.

This page titled 14.3: “Yes, if...”- Suggest a way to limit the argument is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.3: “Yes, if...”- Suggest a way to limit the argument by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.4: “Yes, and...”- Suggest a way to add to the argument

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 32 sec):

Sometimes we forget that agreement doesn’t have to be the end of a conversation. The process of assessing an argument starts us thinking about all the issues it brings up, and primes us to add our own two cents.

Suggest further implications

We can suggest a new idea that takes the argument we assessed a step further. Can we draw an additional conclusion? Maybe we think the argument's claim should lead us to action. Maybe we think that the claim could be expanded to include other cases or situations.

Here are a few ways to introduce a further implication of an argument that we agree with:

- The idea that _____ could apply to _____ as well.
- Beyond _____, X’s argument has implications for _____.
- This argument shows how important it is that we take action on _____.
- If we accept the idea that _____, as we should, then the time has come to _____.
- Given X’s points, shouldn’t we consider _____?



Photo by AllGo - An App For Plus Size People on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Give a new reason

Sometimes we may agree with an argument’s claim, but for a different reason. In that case, we can make an original contribution just by pointing out the alternate reason. In other cases, we might just want to add one or more reasons to the list already covered by the argument. Maybe we are aware of evidence from another reading or from our own experience, or maybe we see a whole different line of reasoning which also leads us to the same conclusion.

For example, we noted in Section 4.4 that in the argument below, the reason was the same as the claim, so the claim had no support at all (a fallacy called circular reasoning).

> Anyone born in the United States has a right to citizenship because citizenship here depends on birth, not ethnicity or family history of immigration.

As a response to that argument, we could suggest a better reason for the same claim:

> Anyone born in the United States has a right to citizenship because the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees birthright citizenship.

Here are a few phrases to introduce alternate or additional reasons for a claim:

- Better evidence for _____ lies in _____.
- Another reason why _____ is that _____.
- The fact that _____ provides further support for X's claim.
- My own experience has also shown that _____ , which leads me to agree with X.
- I have seen firsthand how _____.
- In addition to the evidence X gives, it is also worth considering that _____.



"I love you because" by Scarlet O. on Flickr is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Explain why the argument matters

We can offer our own explanation for why the argument matters. This might be a point from another reading we've done, an abstract idea, a personal experience, or an anecdote of someone we know. Often, explaining why the argument matters will involve appealing to emotion or trust, which we will look at in-depth in Chapters 8 and 9.

Here are some phrases for underscoring the importance of an argument:

- X's claim is important because _____.
- This is especially concerning because _____.
- We should take note of this since _____.



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Suggest a way to spread the word

If we found the argument both valid and important, we are probably motivated to spread the word. Who needs to know about this argument, and what would be the best way to share it with them? For example, if we agree with another author that drone deliveries would pose a significant threat to privacy, we might then encourage readers to write to their Congressional representatives and post on social media about this threat.

The following phrases suggest ways to spread the word:

- We could help spread awareness of _____ by _____.
- The idea that _____ should be taught in _____ classes.
- We should all talk to those we know about _____.



Photo by Karolina Grabowska from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Exercise 14.4.1

Choose an argument about immigration that you mostly agree with, such as "The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart, "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border" by Anna Mills, or another of your choosing. Find a way to add your own point to it by explaining why it matters, giving a new reason, suggesting further implications, or suggesting a way to spread the word. Consider using a phrase from this section.

This page titled 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 16 sec):

If we can’t agree with the argument’s main claim, we probably have some ideas of our own on the subject. For example, let’s say a student, let’s call her Anoush, has just read an article that celebrates the fashion industry’s inclusion of multiple ethnicities and body types. Let’s say Anoush is not impressed with the fashion industry’s efforts. She has critiqued the article, but she knows that her readers may not be satisfied if she stops there. If the article was wrong, then what would a better article on the topic look like?

We don’t always have to have a fully formed or researched argument to put our own ideas into a college essay. If our main task is to summarize and assess with just a little response, this part can be tentative and not fully developed. The idea is to point the reader in a new direction. We may want to qualify or limit our suggestion with words like “perhaps,” “it may be that,” or “The idea that _____ is worth considering…”

Suggest an alternate claim that addresses the same issue

If we just analyzed an argument we found to be weak, we may already have an opposing argument or an alternate argument in mind. If readers are convinced that the first argument is without merit, they will be looking for a replacement. Our critique puts us in a good position to present an alternate vision.

In the example above, the student Anoush could give her take on where the fashion industry is right now in terms of inclusion. She might argue that the industry needs to represent a greater range of ethnicities and sizes and make sure that diverse models are shown as regular people, not as exotic.

The following phrases introduce alternate claims:

- Instead of _____, I would argue that _____.
- A more accurate claim would be _____.
- In actuality, _____.
- The idea that _____ better accounts for the evidence.
- We can find a better explanation of _____ in _____.
- As we have seen, it is not true that _____. Rather, _____.



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Suggest a different way to frame the issue

Even if we are not ready with an alternate argument, we may at least have some recommendations for a better way to approach the topic. We can suggest a particular angle or lens. For example, we might suggest that in order to understand the scarcity of Black, Latino, and Asian CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, we should stop focusing so narrowly on CEOS and should look at the demographics of management positions more generally since CEOs are almost always promoted from other leadership positions.

Here are some phrases for reframing an issue:

- Instead of focusing on _____, we should look at the question in the light of _____.
- A better way to frame the issue of _____ would be in terms of _____.
- To better understand _____, we should first ask ourselves _____.



Photo by Ivan Bertolazzi from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Exercise 14.5.1

Interactive Content

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this Interactive Content online

Exercise 14.5.2

Choose an argument about immigration that you find problematic, such as "The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart, "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border" by Anna Mills, or another of your choosing. Suggest an alternate claim or an alternate way to frame the issue. Consider using a phrase suggested in this section.

This page titled 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.6: Common Response Phrases

Here are all of the common phrases discussed in Chapter 5: Responding to an Argument. Each heading links to the relevant section of the text.

Call for clarification

- X should specify whether they mean _____ or _____.
- X should explain what they mean by _____.
- X should elaborate on the concept of _____.

Call for support and research

- Further research on _____ could show us _____.
- A study of _____ might show whether _____.
- Is it really the case that _____? We need more information about _____.
- An investigation of _____ could help us determine the role of _____ in _____.

Suggest a limit to the claim

- We should recognize that this pattern is limited to cases where _____.
- The argument holds true in situations where _____.
- It is important to note that this claim only applies to _____.
- _____ is a notable exception because _____.
- We should note that this claim is certainly not true of _____.

Point to further implications

- The idea that _____ could apply to _____ as well.
- Beyond _____, X's argument has implications for _____.
- This argument shows how important it is that we take action on _____.
- If we accept the idea that _____, as we should, then the time has come to _____.
- Given X's points, shouldn't we consider _____?

Introduce alternative or additional reasons

- Better evidence for _____ lies in _____.
- Another reason why _____ is that _____.
- The fact that _____ provides further support for X's claim.
- My own experience has also shown that _____ , which leads me to agree with X.
- I have seen firsthand how _____.
- In addition to the evidence X gives, it is also worth considering that _____.

Underscore the importance of an argument

- X's claim is important because _____.
- This is especially concerning because _____.
- We should take note of this since _____.

Suggest ways to spread the word

- We could help spread awareness of _____ by _____.
- The idea that _____ should be taught in _____ classes.
- We should all talk to those we know about _____.

Introduce alternate claims

- Instead of _____, I would argue that _____.
- A more accurate claim would be _____.
- In actuality, _____.
- The idea that _____ better accounts for the evidence.
- We can find a better explanation of _____ in _____.
- As we have seen, it is not true that _____. Rather, _____.

Reframe the issue

- Instead of focusing on _____, we should look at the question in the light of _____.
- A better way to frame the issue of _____ would be in terms of _____.
- To better understand _____, we should first ask ourselves _____.

This page titled 14.6: Common Response Phrases is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.6: Common Response Phrases by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.7: Sample Response Essays

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (36 sec):

1. In "Spread Feminism, Not Germs," student Gizem Gur summarizes, assesses, and responds to the *Atlantic Magazine* article "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism." Annotations point out how Gur structures the response paper.
    - Sample response paper "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" in PDF with margin notes
    - Sample response paper "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" accessible version with notes in parentheses
2. In "Typography and Identity," Saramanda Swigart summarizes, assesses, and responds to the *New York Times* article "A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans 'Black' or 'black'?" Annotations point out how Swigart structures the response paper.
    - Sample response paper "Typography and Identity" in PDF with margin notes
    - Sample response paper "Typography and Identity" accessible version with notes in parentheses

This page titled 14.7: Sample Response Essays is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.7: Sample Response Essays by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 46 sec):

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of "Spread Feminism, Not Germs."

Gizem Gur

English 1A

Anna Mills

Spread Feminism, Not Germs

COVID-19 is not the first outbreak in history and probably won't be the last one. (Note: The opening statement provides the essay's overall context: the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic.) However, its effects will be long-lasting. (Note: The followup statement introduces the essay's particular focus: the impact of the Pandemic on women.) While the Pandemic has affected everyone's lives in every aspect, its impacts on women are even more severe. Helen Lewis, the author of "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism" explains why feminism cannot survive during the Pandemic. (Note: An outside text is introduced that the essay will engage with.) Lewis starts her article with a complaint by saying "enough already" because, in terms of housework especially for child care, there has been inequality since the past. This inequality has become even more explicit with the coronavirus outbreak. Women have to shoulder not only more housework but also childcare more than ever due to school closures. The Pandemic started as a public health crisis and brought along an economic one. Women are mainly affected by this crisis more than men because women are more likely to take housework and childcare responsibilities while men are expected to work and "bring home the bacon." (Note: The author provides a clear thesis statement to close the opening (introduction) paragraph).)

Each gender has a different role in society. While men are usually seen as breadwinners, women mostly spend their time at home and do housework. (Note: The first supporting argument: the unpaid labor of women under traditional gender roles.) Women also are the primary caregivers for both children and elders. As Lewis mentions, "looking after" duty is on women's shoulder. Then she adds " all this looking after—this unpaid caring labor—will fall more heavily on women because of the existing structure of the workforce," and she includes a provocative question from Clare Wenham, an assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of Economics: "Who is paid less? Who has the flexibility?" The author intentionally uses this quote to express her frustration. At the same time, she implies that this existing structure is based upon the gender pay gap. (Note: The author supports her argument with evidence from the text, and provides analysis to tie that evidence to her argument.) We all are familiar with the reality that "women's income is less than men's" so this fact goes a long way towards explaining why women mainly stay at home and take caregiving responsibilities. It is a kind of survival rule that whoever earns less should stay at home. In this case, it seems like couples do not have many options.

One of the most challenging aspects of the Pandemic for dual-income parents is the school and daycare closures. (Note: Whereas the first support focused on gender roles, the second paragraph focuses on the particular challenges for parents during the Covid-19 epidemic.) These dual-earner parents should find a way to split children's needs during the shelter-in-place. If they do not balance paid work and child care, both sides will feel the consequences. To emphasize these consequences, Lewis humorously says "Dual-income couples might suddenly be living like their grandparents, one homemaker, and one breadwinner." (Note: Drawing on evidence from the text, this passage shows how gender roles relate to the challenges of Covid-19 for working parents and families.) Instead of splitting the housework, women take the role of "homemaker" so the author implies here that this regresses gender dynamics two generations backward. It obviously demonstrates that nothing much has changed over time and the mentality remains. While many couples are trying to find a middle way, others think that women have to suck it up and sacrifice their jobs.

In reference to school closures, Lewis brings up the Ebola health crisis which occurred in West Africa in the time period of 2014-2016. (Note: The following paragraph cites a historical precedent for the Covid-19 outbreak as a basis for comparison.) According to Lewis, during this outbreak, many African girls lost their chance at education; moreover, many women died during childbirth because of a lack of medical care. Mentioning these elaborations proves once again that not only coronavirus but also many other outbreaks have caused a disaster for feminism. Pandemics, in other words, pile yet another problem on women who always face an uphill battle against patriarchal structures. (Note: This passage ties this observation about the Ebola outbreak in West Africa to a greater observation about Pandemics and gender roles overall.)

I started reading her article with a feeling of frustration. While the main topic of the article is feminism, Lewis gives a couple of male examples from the past, such as William Shakespeare and Isaac Newton. (Note: The author makes a personal note here, marking an emotional connection and reaction to the text.) She seems at times to attribute their success to their masculinity. They both lived in times of plague, demonstrating that despite all our progress, the human species is still grappling with the same issues. According to Lewis, neither Newton nor Shakespeare had to worry about childcare or housework. Even though her comparison seemed odd to me, she managed to surprise me that in over 300 years many gender inequities remain the same. This is actually very tragic. It is hard to acknowledge that women are still facing gender inequality in almost every area even 300 years after the time of these great English thinkers. (Note: The author cites historical precedent again: this passage argues that the relationship between plagues and gender roles has not changed much in centuries.) Assuming housework is the natural place of women without asking women if they want to do it is asking for too big a sacrifice. Since couples have the option to split the housework and childcare, why should only women have to shoulder most of the burden? This is a question that I might never be able to answer, even if I search my whole life. It is unacceptable that there is pressure on women to conform to gender roles, such as cultural settings and expectations. (Note: The author uses a rhetorical question to segue into a new supporting argument.) Women should not have to sacrifice their leisure time completing unpaid work. I agree with Lewis when she mentions the “second shift” situation. When we consider women’s first shift as their paid work, the second shift represents the time that they spend working in the home. In this case, there is apparently no shift for leisure time. Lewis also supports this by saying “Across the world, women—including those with jobs—do more housework and have less leisure time than their male partners.” Additionally, it seems like economic recovery is going to be long-lasting because of the Coronavirus. As a solution, if men and women have equal housework responsibilities, women may spend more of their time completing paid work. (Note: The author makes a call to action near the end of the essay.) In this way, they can contribute to the economy while they are socializing. Especially after the Pandemic is over, we will need a greater workforce, so hopefully both men and women can equally participate in the economy. (Note: Much like the first sentence of the essay, the last sentence speaks to a greater, big-picture context: the need for equality in a post-pandemic world.)

Attribution

This sample essay was written by Gizem Gur and edited by Anna Mills. Annotations are by Saramanda Swigart, edited by Anna Mills. Licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

This page titled 14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (11 min, 43 sec):

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of "Typography and Identity."

Sample Essay Z

English 1C

Prof. Saramanda Swigart

Typography and Identity

John Eligon's *New York Times* article, “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black’?” outlines the ongoing conversation among journalists and academics regarding conventions for writing about race—specifically, whether or not to capitalize the “b” in “black” when referring to African-Americans (itself a term that is going out of style). (Note: The opening sentence introduces the text this essay will respond to and gives a brief summary of the text's content.) Eligon argues that, while it might seem like a minor typographical issue, this small difference speaks to the question of how we think about race in the United States. Are words like “black” or “white” mere adjectives, descriptors of skin color? Or are they proper nouns, indicative of group or ethnic identity? Eligon observes that until recently, with the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, many journalistic and scholarly publications tended to use a lowercase “black,” while Black media outlets typically capitalized “Black.” He suggests that the balance is now tipping in favor of "Black," but given past changes, usage will probably change again as the rich discussion about naming, identity, and power continues. (Note: The thesis statement includes two related ideas explored by Eligon: the current trend toward using "Black" and the value of the ongoing discussion that leads to changing terms.)

Eligon points to a range of evidence that "Black" is becoming the norm, including a recent change by "hundreds of news organizations" including the Associated Press. This comes in the wake of the George Floyd killing, but it also follows a longtime Black press tradition exemplified by newspapers like *The New York Amsterdam News*. Eligon cites several prominent academics who are also starting to capitalize Black. However, he also quotes prominent naysayers and describes a variety of counterarguments, like the idea that capitalization gives too much dignity to a category that was made up to oppress people. (Note: Summary of a counterargument.) Capitalizing Black raises another tricky question: Shouldn't White be likewise capitalized? Eligon points out that the groups most enthusiastic to capitalize White seem to be white supremacists, and news organizations want to avoid this association. (Note: The choice of "points out" signals that everyone would agree that mostly white supremacist groups capitalize White.)

Eligon's brief history of the debate over racial labels, from “Negro” and “colored” to “African-American” and “person of color,” gives the question of to-capitalize-or-not-to-capitalize a broader context, investing what might seem like a minor quibble for editors with the greater weight of racial identity and its evolution over time. (Note: This paragraph shifts focus from present to past trends and debates.) He outlines similar disagreements over word-choice and racial labels by scholars and activists like Fannie Barrier Williams and W.E.B. Du Bois surrounding now-antiquated terms like “Negro” and “colored.” These leaders debated whether labels with negative connotations should be replaced, or embraced and given a new, positive connotation. (Note: This paragraph summarizes the historical examples Eligon gives. Phrases like "He cites" point out that certain ideas are being used to support a claim.) Eligon observes that today's "black" was once used as a pejorative but was promoted by the Black Power movement starting in the late sixties, much as the word "Negro" was reclaimed as a positive word. (Note: Summary of a historical trend that parallels today's trend.) However, the Reverend Jesse Jackson also had some success in calling for a more neutral term, "African American," in the late eighties. He thought it more appropriate to emphasize a shared ethnic heritage over color. (Note: Summary of a historical countertrend based on a counterargument to the idea of reclaiming negative terms.) Eligon suggests that this argument continues to appeal to some today, but that such terms have been found to be inadequate given the diversity of

ethnic heritage. “African-American” and the more generalized “people/person of color” do not give accurate or specific enough information. (Note: Describes a response to the counterargument, a justification of today's trend toward Black.)

Ultimately, Eligon points to personal intuition as an aid to individuals in the Black community grappling with these questions. He describes the experience of sociologist Crystal M. Fleming, whose use of lowercase “black” transformed to capitalized “Black” over the course of her career and years of research. Her transition from black to Black is, she says, as much a matter of personal choice as a reasoned conclusion—suggesting that it will be up to Black journalists and academics to determine the conventions of the future. (Note: This last sentence of this summary paragraph focuses on Eligon's conclusion, his implied argument about what should guide the choice of terms.)

Eligon's statistical and anecdotal survey of current usage of Black and black covers enough ground to convince us of the trend in favor of capitalization. (Note: This sentence indicates the shift from summary to a positive assessment of the argument's effectiveness.) But the value of Eligon's article lies in the attention it brings both to the convention and the discussion as a way for the Black community to wrestle with history and define itself. By presenting a variety of past and present opinions from Black leaders, Eligon gives a sense of the richness and relevance of this ongoing debate. (Note: this part of the assessment emphasizes not just what is effective at convincing readers, but what is most valuable about the argument.) His focus at the end on the opinion of one Black scholar, Crystal Fleming, offers an appealing intuitive approach to these decisions about naming. This idea is more hinted at than developed, leaving us to wonder how many other leaders share Fleming's approach and whether this approach might lead to chaos, as each writer might choose a different way to refer to racial identity. (Note: This last sentence offers a gentle critique of the limits of Eligon's evidence on this last point and the existence of possible counterarguments that are not addressed.) Still, Eligon's ending leaves us hopeful about the positive outcome of continuing the discussion: perhaps decisions about naming can help the Black community find self-definition in the face of historical injustice.

We could build on Eligon's analysis to make a further claim about success not just of Black but of other terms that remind us of a shared history of oppression. Despite the ongoing debates, his evidence suggests that the Black community has gravitated more toward reclaiming negative terms rather than inventing neutral ones. (Note: The writer suggests a way to draw a new conclusion using Eligon's evidence.) He notes that historically, W.E.B Dubois's push to embrace Negro and transform it into a positive was successful and that the Black Power movement did the same with black. It is true that the term African American has been partially successful, but clearly its relevance is waning: Eligon scarcely considers it necessary to mention this term further as he turns to the discussion of black vs. Black. The Black Lives Matter movement chose Black rather than African American, and this choice continued to feel appropriate when the movement grew dramatically after the killing of George Floyd. (Note: The writer points to ideas that were implied but not emphasized by Eligon.)

Why has the Black community continued to gravitate toward previously negative terms? Perhaps in this time of racial reckoning, in the face of active ongoing injustice, a label that points to the history of oppression is more empowering. It expresses defiance and determination. If so, perhaps it would make sense for *The New York Times* to adopt Black. Eligon does not take a side on this issue, perhaps because he is not writing an opinion piece, but it is a short distance from his piece to a piece advocating that the *Times* follow the lead of the Associated Press and the majority of Black leaders of the moment. (Note: Here, the response claims that a particular stance on a controversial issue follows from Eligon's argument.) Howard Zinn, radical author of *A People's History of the United States,* writes, “The memory of oppressed people is one thing that cannot be taken away, and for such people, with such memories, revolt is always an inch below the surface.” Reclaiming an oppressor's name for a people keeps this memory, and this potential for revolt, alive. Ideally, each time we use such a reclaimed term, we remember that inequity still permeates our society, and we recommit ourselves to fighting its many forms. (Note: The essay suggests a way in which this discussion of terms for an oppressed community can inspire us to fight oppression more broadly.)

Eligon focuses only on the Black community in America, but it would be interesting to learn more about the appeal of reclaiming negative terms by looking at trends among other marginalized groups. (Note: This passage adds to the conversation by suggesting parallels to groups beyond the Black community.) Which ones have chosen to embrace once-hateful terms, and which have chosen new, more accurate, more inclusive names? Does reclaiming negative terms become more common when oppression is more active? One obvious example lies in the reclaiming of the term "queer." Despite ongoing marginalization of queer people, the reclaimed term never gained dominance. "LGBTQ" and variations are used more commonly, despite their awkwardness. Another parallel lies in the debate over the use of Indian vs. Native American vs. indigenous. The term "cholo," too, was initially a slur referring to persons of mixed Amerindian ancestry in Bolivia and Peru, but is now used by some as a badge of indigenous pride and power. (It has various other meanings in Mexico, the United States, and in other Latin American countries.) Future discussions could analyze the historical trends in terminology and their relation to changing power relations for each of these groups. Perhaps comparing these histories could shed new light on the complex role of names in the struggle for social justice.

Works Cited

(Note: Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class)

Eligon, John. “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black’?” The New York Times, 26 Jun 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/u...merican-style-debate.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage

Attributions

This sample essay and its annotations were written by Saramanda Swigart and edited by Anna Mills. Licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

This page titled 14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity" is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

- 5.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

Interactive Content

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this Interactive Content online

This page titled 14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anna Mills.

15: STYLE

15.1: Style Chapter Overview
15.2: Simplicity
15.3: Point of View
15.4: Word Choice
15.5: Sentence Crafting
15.6: Sentence Combining
15.7: Parallelism
15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

This page titled 15: Style is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14: Style by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.1: Style Chapter Overview

Simplicity: Simplicity does not mean writing simple sentences. A series of short simple sentences can sound too simple and unsophisticated in academic writing. Simplicity in writing is trimming the fat which is eliminating the wordiness and saying what you want to say clearly and directly. A reader cannot be convinced of your point if they get lost in the sentences.

Point of View: Point of view refers to the position from which a writer "speaks" to their audience. Writers must be careful and maintain a consistent point of view. Academic writing should primarily rely on third person point of view to appear objective with minimal instances of first person point of view.

Word Choice: You want to choose the best, most effective words to form clear and convincing sentences. So what makes the best word choices? When writing academic essays, you want to use concrete and specific words that directly engage the senses and give precise meaning. Concrete words refer to objects that we can hear, see, feel, touch, and/or smell.

Sentence Crafting: You want to consciously create clear and focused sentences by using energetic verbs (replace the bland verb "to be" when you can), preferring the active voice (rather than passive voice), and choosing clear noun references (don't use vague pronouns that don't have a clear referent).

Sentence Combining: Trying to achieve simplicity in your writing does not mean writing only in short sentences. If your essays are filled with short sentences, they will read as choppy and the relationships between the sentences will not be as clear. Combining or joining sentences can convey your ideas more fluidly and logically. However, you also want rhythm in your writing which can be created through varied sentence length and structure. Include short sentences for impact.

Parallelism: Parallelism is giving two or more parts of a sentence a similar form so as to give the passage a definite pattern and to give the ideas the same level of importance and a balance.

Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words: As English teachers who read a lot of essays, we see some words that are regularly used incorrectly, and we see some words that are commonly misspelled. Consult the lists provided to avoid common errors.

This page titled 15.1: Style Chapter Overview is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.1: Style Chapter Overview by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.2: Simplicity

WHAT IS SIMPLICITY IN WRITING?

“If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself.” — Albert Einstein

“It is not a daily increase, but a daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials.” — Bruce Lee

William Zinsser, an expert on writing and author of *On Writing Well,* said: “The sentence is too simple—there must be something wrong with it. But the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that’s already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are a thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence.”

Simplicity does not mean writing simple sentences. A series of short simple sentences (He went to the store. The store was far. The day was hot. He was tired.) can sound too simple and unsophisticated in academic writing. You want complexity in your sentences, but that does not mean cramming in smart-sounding words and making long rambling sentences.

Simplicity in writing is trimming the fat which is eliminating the wordiness and saying what you want to say clearly and directly. A reader cannot be convinced of your point if they get lost in the sentences.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Simplicity in writing is beneficial because...

1. When you say things with a lot of extra words in them or make sentences long because you think that’s what teachers want, then the sentences are not always as easy to follow and can confuse your reader.
2. Sentences that are clear and easy to follow are then easier for your reader to follow and eventually be convinced by the points that you are trying to make.
3. The more that writers can strip down their sentences to the most important parts, they can better control what they want to say and shape the meaning in the writing they are striving to convey.

Let’s try that again.

Simplicity in writing is beneficial because...

1. direct sentences are clearer.
2. direct sentences are more convincing.
3. writers can better control and shape meaning.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Take notice of common expressions that are needlessly wordy and trim them:

Trimming Wordiness

there is no doubt but that	no doubt (doubtless)
he is a man who	he
in a hasty manner	hastily
this is a subject which	this subject
owing to the fact that	since (because)

there is no doubt but that	no doubt (doubtless)
in spite of the fact that	though (although)
call your attention to the fact that	remind you (alert you)

A common violation of conciseness is the presentation of a single complex idea, step by step, in a series of sentences which might better be combined into one:

Example

Macbeth was very ambitious. This led him to wish to become king of Scotland. The witches told him that this wish of his would come true. The king of Scotland at this time was Duncan. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth murdered Duncan. He was thus enabled to succeed Duncan as king. (55 words)	**Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth achieved his ambition and realized the prediction of the witches by murdering Duncan and becoming king of Scotland in his place. (26 words)**

The active voice is more concise and vigorous than the passive:

Passive:

Example

The large chunks of debris covering the roof and clogging the drainpipes were removed by city workers.

Active:

Example

City workers removed the large chucks of debris covering the roof and clogging the drainpipes.

The active voice can also strengthen bland expressions and wordy phrasing:

Passive to Active Voice

There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground.	Dead leaves covered the ground.
The reason that he left college was that his health became impaired.	Failing health compelled him to leave college.
It was not long before he was very sorry that he had said what he had.	He soon repented his words.

Practice: Simplicity

Revise the following passages, avoiding wordiness and undesirable repetition.

A large number of people enjoy reading murder mysteries regularly. As a rule, these people are not themselves murderers, nor would these people really ever enjoy seeing someone commit an actual murder, nor would most of them actually enjoy trying to solve an actual murder. They probably enjoy reading murder mysteries because of this reason: they have found a way to escape from the monotonous, boring routine of dull everyday existence.

To such people the murder mystery is realistic fantasy. It is realistic because the people in the murder mystery are as a general rule believable as people. They are not just made up pasteboard figures. It is also realistic because the character who is the hero, the character who solves the murder mystery, solves it not usually by trial and error and haphazard methods but by exercising a high degree of logic and reason. It is absolutely and totally essential that people who enjoy murder mysteries have an admiration for the human faculty of logic.

> But murder mysteries are also fantasies. The people who read such books of fiction play a game. It is a game in which they suspend certain human emotions. One of these human emotions that they suspend is pity. If the reader stops to feel pity and sympathy for each and every victim that is killed or if the reader stops to feel terrible horror that such a thing could happen in our world of today, that person will never enjoy reading murder mysteries. The devoted reader of murder mysteries keeps uppermost in mind at all times the goal of arriving through logic and observation at the final solution to the mystery offered in the book. It is a game with life and death. Whodunits hopefully help the reader to hide from the hideous horrors of actual life and death in the real world.
>
> *Answer available at the end of this section.*

Answers

Practice: Simplicity

ELIMINATING WORDINESS:

A large number of people enjoy reading murder mysteries regularly. As a rule, these people are not themselves murderers, nor would these people really ever enjoy seeing someone commit an actual murder, nor would most of them actually enjoy trying to solve an actual murder. They probably enjoy reading murder mysteries because of this reason: they have found a way to escape from the monotonous, boring routine of dull everyday existence.

Many people who do not desire to commit, see, or solve a murder still like to read murder mysteries to escape the monotony of everyday life.

To such people the murder mystery is realistic fantasy. It is realistic because the people in the murder mystery are as a general rule believable as people. They are not just made up pasteboard figures. It is also realistic because the character who is the hero, the character who solves the murder mystery, solves it not usually by trial and error and haphazard methods but by exercising a high degree of logic and reason. It is absolutely and totally essential that people who enjoy murder mysteries have an admiration for the human faculty of logic.

Murder mysteries are realistic fantasies because the characters are not pasteboard figures but believable, and the hero solves the mystery not haphazardly but with logic and reason. Murder mystery fans must admire logic.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. The people who read such books of fiction play a game. It is a game in which they suspend certain human emotions. One of these human emotions that they suspend is pity. If the reader stops to feel pity and sympathy for each and every victim that is killed or if the reader stops to feel terrible horror that such a thing could happen in our world of today, that person will never enjoy reading murder mysteries. The devoted reader of murder mysteries keeps uppermost in mind at all times the goal of arriving through logic and observation at the final solution to the mystery offered in the book. It is a game with life and death. Whodunits hopefully help the reader to hide from the hideous horrors of actual life and death in the real world.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. To enjoy the mystery, readers must suspend pity and play a game and not stop to feel sympathy for every victim or horror for every crime. Devoted readers focus on logic and observation to solve the game of life and death. Whodunits hide from hideous, real life horrors.

This page titled 15.2: Simplicity is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.2: Simplicity by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.3: Point of View

WHAT IS POINT OF VIEW?

Point of view refers to the position from which writers "speak" to their audience. Writers have a point of view in all types of writing (and speaking), including emails, text messages, essays, articles, stories, etc.

Writers have three different options for point of view:

- **First person point of view** makes direct references to the writer using the following pronouns: I, me, my, myself, mine, we, us, our, and ourselves.
- **Second person point of view** makes direct references to the reader using the following pronouns: you, your, yourself, and yourselves.
- **Third person point of view** directly states who or what the writing discusses without using first person pronouns; third person point of view uses the following pronouns: he, she, it, they, him, her, his, hers, its, itself, them, their, themselves, one, etc.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Although creative writing gives writers more flexibility with the point of view, **academic essays typically use third person point of view** (with minimal uses of first person point of view) because third person enhances credibility by appearing objective and also emphasizes the topic instead of the writer.

Here's a guide for when you use which point of view and why:

- **First person point of view** allows writers to write about themselves when including specific personal examples ("The author's criticisms are accurate which I know from having also served in the army as a young woman"). In some projects, first person point of view can be used to show how a writer's research or ideas build on or depart from the work of others.
- **Second person point of view** allows the writer to speak directly to the reader so is helpful in "how to" instruction (like in this Rhetoric); however, this is not commonly used in academic writing because it can include your readers in beliefs they may not share ("When you listen to the president, you wonder how he got elected."). Using "you" can also be imprecise ("You can drive around for hours looking for parking." This is not true for all. This is more precise: "San Franciscans can drive around for hours looking for parking."). Using "you" is also more informal and conversational. For these reasons second person is not commonly used in academic writing.
- **Third person point of view** allows the writer to appear objective and should be the primary point of view for academic essays and other formal types of communication.

HOW DO I USE IT?

As you write your essays, you will need to carefully consider how you use point of view so that your writing has a consistent voice throughout the essay. Let's look at some basics on using point of view.

1. **Consistent Point of View—**Writers must be careful and maintain a consistent point of view; as noted above, academic writing should primarily rely on third person point of view with minimal instances of first person point of view. When writers switch the point of view within a sentence, the sentences may be confusing.

    - **ORIGINAL:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since he will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.
    - **REVISED:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since *they* will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.

Another consideration for a consistent point of view relates to using plural nouns and pronouns instead of the singular forms; this approach helps writers be more concise and avoid the unnecessary use of "he/she" and "him/her." While "he/she" and "him/her"

may be grammatically correct, you can achieve a stronger voice and better style by minimizing the use of these phrases.

- **ORIGINAL:** A student should make sure he/she signs up early for the workshops he/she wants to attend for his/her classes.
- **REVISED:** Students should make sure *they* sign up early for the workshops *they* want to attend for *their* classes.

2. **Personal examples**—When you include personal examples or experiences to illustrate a point in an academic essay, you should not refer to yourself in the third person. On the contrary, you should definitely use first person point of view to avoid accidental changes in point of view as well as to avoid awkward references to yourself.

   - **ORIGINAL:** Last year, Rachel Everett attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop. (NOTE: the writer, Rachel Everett, first refers to herself in the third person and switches to first person in the second half of the sentence)
   - **REVISED:** Last year, I attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop.

3. **Unnecessary use of first person—**When writing academic essays, you will often need to make an argument, which requires you to state your opinion on the topic and sources. You do not need to use phrases like "I think/feel/believe" or "in my opinion." If you have written a grammatically correct sentence, you will be able to simply delete these phrases (and *still* state your opinion).

   - **ORIGINAL:** I think Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because to me many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.
   - **REVISED:** Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.

Practice: Point of View

Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.

1. A student should seek help from counselors to make sure they have student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while it also helps them improve their writing.
3. A new student must work hard to learn about the college resources he or she may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If you want more active participation in class, teachers will appeal to different learning styles.

Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so I think local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. In my opinion, California should provide more funding to community college students because I believe education should be a top priority for the government.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice: Point of View

Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.

1. A Student should seek help from counselors to make sure ***he or she has*** student educational plans. OR LESS WORDY: Students should seek help from counselors to make sure ***they have*** student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while ***they*** also ***help students*** improve their writing.
3. ***New students*** must work hard to learn about the college resources ***they*** may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If ***teachers want*** more active participation in class, ***they*** will appeal to different learning styles.

Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so ~~**I think**~~ local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. ~~**In my opinion,**~~ California should provide more funding to community college students because ~~**I believe**~~ education should be a top priority for the government.

This page titled 15.3: Point of View is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.3: Point of View by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.4: Word Choice

WHAT IS WORD CHOICE?

Of course, it is what it sounds like: choosing the best, most effective words to form clear and convincing sentences. So what makes the best word choices? When writing academic essays, you want to use concrete words that directly engage the senses and give precise meaning. Here are some definitions of different types of words to consider:

- **Abstract words** refer to ideas or concepts rather than physical objects. For example, words like *love* and *hate* represent concepts with no physical referent.
- **Concrete words** refer to objects that we can hear, see, feel, touch, and/or smell; for instance, *tattoo* relates to something we can see and touch while you cannot touch, smell, or taste *justice*, an abstract term.
- **General words** refer to large classes of objects; for example, "jobs" and "video games" relate to general types of objects.
- **Specific words** refer to specific objects; for example, "high school teacher" and "*Call of Duty*" relate to specific jobs and video games.
- **Clichés** refer to overused word phrases and statements like, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

WHY IS WORD CHOICE IMPORTANT?

As you work on your academic essays, you want to create sentences that express clear, precise ideas to your readers. You want to be mindful about overusing abstract terms because your writing will lose clarity. In conveying the importance of favoring concrete terms in writing, French poet Alain de Lille once said, "Your sentences should be full of stones, metals, chairs, tables, animals, men, and women."

Although abstract ideas have an important place in many academic essays, you will need to use concrete and specific language to clearly and effectively communicate your meaning to your readers. This also means that you should avoid using clichés because they do not show original thoughts and lack specific meaning.

HOW DO I APPLY IT?

As you revise your academic essays (and other types of communications), you will need to revise your sentences for concrete and specific language. Let's look at a few examples:

1. **Abstract vs. concrete**—To give your reader a clear understanding of your meaning, you will often need to replace abstract terms with more concrete terms.

    - **ORIGINAL:** To develop a strong academic essay, you will need to work hard.
    - **REVISED:** To develop a strong academic essay, you will need to spend time prewriting, organizing your ideas, writing an outline, and completing multiple drafts.

2. **General vs. specific**—Good academic essays will use specific language for more precise and clearer sentences.

    - **ORIGINAL:** The student found the class fascinating. (NOTE: the reader might need more information here; why does he find the class fascinating?)
    - **REVISED:** Jimmy found Professor Lachmayr's class fascinating because it focused on race and gender.

3. **Clichés**—In everyday speech, we might use clichés, but academic writing requires more thoughtful ideas and originality. Thus, you should not use clichés in your writing; instead, think of more original and specific ways of stating your idea.

    - **ORIGINAL:** Because Jimmy submitted his essay late, he had to "pay the piper." (NOTE: The cliché "pay the piper" needs to be replaced to indicate exactly what this means in reference to the late essay.)
    - **REVISED:** Because Jimmy submitted his essay late, he lost ten points and had to meet with Professor Williams.

Practice: Word Choice

Revise the following sentences to replace abstract language with more concrete language and details.

1. I wrote a great research paper.

2. College students have a lot of freedom.

Revise the following sentences to replace general language for more specific language and sentences.

3. The book was very interesting.

4. Skyline College has a lot of great resources.

Revise the following sentences to replace the cliché in bold with more original and precise language.

5. John **let the cat out of the bag** when he told my parents which college I chose to attend.

6. Traveling to different parts of the world has taught me to **not judge a book by its cover**.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice: Word Choice

1. I wrote a great research paper. **REVISED:** My research paper did an excellent job of incorporating evidence from both sides of the issue while also providing a clear, consistent argument.
2. College students have a lot of freedom. **REVISED:** College students have a lot of scheduling freedom as they can take classes during the daytime, evenings, and even online.
3. The book was very interesting. **REVISED:** *Drive* gave me a better understanding of how constant praise can negatively affect motivation.
4. Skyline College has a lot of great resources. **REVISED:** Skyline College offers health services, psychological counseling, academic counseling, tutoring, and career counseling.
5. John **let the cat out of the bag** when he told my parents which college I chose to attend. **REVISED:** John ***accidentally revealed my secret*** when he told my parents which college I chose to attend.
6. Traveling to different parts of the world has taught me to not **judge a book by its cover**. **REVISED:** Traveling to different parts of the world has taught me to ***take the time to understand cultural differences and not make quick and inaccurate judgments.***

This page titled 15.4: Word Choice is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.4: Word Choice by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.5: Sentence Crafting

WHAT IS SENTENCE CRAFTING?

Sentence craft is consciously creating clear and focused sentences. Good writers work hard to edit their compositions on the sentence level. As you review each sentence of the essay, you will need to consider your reader to make sure you craft sentences (and paragraphs) that effectively express your meaning.

As with any skill, crafting clear sentences that effectively communicate your meaning requires a lot of practice, but with that practice you will become more adept and efficient at editing your sentences for clarity, focus, and style. Even the greatest writers continually review their sentences to ensure they clearly express their ideas to the reader.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Good writers know they must put in the time to make sure their reader clearly understands their writing, from a text message to an email to a college essay. Think of the times when you have said something that someone misinterpreted. If this happened in a conversation, you had the chance to explain yourself to make sure your "audience" understood your meaning.

However, when you write, your reader does not have the chance to ask you questions to clarify your meaning. Therefore, you must work hard to edit your sentences to accurately deliver your message to the reader the first time.

HOW DO I DO IT?

In this section, you will learn some techniques to help you craft clear, focused sentences.

1. **"to be" verb + verb ending in –ing—**When you find a sentence using this construction, drop the "to be" verb and make the verb ending in –ing the main verb of the sentence.

    - **ORIGINAL:** This book **is showing** the reader how hip hop can affect listeners.
    - **REVISED:** This book **shows** the reader how hip hop can affect listeners.

2. **There + "to be" verb—**When you find sentences that begin with "There is/are/was/were," delete "there" and the "to be" verb and find the *real* subject of the sentence and think of an active verb to accurately describe the subject's specific action.

    - **ORIGINAL: There are** many hip hop artists rapping about drugs, sex, and violence.
    - **REVISED:** Many hip hop artists rap about drugs, sex, and violence.
    - **ORIGINAL: There is** a difference between mainstream and underground hip hop.
    - **REVISED:** Some key differences distinguish mainstream and underground hip hop.

3. **Passive voice ("to be" verb + past participle)—**Sentences in passive voice start with the object of the action rather than the subject (or actor); instead of beginning the sentences with the object of the action, you should begin the sentence with the subject (actor) directly followed by the action. To accomplish this, you will need to identify the "who" or "what" that performs the action in the sentence and make the actor the subject of the sentence; drop the "to be" verb and replace it with a more active verb.

    - **ORIGINAL:** The audience is influenced negatively by the violence in hip hop lyrics.
    - **REVISED:** Violent hip hop lyrics negatively affect the audience.

4. **"to be" as the main verb—**Since good writing includes specific actions performed by specific actors, you will want to make sure you use active verbs instead of "to be." If you use "to be" as the main verb of the sentence, you will need to revise the sentence by focusing on the specific action you describe. For example, look for other words in the sentence (i.e. nouns) based off verbs and use the verb form.

    - **ORIGINAL:** Talib Kweli's lyrics are both socially conscious and clever.

- **REVISED:** Talib Kweli creates both socially conscious and clever lyrics.

5. **Noun forms of verbs + "to be"—**Often writers end up with "to be" in their sentences when they rely on noun forms of verbs. Rather than using the noun form of the verb, you should use the verb form to show the action in the sentence.

   - **ORIGINAL:** The specialization of magazines in hip-hop is something that started in the 1980s.
   - **REVISED:** Magazines first specialized in hip-hop in the 1980s.

   - **ORIGINAL:** Bakari Kitwana is the organizer of "Rap Sessions: Community Dialogues on Hip-Hop," which supports political activism on college campuses throughout the United States.
   - **REVISED:** Bakari Kitwana organizes "Rap Sessions: Community Dialogues on Hip-Hop," which supports political activism on college campuses throughout the United States.

6. **Unclear pronoun references—**When you use pronouns to refer to other nouns in your sentences and paragraphs, you must make sure the reader can easily identify to whom or what the pronoun refers. You can accomplish this by simply using the specific noun rather than the pronoun.

   - **ORIGINAL:** Skyline College holds a hip hop and education conference every year and has a new hip-hop learning community. This gives middle school and high school students an introduction to the College.
   - **REVISED:** Skyline College holds a hip hop and education conference every year and has a new hip-hop learning community. The conference gives middle school and high school students an introduction to the College.

Practice: Sentence Crafting

Revise the following sentences to replace the "to be" verb with an active verb.

1. I am studying nursing at University of San Francisco.
2. The psychology class is interesting to me because it focuses on how war affects soldiers.

Revise the following sentences to remove the "there + to be."

3. There are many Skyline College students who want to transfer to a four-year university.
4. There is a major advantage to starting your college career at a community college.

Revise the following sentences to use active voice.

5. The application was sent yesterday by my sister.
6. The increase in college attendance was partially caused by a poor economy.

Revise the following sentences to use an active verb for the main verb of the sentence.

7. John is responsible for maintaining a 3.0 GPA so that he can transfer next Fall.
8. Counseling 100 is helpful for first-generation college students.

Revise the following sentences to use make the noun-form of the verb the main verb of the sentence.

9. Professor Smith is the teacher for my calculus class.
10. The student government president was a presenter at the awards banquet.

Revise the following sentences for clear pronoun references.

11. The book and movie told the same story, but it gives readers more insight into the characters' thoughts.
12. Though John and Mark both had full-time schedules last semester, he took this semester off to work.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice: Sentence Crafting

Revise the following sentences to replace the "to be" verb with an active verb.

1. I ***study*** nursing at University of San Francisco.
2. The psychology class ***interests me*** because it focuses on how war affects soldiers.

Revise the following sentences to remove the "there + to be."

3. Many Skyline College students want to transfer to a four-year university.
4. There is a major advantage to starting your college career at a community college.

Revise the following sentences to use active voice.

5. My sister sent the application yesterday.
6. The poor economy partially caused the increase in college attendance.

Revise the following sentences to use an active verb for the main verb of the sentence.

7. John **must maintain** a 3.0 GPA so that he can transfer next Fall.
8. Counseling 100 **helps** first-generation college students begin their college career.

Revise the following sentences to use make the noun-form of the verb the main verb of the sentence.

9. Professor Smith **teaches** my calculus class.
10. The student government president **presented** at the awards banquet.

Revise the following sentences for clear pronoun references.

11. The book and movie told the same story, but ***the book*** gives readers more insight into the characters' thoughts.
12. Though John and Mark both had full-time schedules last semester, ***John*** took this semester off to work.

This page titled 15.5: Sentence Crafting is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.5: Sentence Crafting by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.6: Sentence Combining

WHAT IS SENTENCE COMBINING?

Trying to achieve simplicity in your writing does not mean writing only in short sentences. If your essays are filled with short sentences, they will read as choppy and the relationships between the sentences will not be as clear. Combining or joining sentences can convey your ideas more fluidly and logically. However, you also want rhythm in your writing which can be created through varied sentence length and structure. Include short sentences for impact.

Connections: In the Grammar chapter, see also “Appositives,” “Coordinators,” and “Subordinators.”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Sentence combining helps you to...

- avoid the monotony of sentences that are brief and of equal length.
- draw attention to the ideas in the paper not to the repetitive and simple sentence structure.
- create rhythm through varied sentence length and structure.
- show the reader the relationships that exist among ideas of different importance.
- experiment with different methods of putting words together. Because there are countless ways to build sentences, the goal is not to find the one "correct" combination but to consider different arrangements to find the most effective.

HOW DO I DO IT?

There are 3 main methods used to combine sentences

I. **Coordinate** sentences when you want to equally emphasize the sentences
II. **Subordinate** sentences when you want to emphasize one sentence over another.
II. **Embed** words, phrases and/or sentences to integrate ideas within sentences.

First, to understand how to combine sentences, we must have an understanding of the basic components of a sentence.

A **basic or simple sentence** contains a *subject* and a **verb** and can stand alone.

Examples: *Fish* **swim**. *Dogs* **bark**. *People* **talk**, **laugh**, and **sing**.

Practice

In the following sentences, mark the subject (the doer of the action) and the verb (the action):

a. Schools educate.

b. Better funding should be given to schools.

c. Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors.

Answer available at the end of this section.

To combine basic or simple sentences, there are 3 main methods used

I. **Coordinate** sentences when you want to equally emphasize the sentences.

Coordination means to CONNECT two or more sentences. You join sentences through coordination when you want to give equal emphasis to each sentence.

Two ways to coordinate sentences:

1. Join sentences using a comma and conjunction (**F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o)

   Example: I like reading poetry**, but** I don't always understand it.

2. Combine related sentences using a semi-colon à **;**

   Example: I like reading poetry**;** I don't always understand it.

Practice: Coordinating Sentences

Coordinate the following sentences by using one of the above methods.

d. Schools educate. Better funding should be given to schools.

e. Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors. Increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

f. Better prepared students produce smarter citizens. More educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society.

Answer available at the end of this section.

II. **Subordinate** sentences when you want to emphasize one sentence over another.

First, to subordinate you have to know some subordinators:

.

Subordinators	
Contrast/Concession	although, while, even though, even if, whereas, though
Cause	because, since
Effect/Result	so that, in that, in order that
Condition	if, unless, provided that
Time	after, before, as soon as, since, when, while, until, as

Subordination means to CONNECT one or more sentences with a subordinator. You join sentences through subordination when you want to give emphasis to one sentence over another. The sentence that begins with a subordinator receives LESS emphasis.

Two ways to subordinate sentences:

1. Join two sentences using a subordinator.

   Example: Jenson spent a year traveling the world **because** he got fired from his job

2. Begin the sentence with a subordinator, which gives less emphasis to the beginning subordinated sentence.

   Example: **Because** Jenson got fired from his job, he spent a year traveling the world.

Punctuation Note:

When a subordinator introduces a sentence, put a comma after the first clause.

Example: *After* she went to bed**,** she started to hear noises downstairs.

But if the subordinator comes in the middle of a clause, you don't need to set it off with a comma.

Example: She started to hear noises downstairs *after* she went to bed.

Practice: Subordinating Sentences

Subordinate *the following sentences by using one of the above methods.*

g. Schools educate. Better funding should be given to schools.

h. Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors. Increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

i. We are going to have a better educated populace. State funding priorities are adjusted to provide larger budgets for school.

Answer available at the end of this section.

II. **Embed** words, phrases and/or sentences to integrate ideas within sentences.

First, to embed sentences, you want to be familiar with some words that are commonly used to embed sentences. Words such as:

who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where

Example: She had a goat. She loved it very much.
Embedded: She had a goat **that she loved very much**.

Example: His favorite girlfriend had just received an anonymous phone call. She was coming over later that evening.

Embedded: His favorite girlfriend, **who was coming over later that evening**, had just received an anonymous phone call.

Ways to embed sentences:

1. When the subject of the sentence is repeated in more than one sentence, look to embed.

   Example: Audrey loves traveling. Audrey was leaving for China in May. She works with me.
   Embedded: Audrey, a woman I work with who loves traveling, was leaving for China.

2. For whole sentences used to give little pieces of information, look to embed.

   Example: I wanted to give Craig money to buy me tickets. Craig is my sister's boyfriend.
   Embedded: I wanted to give Craig, my sister's boyfriend, money to buy me tickets.

Practice: Embedding Sentences

Combine each grouping of sentences into one sentence using embedding.

j. Pancho came to the party. He is Jose's cousin. He graduated from Stanford. He was top in his class.

k. The clown was juggling for twelve hours in the circus tent. The clown was exhausted. The circus tent was crowded. He was juggling next to the live animals acts. The animals smelled badly.

l. After 10 years, Suzanne achieved her goal. Her goal was to get a PhD from Berkeley. Her PhD was in English Literature. Her degree had an emphasis in French literature. The 10 years were grueling. Suzanne is my neighbor.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Practice: Sentence Combining

Apply the different sentence combining techniques you have learned to make this paragraph more fluid.

Paragraph 1:
The Boston Red Sox were three games down. The Red Sox had to win the next four games to advance. Fans were worried. Boston had not won a World Series since 1918. No team had ever come back in the playoffs from a three-game deficit. All of the fans knew this. Red Sox fans watched anxiously as the fourth game of the ALCS began. Yankees fans watched confidently. They also knew that anything could happen. People wanted to watch a good series. They did not expect it to be such a nail-biter! David Roberts stole second base. This move would be remembered as the turning point of the series. Nobody believed the Red Sox would win that year. The Red Sox won that year. The Yankees would not win the World Series for another five years. In 2009, the Yankees won the World Series.

Now let's try **de-combining** sentences so we can appreciate the conciseness of well combined sentences and how it is easier to see the relationship among ideas when they are joined. Break this sentence down into its root sentences:

Paragraph 2:
Here's a thesis from an essay written on Malcolm X's "Learning to Read":

The characteristics that he shows of not giving up even in the face of overwhelming odds and applying good old-fashioned, and often tedious and repetitive, hard work and persistence have become frighteningly rare in the U.S. today where people have bloated senses of entitlement.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

In the following sentences, the subject (the doer of the action) is *italicized*, and the verb (the action) is in **bold**.

a. *Schools* **educate**.
b. *Better funding* **should be given** to schools.
c. *Students* **learn** best in environments with quality materials and instructors.

Practice: Coordinating Sentences

COORDINATING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

d. Schools educate**, so** better funding should be given to schools.

OR Schools educate**; therefore** better funding should be given to schools.

e. Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors**, but** increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

OR Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors**; however** increased funding to is difficult for schools to secure.

f. Better prepared students produce smarter citizens**, and** more educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society. OR Better prepared students produce smarter citizens**;** more educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society.

Practice: Subordinating Sentences

SUBORDINATING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

g. **Because** schools educate**,** better funding should be given to schools.

h. **Although** students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors**,** increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

i. We are going to have a better educated populace **when** state funding priorities are adjusted to provide larger budgets for school.

Practice: Embedding Sentences

EMBEDDING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

Combine each grouping of sentences into one sentence using embedding.

j. Pancho, Jose's cousin who graduated from Stanford top of his class, came to the party.

k. The exhausted clown was juggling for twelve hours in the crowded circus tent next to the live animal acts that smelled badly.

l. After 10 grueling years, my neighbor Suzanne, achieved her goal, which was getting a PhD from Berkeley in English Literature with an emphasis in French literature.

Practice: Sentence Combining

GENERAL SENTENCE COMBINING EXERCISES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

Paragraph 1: Sentence Combining

Three games down, the Boston Red Sox had to win the next four to advance, and fans were worried because they had not won a World Series since 1918. No team had ever come back from a three-game deficit. As the fourth game began, Red Sox fans watched anxiously while Yankee fans watched confidently. Anything could happen, and people wanted a good series, but no one expected such a nail biter! David Roberts stole second base, the series turning point. No one believed the Red Sox would win, but they did. The Yankees would not win the World Series for another 5 years until 2009.

Paragraph 2: Sentence De-Combining (1 sentence into 15 sentences)

The characteristics are rare.
He shows not giving up.
He doesn't give up in the face of overwhelming odds.
He shows applying good hard work.
He shows applying good persistence.
He shows applying old-fashioned hard work.
He show applying old-fashioned persistence.
He shows tedious hard work.
He shows tedious persistence.
He shows repetitive hard work.
He shows repetitive persistence.
They have become frighteningly rare.
Rare in the U.S.
Rare today.
People have bloated senses of entitlement.

This page titled 15.6: Sentence Combining is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.6: Sentence Combining by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.7: Parallelism

WHAT IS PARALLELISM?

Parallelism is giving two or more parts of a sentence a similar form so as to give the passage a definite pattern and to give the ideas the same level of importance and a balance. Here is a visual of what parallelism looks like:

Parallel elements:

Parallel elements

Words	Infinitives	prepositional phrases	Subordinate clauses
singing	to wonder	at the time	when I saw her
dancing	to investigate	under the table	after they called

Non-Parallel elements:

Non-parallel elements

Words	Infinitives	prepositional phrases	Subordinate clauses
to sing	since I wondered	at the time	to see her
dancing	to investigate	being nearby	after they called

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Parallelism helps to...

- improve the fluidity of sentences.
- process meaning more easily.
- emphasize the likeness between two or more ideas.
- create symmetry (balance) in writing
- add force to writing.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Here are some basic parallelism guidelines to apply in your writing:

1. Parallelism is used to balance nouns with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, participles with participles, infinitives with infinitives, clauses with clauses (***in*** the cup, ***on*** the desk).
2. Parallelism is used with elements joined by coordinating conjunctions (especially ***and, but,*** and ***or).***
3. Parallelism is used with elements in lists or in a series (***talked*** on the phone, ***ran*** 5 miles, ***saw*** friends)
4. Parallelism is used with elements being compared (**X** is *more than / better than* **Y**).
5. Parallelism is used with elements joined by a linking verb or a form of be (like ***being***, ***is, were***).
6. Parallelism is used with elements joined by linking words (**either/or, neither/nor, not only/but also).**

Practice

Using the different approaches to creating parallel structure, fix the faulty parallelism in the following sentences.

1. Parallelism is used to balance nouns with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, participles with participles, infinitives with infinitives, clauses with clauses (***in*** the cup, ***on*** the desk).

   Example: We want a candidate who has a **sense of commitment**, a good **record** in public office, and **experience** in foreign affairs.

   To Fix: At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, I work the registers, and assisting customers.

2. Parallelism is used with elements joined by coordinating conjunctions (especially ***and, but,*** and ***or).***

   Example: She likes **to look, but** not **to listen**. He wondered **who he was and what he was** doing.

   To Fix: She is both happy about the raise and she is feeling nervous about the extra responsibility.

3. Parallelism is used with elements in lists or in a series (***talked*** on the phone, ***ran*** 5 miles, ***saw*** friends)

   Example: He found cleaning supplies **in the closet**, **under the sink** but not **in the garage**.

   To Fix: Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness, being resourceful, they are rebellious, and they have a lot of determination.

4. Parallelism is used with elements being compared (**X** is *more than / better than* **Y**).

   Example: **Driving** to New York can actually take less time than **flying** there.

   To Fix: Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than if you heard her on the radio.

5. Parallelism is used with elements joined by a linking verb or a form of be (like ***being***, ***is, were***).

   Example: **Being** Jim's friend means **being** understanding. **To know** her **is to love** her.

   To Fix: The passengers were preparing for departure while the flight attendants are going to try to get all the drinks served.

6. Parallelism is used with elements joined by linking words (**either/or, neither/nor, not only/but also).**

   Example: As young recruits, we were told **not only what to do but also what to think**.

   To Fix: They not only ate all the food in the house but they also didn't clean up the mess.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Practice

Using the different approaches to creating parallel structure, fix the faulty parallelism in the following paragraph:

Many college courses require students to write essays as part of the class curriculum. An academic essay for a college course should contain a thesis, body, and to conclude. It is important for students to perform some type of pre-writing or to cluster before typing is attempted on the computer. Pre-writing will usually help students to find and expand new ideas for the paper. After pre-writing, students should type a rough draft using their previous cluster. Students are always nervous in writing the rough draft and started the paper. It is better for students to write to the end of the rough draft than stopping every few sentences to check the grammar. If students do not expand their rough draft, the essay will not only be short but will be also disorganized. Revising the essay for a strong thesis, organization, and proper supporting is the most important part of the writing process. This is what separates the strong writers from the writers who are weaker. The final step in writing a college paper is editing. This is where students will check the paper for grammatical errors, proper punctuating, and spelling errors. A strong writing process will allow students to write a proper college essay.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

POSSIBLE AnswerS FOR EXERCISES FROM PARALLELISM SECTION

1. At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, **to work** ~~I work~~ the registers, and **to assist** ~~assisting~~ customers.

2. She is both happy about the raise and ~~she is feeling~~ nervous about the extra responsibility.

3. Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness, **resourcefulness** ~~being resourceful~~, **rebelliousness** ~~they are rebellious~~, and ~~they have a lot of~~ determination.

4. Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than **hearing** ~~if you heard~~ her on the radio.

5. The passengers were preparing for departure while the flight attendants **were trying** ~~are going to try~~ to get all the drinks served.

6. They not only ate all the food in the house but ~~they~~ also **left** ~~didn't clean up the~~ a mess.

Practice

Possible revisions to the paragraph:

Many college courses require students to write essays as part of the class curriculum. An academic essay for a college course should contain a thesis, body, and **conclusion** ~~**to conclude**~~. It is important for students to perform some type of pre-writing or **clustering** ~~**to cluster**~~ before **they start typing** ~~**typing is attempted**~~ on the computer. Pre-writing will usually help students **to** find and expand new ideas for the paper. After pre-writing, students should type a rough draft using their previous cluster. Students are always nervous in writing the rough draft and **starting** ~~**started**~~ the paper. It is better for students to write to the end of the rough draft than **to stop** ~~**stopping**~~ every few sentences to check the grammar. If students do not expand their rough draft, the essay will not only be short but ~~**will be**~~ also disorganized. Revising the essay for a strong thesis, organization, and proper **support** ~~**supporting**~~ is the most important part of the writing process. This is what separates the strong writers from **the weak writers** ~~**writers who are weaker**~~. The final step in writing a college paper is editing. This is where students will check the paper for grammatical errors, proper **punctuation** ~~**punctuating**~~, and spelling errors. A strong writing process will allow students to write a proper college essay.

This page titled 15.7: Parallelism is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.7: Parallelism by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

WHAT ARE SOME COMMONLY MISUSED AND MISSPELLED WORDS?

As English teachers who read a lot of essays, we see some words that are regularly used incorrectly, and we see some words that are commonly misspelled. Here are lists to help you avoid these errors.

COMMONLY MISUSED WORDS

accept and **except** - *Accept* means to receive while *except* means to exclude.

affect and **effect** - *Affect* is usually a verb meaning to influence. *Effect* is usually a noun meaning result. *Effect* can also be a verb meaning to bring about.

a lot and **allot**. *A lot* means many; *allot* means to distribute something.

cite, sight and site. A *sight* is something seen; a *site* is a place. To *cite* is to quote or list as a source.

it's and **its**. *It*'s is a contraction that replaces *it is*. *Its* is the possessive determiner corresponding to *it*, meaning "belonging to it."

lose and **loose**. *Lose* can mean "fail to win," "misplace," or "cease to be in possession." *Loose* can mean the opposite of tight, or the opposite of tighten.

of and have. In some dialects of spoken English, *of* and the contracted form of *have*, *'ve*, sound alike. However, in standard written English, they are not interchangeable. Could of, would of, should of is non-standard English. Instead use could *have*, would *have*, should *have*.

past and passed. *Past* refers to events that have previously occurred while *passed* is the past tense of "to pass."

than, then - *Than* is used for comparisons; *then* means it came next.

there, their, they're - *There* refers to the location of something. *Their* means "belonging to them." *They're* is a contraction of "they are."

to, two, too - *Two* is a number, *too* means also, *to* is used with verbs (going to) or as a preposition.

weather, whether - *Weather* is what the meteorologist always predicts wrong; *whether* is used when making a choice.

who's, whose - *Whose* is possessive; *who*'s is short for who is.

who, which, that: Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That*, though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people.

your, you're - *Your* is something that belongs to you; *you're* is a contraction for you are.

COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS

a lot - Two words! We know this is listed under misused words as well but it is misspelled a lot!

accommodate - This word is large enough to accommodate both a double "c" AND a double "m."

argument - Let's not argue about the loss of this verb's silent [e] before the suffix -ment.

committed - If you are committed to correct spelling, you will remember that this word doubles its final [t] from "commit" to "committed."

conscience - Don't let misspelling this word weigh on your conscience.

conscientious - Work on your spelling conscientiously.

conscious - Try to be conscious of all the vowels after the “sc” in this word's ending.

definite(ly) - This word definitely gets confused as having an “a” in the middle but there are e’s on the ends and i’s in the middle.

grammar – If you’re pointing out errors in grammar, then be sure not to end this word in “er.”

independent - Please be independent but not in your spelling of this word. It ends in -ent.

indispensable - Knowing that this word ends on -able is indispensable to good writing.

mischievous - This mischievous word holds two traps: [i] before [e] and [o] before [u]. Four of the five vowels in English reside here.

misspell - What is more embarrassing than to misspell the name of the problem? Just remember that it is mis + spell and that will dispel your worry about spelling "misspell."

noticeable - The [e] is noticeably retained in this word to indicate the [c] is "soft," pronounced like [s]. Without the [e], it would be pronounced "hard," like [k], as in "applicable."

occasionally - Writers occasionally tire of doubling so many consonants and omit one but this word has 2 c’s in the front and 2 l’s in the back.

occurrence - Remember not only the occurrence of double double consonants in this word, but that the suffix is -ence, not -ance. No reason, just the English language keeping us on our toes.

perseverance - All it takes is perseverance and you, too, can be a (near-) perfect speller. The suffix is -ance for no reason at all.

playwright - Since they write plays, they should be "play-writes," right? Wrong. Remember that a play writer in Old English was called a "play worker" and "wright" is from an old form of "work" (wrought iron, etc.)

weird - This word is an exception to the rule about [i] before [e] except after...? So, rules can be broken!

This page titled 15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 14.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

16: CREATING PRESENTATIONS AND SHARING YOUR IDEAS

16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation
16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation
16.3: Giving a Presentation
16.4: Key Takeaways

This page titled 16: Creating Presentations and Sharing Your Ideas is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation

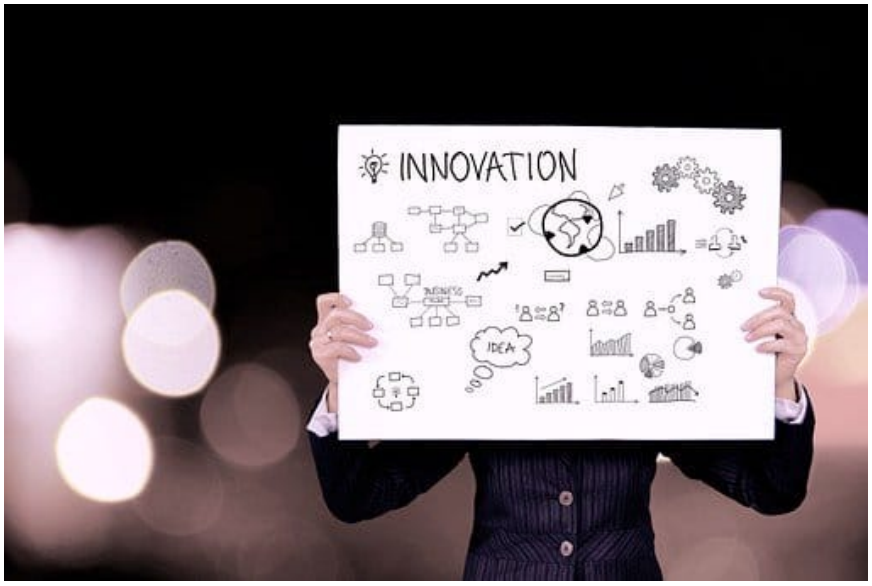


Figure: Image by Pixabay

Until now, you have interacted with your audience of readers indirectly, on the page. You have tried to anticipate their reactions and questions as all good writers do. Anticipating the audience's needs can be tough, especially when you are sitting alone in front of your computer.

When you give a presentation, you connect directly with your audience. For most people, making a presentation is both exciting and stressful. The excitement comes from engaging in a two-way interaction about your ideas. The stress comes from the pressure of presenting your ideas without having a delete button to undo mistakes. Outside the classroom, you may be asked to give a presentation, often at the last minute, and the show must go on. Presentations can be stressful, but planning and preparation, when the time and opportunity are available, can make all the difference.

This chapter covers how to plan and deliver an effective, engaging presentation. By planning carefully, applying some time-honored presentation strategies, and practicing, you can make sure that your presentation comes across as confident, knowledgeable, and interesting—and that your audience actually learns from it. The specific tasks involved in creating a presentation may vary slightly depending on your purpose and your assignment. However, these are the general steps.

1. Determine your purpose and identify the key ideas to present.
2. Organize your ideas in an outline.
3. Identify opportunities to incorporate visual or audio media, and create or locate these media aids.
4. Rehearse your presentation in advance.
5. Deliver your presentation to your audience.

Getting Started: Identifying and Organizing Key Ideas

To deliver a successful presentation, you need to develop content suitable for an effective presentation. Your ideas make up your presentation, but to deliver them effectively, you will need to identify key ideas and organize them carefully. Read the following considerations, which will help you first identify and then organize key ideas:

- **Be concise.** You will include the most important ideas and leave out others. Some concepts may need to be simplified.
- **Employ more than one medium of expression.** You should incorporate other media, such as charts, graphs, photographs, video or audio recordings, or websites.
- **Prepare for a face-to-face presentation.** If you must deliver a face-to-face presentation, it is important to project yourself as a serious and well-informed speaker. You will often speak extemporaneously, or in a rehearsed but not memorized manner, which allows for flexibility given the context or audience. You will need to know your points and keep your audience engaged.

Determine Your Purpose

As with a writing assignment, determining the purpose of your presentation early on is crucial. You want to inform your readers about the topic, but think about what else you hope to achieve.

Are you presenting information intended to move your audience to adopt certain beliefs or take action on a particular issue? If so, you are speaking not only to inform but also to persuade your listeners. Do you want your audience to come away from your presentation knowing how to do something they that they did not know before? In that case, you are not only informing them but also explaining or teaching a process.

Writing at Work

Schoolteachers are trained to structure lessons around one or more lesson objectives. Usually the objective, the mission or purpose, states what students should know or be able to do after they complete the lesson. For example, an objective might state, "Students will understand the specific freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment" or "Students will be able to add two three-digit numbers correctly."

As a manager, mentor, or supervisor, you may sometimes be required to teach or train other employees as part of your job. Determining the desired outcome of a training session will help you plan effectively. Identify your teaching objectives. What, specifically, do you want your audience to know (for instance, details of a new workplace policy) or be able to do (for instance, use a new software program)? Plan your teaching or training session to meet your objectives.

Identify Key Ideas

To plan your presentation, think in terms of three or four key points you want to get across. In a paper, you have the space to develop ideas at length and delve into complex details. In a presentation, however, you must convey your ideas more concisely.

One strategy you might try is to create an outline. What is your main idea? Would your main idea work well as key points for a brief presentation? How would you condense topics that might be too lengthy, or should you eliminate topics that may be too complicated to address in your presentation?

Exercise 1

1. Revisit your writing assignment, or think of a topic for your presentation. On your own sheet of notebook paper, write a list of at least three to five key ideas. Keep the following questions in mind when listing your key ideas:

- What is your purpose?
- Who is your audience?
- How will you engage your audience?

2. On the same paper, identify the steps you must complete before you begin creating your presentation.

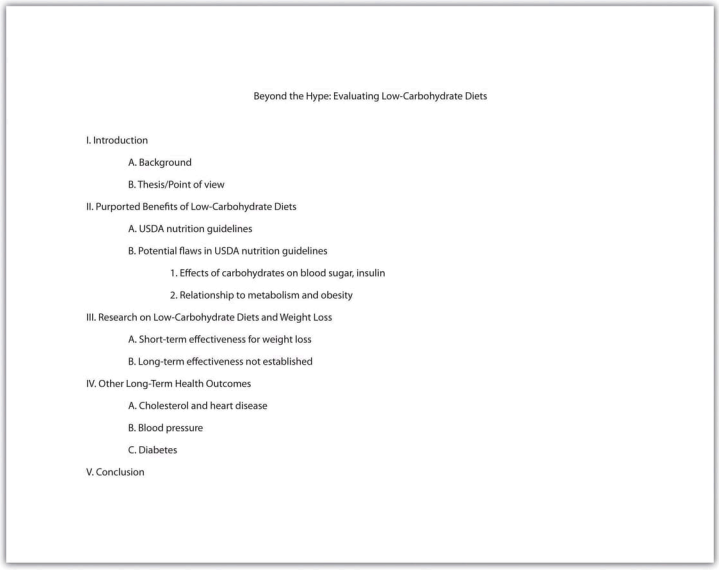
Use an Outline to Organize Ideas

After you determine which ideas are most appropriate for your presentation, you will create an outline of those ideas. Your presentation, like a written assignment, should include an introduction, body, and conclusion. These components serve much the same purpose as they do in a written assignment.

- The introduction engages the audience's attention, introduces the topic, and sets the tone for what is to come.
- The body develops your point of view with supporting ideas, details, and examples presented in a logical order.
- The conclusion restates your point of view, sums up your main points, and leaves your audience with something to think about.

Jorge, who wrote the research paper featured later in this book, developed the following outline. He relied heavily on this outline

to plan his presentation, but he adjusted it to suit the new format.



Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carbohydrate Diets

I. Introduction
- A. Background
- B. Thesis/Point of view

II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets
- A. USDA nutrition guidelines
- B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines
  1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin
  2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity

III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss
- A. Short-term effectiveness for weight loss
- B. Long-term effectiveness not established

IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes
- A. Cholesterol and heart disease
- B. Blood pressure
- C. Diabetes

V. Conclusion

Planning Your Introduction



Figure: Image by Pixabay

In Section 5.4 you learned techniques for writing an interesting introduction, such as beginning with a surprising fact or statistic, a thought-provoking question or quotation, a brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept or connects your topic to your audience's experiences. You can use these techniques effectively in presentations as well. You might also consider actively engaging your audience by having members respond to questions or complete a brief activity related to your topic. For example, you may have your audience respond to a survey or tell about an experience related to your topic.

Incorporating media can also be an effective way to get your audience's attention. Visual images such as a photograph or a cartoon can invoke an immediate emotional response. A graph or chart can highlight startling findings in research data or statistical information. Brief video or audio clips that clearly reinforce your message and do not distract or overwhelm your audience can provide a sense of immediacy when you plan to discuss an event or a current issue. A PowerPoint presentation allows you to integrate many of these different media sources into one presentation. Google Slides is also allows you to do this, but you cannot incorporate audio voiceover.

Tip

With the accessibility provided by the Internet, you can find interesting and appropriate audio and video with little difficulty. However, the clip alone will not sustain the presentation. To keep the audience interested and engaged, you must frame the beginning and end of the clip with your own words.

Jorge completed the introduction part of his outline by listing the key points he would use to open his presentation. He also planned to show various web links early on to illustrate the popularity of the low-carbohydrate diet trend.

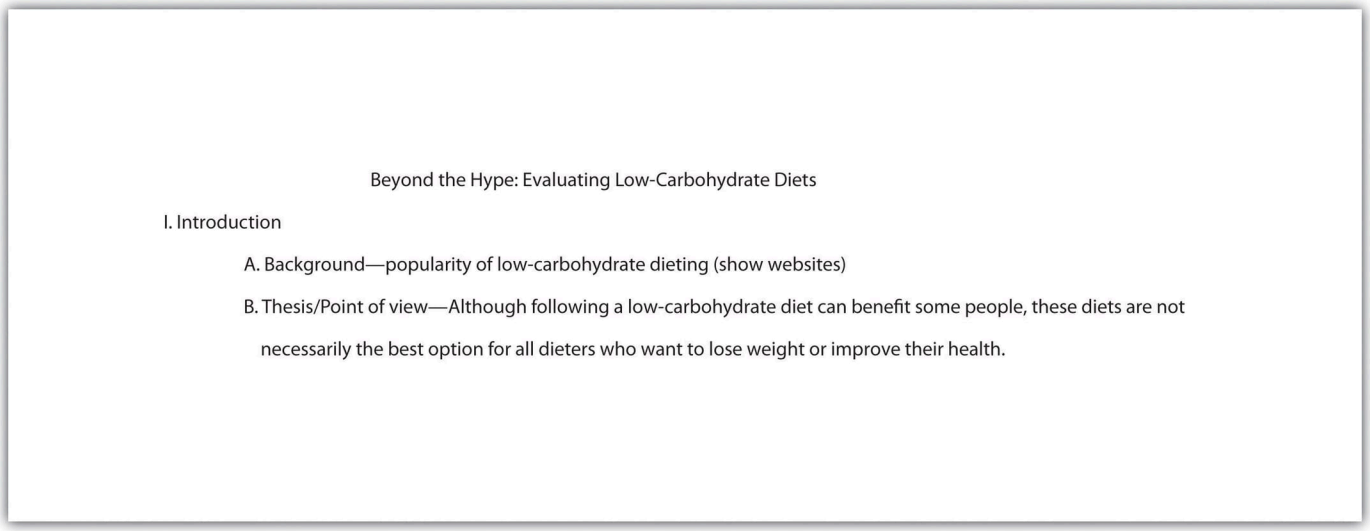


Figure: from @api.

Planning the Body of Your Presentation

The next step is to work with the key ideas you identified earlier. Determine the order in which you want to present these ideas, and flesh them out with important details. Chapter 9, "Argumentation: Purpose and Persuasion in Writing" discusses several organizational structures you might work with, such as chronological order, comparison-and-contrast structure, or cause-and-effect structure.

How much detail you include will depend on the time allotted for your presentation. Your instructor will most likely give you a specific time limit or a specific slide limit, such as eight to ten slides. If the time limit is very brief (two to three minutes, for instance), you will need to focus on communicating your point of view, main supporting points, and only the most relevant details. Three minutes can feel like an eternity if you are speaking before a group, but the time will pass very quickly. It is important to use it well.

If you have more time to work with—ten minutes or half an hour—you will be able to discuss your topic in greater detail. More time also means you must devote more thought into how you will hold your audience's interest. If your presentation is longer than five minutes, introduce some variety so the audience is not bored. Incorporate multimedia, invite the audience to complete an activity, or set aside time for a question-and-answer session.

Jorge was required to limit his presentation to five to seven minutes. In his outline, he made a note about where he would need to condense some complicated material to stay within his time limit. He also decided to focus only on cholesterol and heart disease in his discussion of long-term health outcomes. The research on other issues was inconclusive, so Jorge decided to omit this material. Jorge's notes on his outline show the revisions he has made to his presentation.

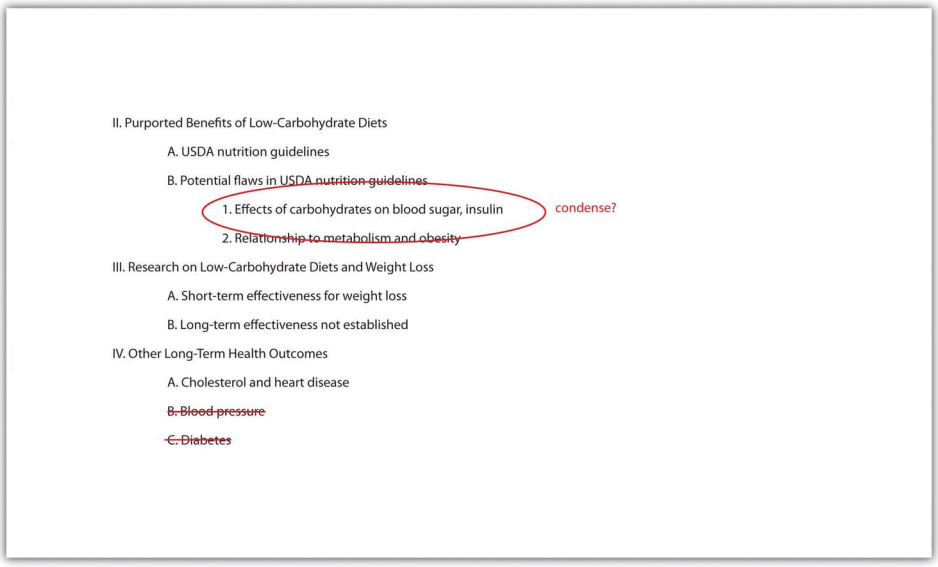


Figure: from @api.

Tip

You are responsible for using your presentation time effectively to inform your audience. You show respect for your audience by following the expected time limit. However, that does not mean you must fill all of that time with talk if you are giving a face-to-face presentation. Involving your audience can take some of the pressure off you while also keeping them engaged. Have them respond to a few brief questions to get them thinking. Display a relevant photograph, document, or object and ask your classmates to comment. In some presentations, if time allows, you may choose to have your classmates complete an individual or group activity.

Planning Your Conclusion

The conclusion should briefly sum up your main idea and leave your audience with something to think about. As in a written paper, you are essentially revisiting your thesis. Depending on your topic, you may also ask the audience to reconsider their thinking about an issue, to take action, or to think about a related issue. If you presented an attention-getting fact or anecdote in your introduction, consider revisiting it in your conclusion. Just as you have learned about an essay's conclusion, do not add new content to the presentation's conclusion.

No matter how you choose to structure your conclusion, make sure it is well planned so that you are not tempted to wrap up your presentation too quickly. Inexperienced speakers, in a face-to-face presentation, sometimes rush through the end of a presentation to avoid exceeding the allotted time or to end the stressful experience of presenting in public. Unfortunately, a hurried conclusion makes the presentation as a whole less memorable and effective.

Tip

Time management is the key to delivering an effective presentation whether it is face-to-face or in PowerPoint. As you develop your outline, think about the amount of time you will devote to each section. For instance, in a five-minute face-to-face presentation, you might plan to spend one minute on the introduction, three minutes on the body, and one minute on the conclusion. Later, when you rehearse, you can time yourself to determine whether you need to adjust your content or delivery.

In a PowerPoint presentation, it is important that your presentation is visually stimulating (but not overly so), avoids information overload by limiting the text per slide, uses speaker notes effectively, and uses a font that is visible on the background (e.g., avoid white letters on a light background or black letters on a dark background).

Exercise 2

Work with the list you created in Exercise 1 to develop a more complete outline for your presentation. Make sure your outline includes the following:

- An introduction that uses strategies to capture your audience's attention,
- A body section that summarizes your main points and supporting details,
- A conclusion that will help you end on a memorable note, and
- Brief notes about how much time you plan to spend on each part of the presentation (you may adjust the timing later as needed)

Identifying Opportunities to Incorporate Visual and Audio Media

You may already have some ideas for how to incorporate visual and audio media in your presentation. If not, review your outline and begin thinking about where to include media. Presenting information in a variety of formats will help you keep your audience's interest.

Use Presentation Software

Delivering your presentation as a slideshow is one way to use media to your advantage. As you speak, use a computer and an attached projector to display a slideshow of text and graphics that complement the speech. Your audience will follow your ideas more easily, because you are communicating with them through more than one sense. The audience hears your words and also sees the corresponding visuals. A listener who momentarily loses track of what you are saying can rely on the slide to cue his or her memory.

To set up your presentation, you will need to work with the content of your outline to develop individual slides. Each slide should focus on just a few bullet points (or a similar amount of content presented in a graphic). Remember that your audience must be able to read the slides easily, whether the members sit in the front or the back of the room. Avoid overcrowding the slides with too much text. Everything you say should not appear on the slide.

Using presentation software, such as PowerPoint, allows you to incorporate graphics, sounds, and even web links directly into your slides. You can also work with available styles, color schemes, and fonts to give your presentation a polished, consistent appearance. Different slide templates make it easy to organize information to suit your purpose. Be sure your font is visible to you audience. Avoid using small font or colored font that is not visible against your background.

Use PowerPoint as a Visual Aid

PowerPoint and similar visual presentation programs can be effective tools to help audiences remember your message, but they can also be an annoying distraction to your speech. How you prepare your slides and use the tool will determine your effectiveness.

PowerPoint is a slideware program that you have no doubt seen used in class, seen in a presentation at work, or perhaps used yourself to support a presentation. PowerPoint and similar slideware programs provide templates for creating electronic slides to present visual information to the audience, reinforcing the verbal message. You will be able to import or cut and paste words from text files, images, or video clips to create slides to represent your ideas. You can even incorporate web links. When using any software program, it is always a good idea to experiment with it long before you intend to use it; explore its many options and functions, and see how it can be an effective tool for you.

At first, you might be overwhelmed by the possibilities, and you might be tempted to use all the bells, whistles, and sound effects, not to mention the tumbling, flying, and animated graphics. If used wisely, a dissolve or key transition can be like a well-executed scene from a major motion picture and lead your audience to the next point. But if used indiscriminately, it can annoy the audience to the point where they cringe in anticipation of the sound effect at the start of each slide. This danger is inherent in the tool, but you are in charge of it and can make wise choices that enhance the understanding and retention of your information.

The first point to consider is which visual aid is the most important. The answer is you, the speaker. You will facilitate the discussion, give life to the information, and help the audience correlate the content to your goal or purpose. You do not want to

be in a position where the PowerPoint presentation is the focus and you are on the side of the stage simply helping the audience follow along. Slides should support you in your presentation, rather than the other way around. Just as there is a number one rule for handouts (do not pass them out at the start of your presentation), there is also one for PowerPoint presentations: do not use PowerPoint slides as a read-aloud script for your speech. The PowerPoint slides should amplify and illustrate your main points, not reproduce everything you are going to say.

Your pictures are the second area of emphasis you will want to consider. The tool will allow you to show graphs, charts and illustrate relationships that words may only approach in terms of communication, but your verbal support of the visual images will make all the difference. Dense pictures or complicated graphics will confuse more than they clarify. Choose clear images that have an immediate connection to both your content and the audience, tailored to their specific needs. After the images, consider using only key words that can be easily read to accompany your pictures. The fewer words the better. Try to keep each slide to a total word count of less than ten words. Do not use full sentences. Using key words provides support for your verbal discussion, guiding you as well as your audience. The key words can serve as signposts or signal words related to key ideas.

A natural question at this point is, How do I communicate complex information simply? The answer comes with several options. The visual representation on the screen is for support and illustration. Should you need to communicate more technical, complex, or in-depth information in a visual way, consider preparing a handout to distribute at the conclusion of your speech. You may also consider using a printout of your slide show with a section for taking notes, but if you distribute it at the beginning of your speech, you run the risk of turning your presentation into a guided reading exercise and possibly distracting or losing members of the audience. Everyone reads at a different pace and takes notes in their own way. You do not want to be in the position of going back and forth between slides to help people follow along.

Another point to consider is how you want to use the tool to support your speech and how your audience will interpret its presentation. Most audiences wouldn't want to read a page of text—as you might see in this book—on the big screen. They will be far more likely to glance at the screen and assess the information you present in relation to your discussion. Therefore, it is key to consider one main idea, relationship, or point per slide. The use of the tool should be guided with the idea that its presentation is for the audience's benefit, not yours. People often understand pictures and images more quickly and easily than text, and you can use this to your advantage, using the knowledge that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Incorporate Visual Media

Even if you do not use a slideshow to complement your presentation, you can include visual media to support and enhance your content. Visual media are divided into two major categories: images and informational graphics.

Image-based media, such as photographs or videos, often have little or no accompanying text. Often these media are more powerful than words in getting a message across. Within the past decade, the images associated with major news stories, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Abu Ghraib prison abuses from 2004 to 2006, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, have powerfully affected viewers' emotions and drawn their attention to these news stories.

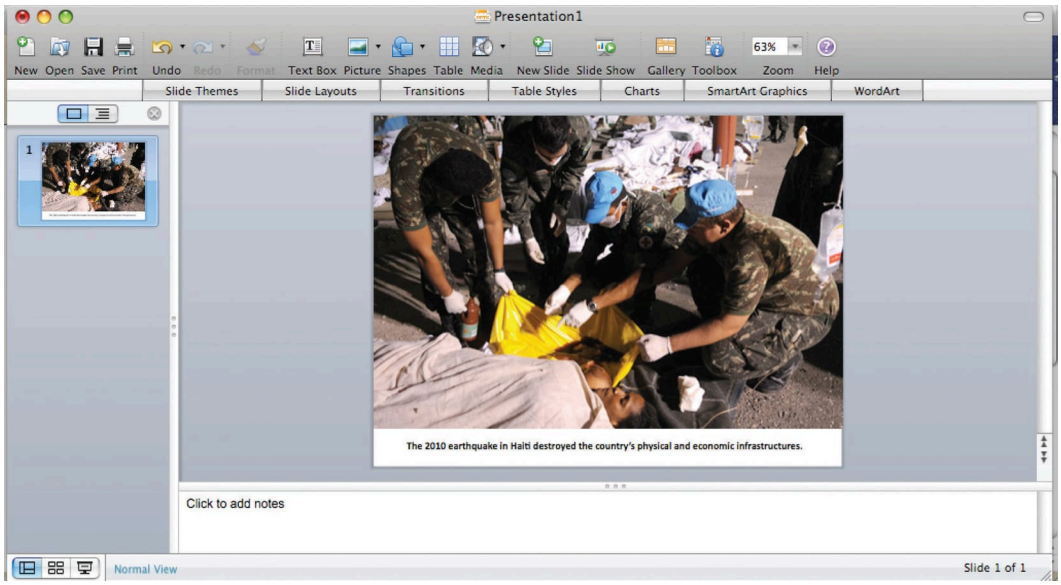


Figure: from @api.

Even if your presentation addresses a less dramatic subject, you can still use images to draw in your audience. Consider how photographs, an illustration, or a video might help your audience connect with a particular person or place or bring a historical event to life. Use visual images to support descriptions of natural or man-made phenomena. What ideas lend themselves to being explained primarily through images?

In addition, consider how you might incorporate informational graphics in your presentation. Informational graphics include diagrams, tables, pie charts, bar and line graphs, and flow charts. Informational graphics usually include some text and often work well to present numerical information. Consider using them if you are presenting statistics, comparing facts or data about several different groups, describing changes over time, or presenting a process.

Incorporate Audio Media

Although audio media are not as versatile as visual media, you may wish to use them if they work well with your particular topic. If your presentation discusses trends in pop music or analyzes political speeches, playing an audio clip is an obvious and effective choice. Clips from historical speeches, radio talk shows, and interviews can also be used, but extended clips may be ineffective with modern audiences. Always assess your audience's demographics and expectations before selecting and including audio media.

Exercise 3

Review the outline you created in Exercise 2. Complete the following steps:

1. Identify at least two to three places in your presentation where you might incorporate visual or audio media. Brainstorm ideas for what media would be effective, and create a list of ideas. (For now, focus on coming up with a few general ideas.)
2. Determine whether you will use presentation software to deliver your presentation as a slideshow. If you plan to do so, begin using your outline to draft your slides.

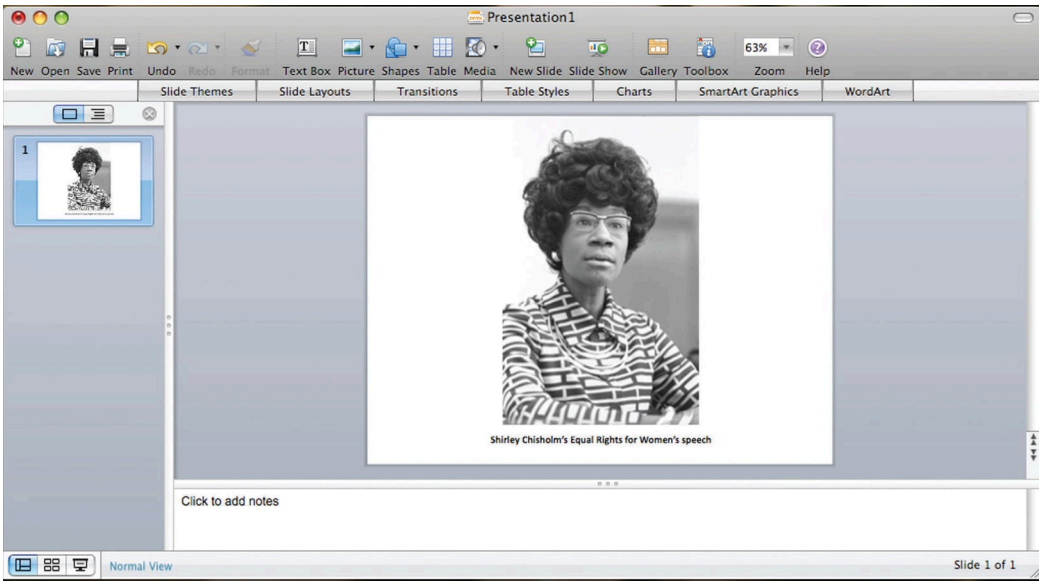


Figure: from agenciabrasil.gov.

Planning Ahead: Annotating Your Presentation

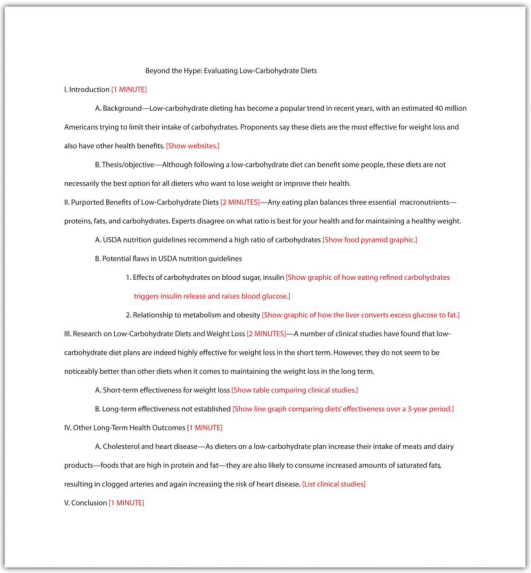
When you make a presentation, you are giving a performance of sorts. It may not be as dramatic as a play or a movie, but it requires smooth coordination of several elements—your words, your gestures, and any media you include. One way to ensure that the performance goes smoothly is to annotate your presentation ahead of time.

To annotate means to add comments or notes to a document. You can use this technique to plan how the different parts of your presentation will flow together. For instance, if you are working with slides, add notes to your outline indicating when you will show each slide. If you have other visual or audio media to include, make a note of that, too. Be as detailed as necessary. Jotting "Start video at 3:14" can spare you the awkwardness of searching for the right clip during your presentation.

Writing at Work

In the workplace, employees are often asked to deliver presentations or conduct a meeting using standard office presentation software. If you are using presentation software, you can annotate your presentation easily as you create your slides. Use the notes feature at the bottom of the page to add notes for each slide. As you deliver your presentation, your notes will be visible to you on the computer screen but not to your audience on the projector screen.

In a face-to-face presentation, make sure your final annotated outline is easy to read. It will serve to cue you during your presentation, so it does not need to look polished, as long as it is clear to you. Double space the text. Use a larger-than-normal font size (14 or 16 points) if that will make it easier for you to read. Boldface or italics will set off text that should be emphasized or delivered with greater emotion. Write out main points, as well as your opening and closing remarks, in complete sentences, along with any material you want to quote verbatim. Use shorter phrases for supporting details. Using your speaker notes effectively will help you deliver an effective presentation. Highlighting, all capital letters, or different-colored font will help you easily distinguish notes from the text of your speech. Read Jorge's annotated outline.



Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carbohydrate Diets

I. Introduction [1 MINUTE]

A. Background—Low-carbohydrate dieting has become a popular trend in recent years, with an estimated 40 million Americans trying to limit their intake of carbohydrates. Proponents say these diets are the most effective for weight loss and also have other health benefits. [Show websites.]

B. Thesis/objective—Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for all dieters who want to lose weight or improve their health.

II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets [2 MINUTES]—Any eating plan balances three essential macronutrients—proteins, fats, and carbohydrates. Experts disagree on what ratio is best for your health and for maintaining a healthy weight.

A. USDA nutrition guidelines recommend a high ratio of carbohydrates [Show food pyramid graphic.]

B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines

1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin [Show graphic of how eating refined carbohydrates triggers insulin release and raises blood glucose.]

2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity [Show graphic of how the liver converts excess glucose to fat.]

III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss [2 MINUTES]—A number of clinical studies have found that low-carbohydrate diet plans are indeed highly effective for weight loss in the short term. However, they do not seem to be noticeably better than other diets when it comes to maintaining the weight loss in the long term.

A. Short-term effectiveness for weight loss [Show table comparing clinical studies.]

B. Long-term effectiveness not established [Show line graph comparing diets' effectiveness over a 3-year period.]

IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes [1 MINUTE]

A. Cholesterol and heart disease—As dieters on a low-carbohydrate plan increase their intake of meats and dairy products—foods that are high in protein and fat—they are also likely to consume increased amounts of saturated fats, resulting in clogged arteries and again increasing the risk of heart disease. [List clinical studies]

V. Conclusion [1 MINUTE]

Tip

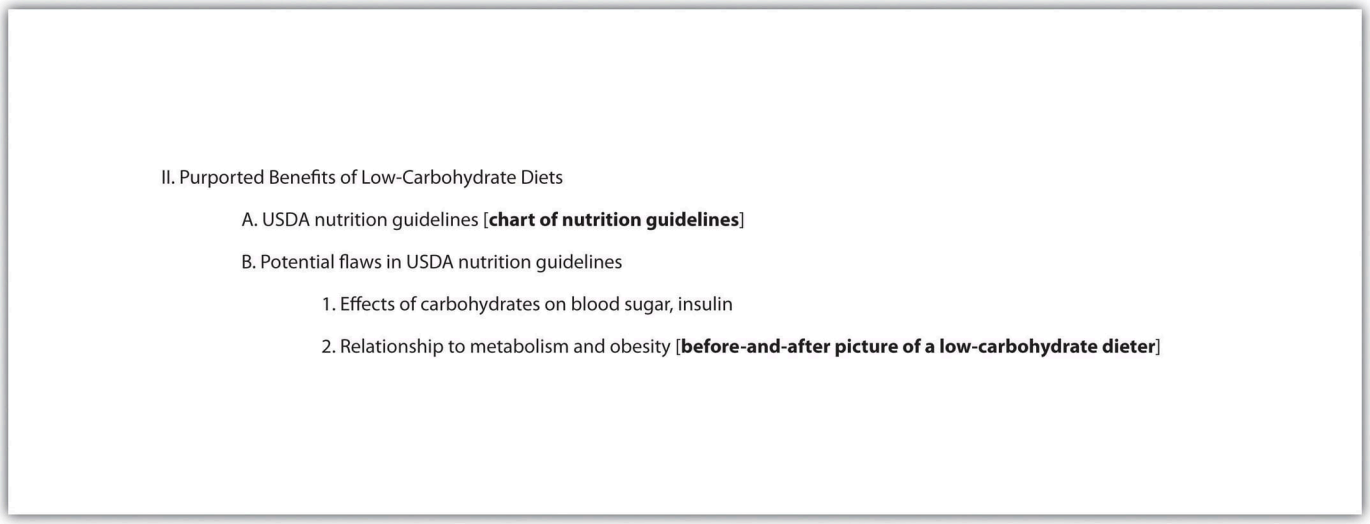
Some students prefer to write out the full text of their face-to-face presentation. This can be a useful strategy when you are practicing your delivery. However, keep in mind that reading your text aloud, word for word, will not help you capture and hold your audience's attention. Write out and read your speech if that helps you rehearse. After a few practice sessions, when you are more comfortable with your material, switch to working from an outline. That will help you sound more natural when you speak to an audience.

In a PowerPoint presentation, remember to have your slides in logical, sequential order. Annotating your presentation before submitting it to your audience or your instructor will help you check for order and logical transitions. Too much text or data may confuse your audience; strive for clarity and avoid unnecessary details. Let the pictures or graphics tell the story but do not overload your slideshow with visuals. Be sure your font is visible. Look for consistency in the time limit of your presentation to gauge your level of preparedness.

Exercise 4

Begin to annotate your outline. (You will probably add more notes as you proceed, but including some annotations now will help you begin pulling your ideas together.) Mark your outline with the following information:

1. Write notes in brackets to any sections where you definitely plan to incorporate visual or audio media.
2. If you are presenting a slideshow, add notes in brackets indicating which slides go with each section of your outline.
3. Identify and set off any text that should be emphasized.



Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 8.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation

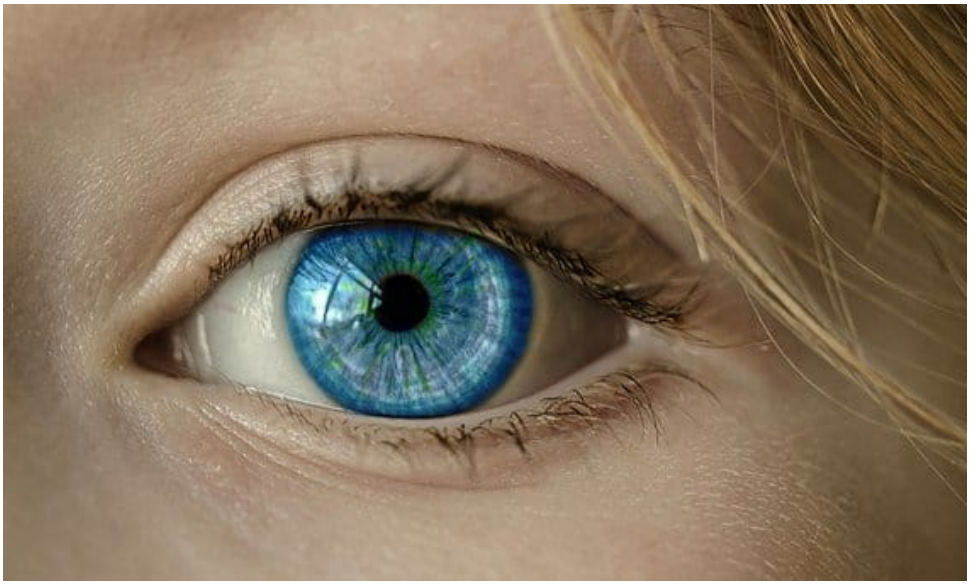


Figure: Image by Pixabay

Good communication is a multi-sensory experience. Children first learning how to read often gravitate toward books with engaging pictures. As adults, we graduate to denser books without pictures, yet we still visualize ideas to help us understand the text. Advertisers favor visual media—television, magazines, and billboards—because they are the best way to hook an audience. Websites rely on color, graphics, icons, and a clear system of visual organization to engage Internet surfers.

Bringing visuals into a presentation adds color, literally and figuratively. There is an art to doing it well. This section covers how to use different kinds of visual aids effectively. If you use an image that someone else made, be sure to cite the source of the image, just as you would a quote.

Using Visual Aids: The Basics

Good writers make conscious choices. They understand their purpose and audience. Every decision they make on the page, from organizing an essay to choosing a word with just the right connotations, is made with their purpose and audience in mind.

The same principle applies to visual communication. As a presenter, you choose the following:

- When to show images or video for maximum impact;
- Which images will best produce the effect you want;
- When to present information using a table, chart, or other graphic;
- How much text to include in slides or informational graphics; and
- How to organize graphics so they present information clearly.

Your goal is to use visual media to support and enhance your presentation. At the same time, you must make sure these media do not distract your audience or interfere with getting your point across. Your ideas, not your visuals, should be the focus.

As you develop the visual side of your presentation, you will follow a process much like the process you follow when you write. You will brainstorm ideas, form an organizational plan, develop drafts, and then refine and edit your work. The following sections provide guidelines to help you make good decisions throughout the process.

What Makes Visual Aids Effective?

To help you get a sense of what makes visual media work, think about what does not work. Try to recall occasions when you have

witnessed the following visual media failures:

- Websites crammed with so many images, flashing phrases,pop-up videos, and clashing colors that they are almost unreadable
- Assembly instructions with illustrations or diagrams that are impossible to follow
- Photographs that are obviously (and badly) altered with photo-editing software
- Distracting typos or other errors in signs, advertisements, or headlines
- Tables, charts, or graphs with tiny, dense text or missing labels

In each case, the problem is that the media creator did not think carefully enough about the purpose and audience. The purpose of images, color, or flashing text on a website is to attract attention. Overusing these elements defeats the purpose because the viewer may become overwhelmed or distracted. Tables, charts, and graphs are intended to simplify complex information, but without clear labels and legible text, they will confuse the audience.

In contrast, effective visual elements are chosen or created with the purpose and audience in mind. Although a photo shoot for a magazine article might result in dozens of images, editors choose those few that work best with the article. Web designers and video game creators have an audience test their products before they are released to ensure that people will understand how to use them. Understanding the function of different visual aids will help you use them with purpose.

Types of Visual Aids

Visual aids fall into two main categories—images and informational graphics. Images include photographs, illustrations and clip art, and video footage. Informational graphics include tables, charts, bar graphs, and line graphs.

These visual aids serve two purposes: to add emotional impact to your presentation and to organize information more clearly. With that in mind, read to find out how specific types of visual aids achieve those purposes.

Photographs

A striking photograph can capture your audience's attention far more successfully than words can. Consider including photographs at the beginning or end of your presentation to emphasize your main ideas or to accompany a particularly important point in the body of your presentation. Remember that, as with other types of graphics, less is often more. Two or three well-chosen photographs are more effective than a dozen mediocre ones.

When you choose photographs, ask yourself these questions:

- What purpose does this image serve? Will it surprise the audience? Will it provoke a strong emotional response? Does it support an important point?
- Will this photograph be more effective if shown with only a caption, or does it need additional text?
- Will the audience understand what is happening in the photograph? Is the meaning immediately evident, or does the photo need some context?
- Would editing the image make it more effective? Consider using image-editing software to crop the photo, change the brightness, or make other cosmetic changes. (Do not go overboard, though. A slightly imperfect but authentic image is preferable to one that has been obviously altered.)

To illustrate the sense of helplessness people felt in the midst of tragedy, a student could use a photograph that shows fear, weariness, or defeat on the face of the photograph's subject.

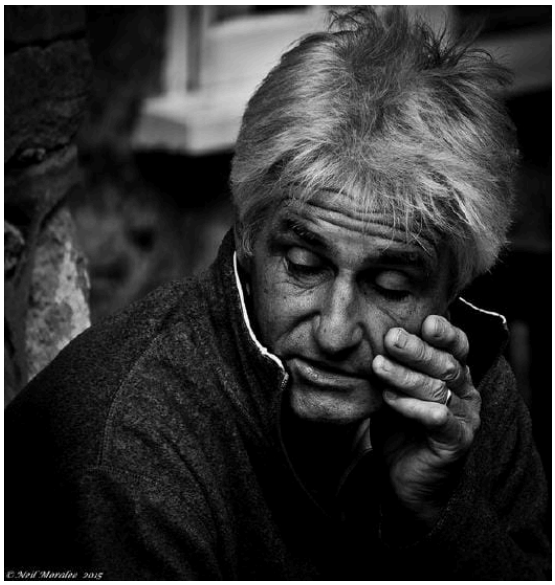


Figure: by Neil Moralee.

Illustrations

Illustrations, such as editorial or political cartoons, serve much the same purpose as photographs. Because an illustration does not capture a moment in time the way a photo does, it may have less impact. However, depending on your topic and the effect you want to achieve, illustrations can still be very useful. Use the same criteria for choosing photographs to help you choose illustrations.



Figure: CC BY 2.0

Tip

The style of an illustration or photograph affects viewers just as the content does. Keep this in mind if you are working with the stock images available in office software programs. Many of these images have a comical tone. This may be fine for some topics—for instance, a presentation on television shows for children. However, if you need to project a more serious tone, make sure you choose images to suit that purpose. Many free (or reasonably priced) image banks are available online.

Video Footage

Even more than photographs, video footage can create a sense of immediacy, especially if your video includes sound. Showing a brief video clip can help your audience feel as if they are present at an important event, connect with a person being interviewed, or better understand a process. Again, ask yourself the following questions to ensure you are using the footage well:

- What purpose does this video serve? (Never rely on video clips just to fill time.)
- How much footage should be shown to achieve your purpose?
- What will need to be explained, before or after showing the video, to ensure that your audience understands its significance?
- Will it be necessary to edit the video to stay within time requirements or to focus on the most important parts?

Tables

Informational graphics, such as tables, charts, and graphs, do not provoke the same response that images do. Nevertheless, these graphics can have a powerful impact. Their primary purpose is to organize and simplify information.

Tables are effective when you must classify information and organize it in categories. Tables are an especially good choice when you are presenting qualitative data that are not strictly numerical. Table 8.2.1 “Example of Qualitative Data Table” was created for a presentation discussing the subprime mortgage crisis. It presents information about people who have held powerful positions both in the government and at one of the investment banking firms involved in the subprime mortgage market.

Table 8.2.1 - Example of Qualitative Data Table

Name	Role(s) at Goldman Sachs	Years Active	Government Role(s)	Years Active
Henry Paulson	Chief operating officer	1994–1998	US secretary of the treasury	2006–2009
	Chief executive officer	1998–2006		
Robert Rubin	Vice chairman and co-chief operating officer	1987–1990	Assistant to the president for economic policy and director, National Economic Council	1993–95
	Co-chairman and co-senior partner	1990–1992	US secretary of the treasury	1995–1999
Stephen Friedman	Co-chief operating officer	1987–1990	Assistant to the president for economic policy and director, National Economic Council	2002–2005
	Co-chairman	1990–1992		
	Chairman	1992–1994		

Sources:
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/business/19gold.html;
http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/henry_m_jr_paulson/index.html?inline=nyt-per;
http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/robert_e_rubin/index.html?inline=nyt-per,
http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/13/us/man-in-the-news-economic-adviser-from-other-side-of-the-deficit-stephen-friedman.html;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/342086.stm.

Tip

If you are working with numerical information, consider whether a pie chart, bar graph, or line graph might be an effective way to present the content. A table can help you organize numerical information, but it is not the most effective way to emphasize contrasting data or to show changes over time.

Pie Charts

Pie charts are useful for showing numerical information in percentages. For example, you can use a pie chart to represent

presidential election results by showing what percentage of voters voted for the Democratic presidential candidate, the Republican candidate, and candidates from other political parties. When using pie charts, all of the percentage must, together, equal 100%.

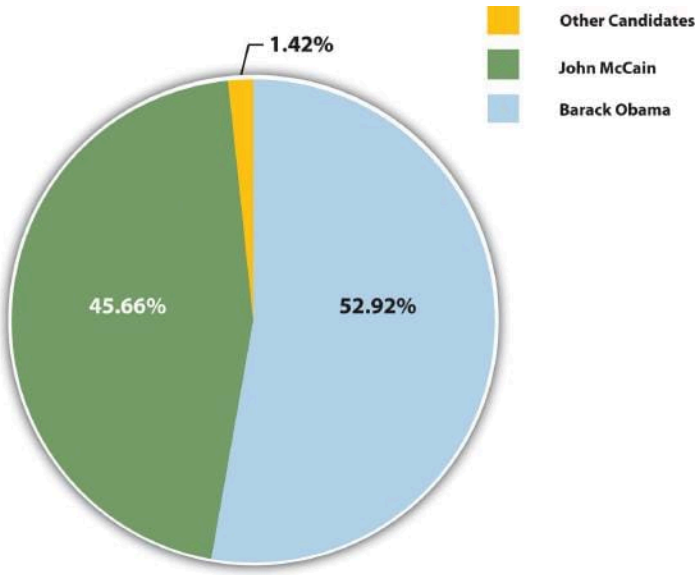


Figure: from www.fec.gov.

Bar Graphs

Bar graphs work well when you want to show similarities and differences in numerical data. Horizontal or vertical bars help viewers compare data from different groups, different time periods, and so forth. For instance, the bar graph, below, allows the viewer to compare data on the five countries that have won the most Olympic medals since the modern games began in 1924: Norway, the United States, the former Soviet Union, Germany, and Austria. Bar graphs can effectively show trends or patterns in data as well.

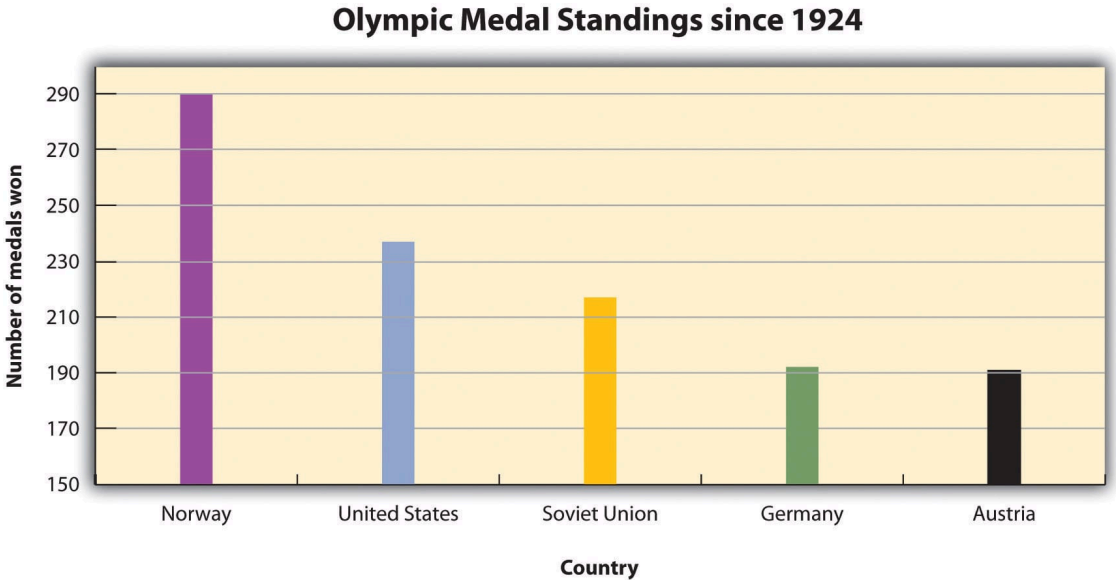


Figure: from www.nbcolympics.com.

Line Graphs

Like bar graphs, line graphs show trends in data. Line graphs are usually used to show trends in data over time. For example, the line graph, below, shows changes in the Dow Jones Industrial Average—an economic index based on trading information about

thirty large, US-based public companies. This graph shows where the Dow closed at the end of each business day over a period of five days.

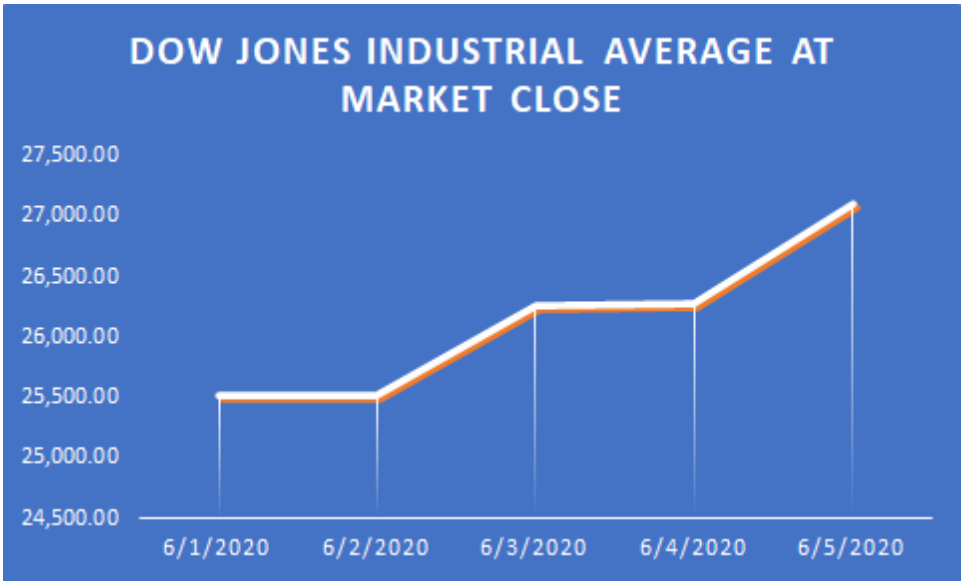


Figure: Data Source: Yahoo Finance.

Exercise 1

In this exercise, you will begin to refine your ideas for incorporating media into your presentation. Complete the following steps on your own sheet of paper.

1. Revisit the list you brainstormed for Exercise 3 in Section 8.1 and the annotated outline you developed for Exercise 4.
2. Analyze the two different types of visual aids: images and informational graphics. Identify at least two places in your presentation where you might incorporate visual aids.
3. Evaluate the purpose of the visual aid. Does it create emotional impact, or does it organize information? Is the visual effective?
4. Determine whether you will be able to create the visual aid yourself or will need to find it.

Creating Original Visual Aids

You may include original visual aids in your presentation to add interest, present complex information or data more clearly, or appeal to your audience's emotions. You may wish to create some visual aids by hand—for instance, by mounting photographs on poster board for display. More likely, however, you will use computer-generated graphics.

Computer-generated visual aids are easy to create once you learn how to use certain office software. They also offer greater versatility. You can print hard copies and display them large or include them in a handout for your audience. Or, if you are working with presentation software, you can simply insert the graphics in your slides.

Regardless of how you proceed, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Create visual aids with purpose.** Think carefully about how they will enhance your message, and choose a form that is appropriate for your content.
- **Strive for quality.** You do not need the skills of a professional photographer or designer, but do take time to make sure your visual aids are neat, attractive, and legible. Proofread for errors, too.

Using Software to Create Visual Aids

You can use standard office software to create simple graphics easily. The following guidelines describe how to work with word-

processing software and presentation software.

Working with Photographs

Most personal computers come equipped with some basic image-editing software, and many people choose to purchase more advanced programs as well. You can upload photographs from a digital camera (or in some cases, a cell phone) or scan and upload printed photographs. The images can then be edited and incorporated into your presentation. Be sure to save all of your images in one folder for easy access.

Creating Tables

To create a table within a word-processing document consult your software program's help feature or an online tutorial. Once you have created the table, you can edit and make any additional changes. Be sure that the table has no more than six to seven rows or columns because you do not want to compromise the size of the text or the readability. Aligning with precision will help your table look less crowded. Also, the row and column titles should spell out their contents.

Creating Graphs

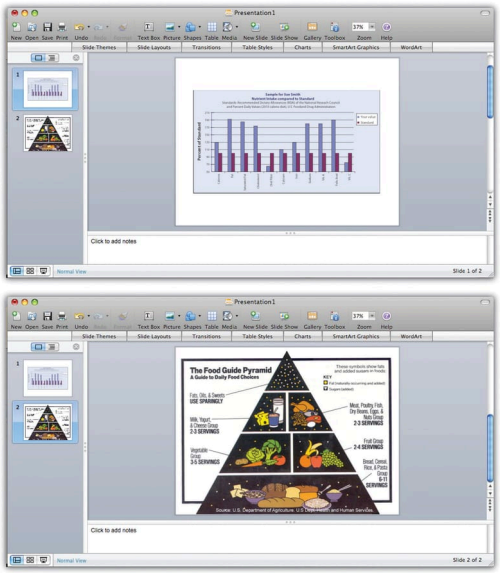


Figure: Pie charts and bar and line graphs can also be created using standard office software (as the stock market line chart was, above). Although you can create these graphics within a document, you will need to work with both your word-processing application and your spreadsheet application to do so. The graph should visually explain the data using colors, titles, and labels. The use of color will help the audience distinguish information; however, avoid colors that are hard on the eyes, such as lime green or hot pink. The title should clearly state what the graph explains. Lastly, avoid using acronyms in the titles and other labels.

Creating Graphics in an Electronic Presentation

If you plan to work only with hard copy graphics during your presentation, you may choose to create them as word-processing documents. However, if you are using presentation software, you will need to choose one of the following options:

- Create your graphics using the presentation software program.
- Create your graphics within another program and import them.

Standard office presentation software allows you to create informational graphics in much the same way you would create them within a word-processing application. Keep the formatting palette, a menu option that allows you to customize the graphic, open while you use the software. The formatting menu provides options for inserting other types of graphics, such as pictures and video. You may insert pictures from an image bank available within the program, or insert images or video from your own desktop files. Shape your use of multimedia in accordance with the message your presentation is trying to convey, the purpose, and your audience.

Creating Visual Aids by Hand

Most of the time, using computer-generated graphics is more efficient than creating them by hand. Using office software programs helps give your graphics a polished appearance while also teaching you skills that are useful in a variety of jobs. However, it may make sense to use hand-created visual aids in some cases—for instance, when showing a 3-D model would be effective. If you follow this route, be sure to devote extra time to making sure your visual aids are neat, legible, and professional.

Flip charts are inexpensive and quick visual aids used during face-to-face presentations. The flip chart can be prepared before, as well as during, the presentation. Each sheet of paper should contain one theme, idea, or sketch and must be penned in large letters to be seen by audience members farthest away from the speaker.

Writing Captions

Any media you incorporate should include a caption or other explanatory text. A caption is a brief, one- to two-sentence description or explanation of a visual image. Make sure your captions are clear, accurate, and to the point. Use full sentences when you write them.

Captions should always be used with photographs, and in some cases, they can be useful for clarifying informational graphics, which represent qualitative data visually. However, informational graphics may not require a caption if the title and labels are sufficiently clear. For other visual media, such as video footage, providing explanatory text before or after the footage will suffice. The important thing is to make sure you always include some explanation of the media.

Exercise 2

In this exercise, you will begin to develop visual aids for your presentation. Complete the steps in this exercise—and enjoy the chance to be creative. Working with visuals can be a pleasant way to take a break from the demands of writing.

1. Revisit the ideas you developed in Exercise 1. Choose at least two ideas that you can create. (**Note:** If you are using software to develop a slideshow presentation, count this as one of your self-created visual aids. Include at least one other self-created visual aid, such as an original photograph, within your slideshow.)
2. Get creative! Take your photographs, construct a 3-D model, create informational graphics, or work on your presentation slides. Develop good working drafts.
3. After you have completed drafts of your visual aids, set them aside for a while. Then revisit them with a critical eye. First, check any text included with the graphic. Make sure your facts are correct, your words are clear and concise, and your language is free of errors.
4. Next, evaluate how well your aids work visually. Are they large enough to be seen and read from a distance? Are captions and labels easy to find? Are photographs of reasonably high quality? Ask someone else for feedback, too.
5. Begin making any needed changes. As you proceed through the rest of this section, continue to revisit your work to improve it as needed.

Collaboration

Please share the first version of your visual aids with a classmate. Examine what they have produced. On a separate piece of paper, note both the elements that catch your attention and those that would benefit from clarification. Return and compare notes.

Testing and Evaluating Visual Aids

Regardless of how you create your visual aids, be sure to test-drive them before you deliver your presentation. Edit and proofread them, and if possible, show them to someone who can give you objective feedback. Use the following checklist.

Checklist 8.2

Visual Aid Evaluation Checklist

- Visual aids are clearly integrated with the content of the presentation
- Photographs and illustrations suit the overall tone of the presentation
- Images and text are large and clear enough for the viewer to see or read
- Images are shown with explanatory text or a caption
- Informational graphics include clear, easy-to-read labels and headings
- Text within informational graphics is easy to read (Watch out for wordiness and crowded text or a font that is too small and hard to read.)
- Formatting choices (color, different fonts, etc.) organize information effectively
- Any text within graphics is free of errors
- Hyperlinks within slides function properly
- Display text for hyperlinks is concise and informative (Never paste a link into a slide without modifying the display text.)

Writing at Work

Office software includes many options for personalizing a presentation. For instance, you can choose or create a theme and color scheme, modify how one slide transitions to the next, or even include sound effects. With so many options, students and employees sometimes get carried away. The result can seem amateurish and detract from, rather than enhance, your presentation.

Remember, you are delivering a presentation, not producing a movie. Use the customization options to help give your presentations a consistent, polished, appearance. However, do not let these special effects detract from the substance of your slides.

Using Existing Visual Media

Depending on your topic, you may be able to find images and other graphics you can use instead of creating your own. For instance, you might use photographs from a reputable news source or informational graphics created by a government agency. If you plan to use visual aids created by others, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Set a purpose before you begin your search.** You will search more efficiently if you start with a general idea of what you are looking for—a line graph of unemployment rates for the past twelve months, for example, or a video clip of the most recent State of the Union address.
- **Filter out visual aids that are not relevant.** You may come across eye-catching graphics and be tempted to use them even if they are only loosely related to your topic, simply because they are attention getting. Resist the temptation. If the graphic is not clearly connected to your point, it does not belong in your presentation.
- **Read carefully.** In addition to reading labels, headings, and captions, read any text that accompanies the visual. Make sure you understand the visual in its original context. For informational graphics, make sure you understand exactly what information is being represented. (This may seem obvious, but it is easy to misread graphic information. Take the time to examine it carefully.)
- **Evaluate sources carefully and record source information.** When you look for visual media to complement your presentation, you are conducting research. Apply the same standards you used for your research paper. Choose reliable sources, such as reputable news organizations, government and nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions. Verify data in additional sources. Finally, be sure to document all source information as you proceed.

Searching Efficiently for Visual Media

You will probably find it most efficient to use the Internet to search for visual aids. Many students begin by typing keywords into a search engine to locate related images. However, this search technique is not necessarily efficient, for several reasons:

- It often pulls up hundreds or even thousands of images, which may be only loosely related to your search terms.

- It can sometimes be difficult to understand the image in its original context.
- It can be hard to find copyright information about how you may use the image.

A more efficient strategy is to identify a few sources that are likely to have what you are looking for, and then search within those sites. For instance, if you need a table showing average life expectancy in different countries, you might begin with the website of the World Health Organization. If you hope to find images related to current events, news publications are an obvious choice. The Library of Congress website includes many media related to American history, culture, and politics.

Searching this way has the following advantages:

- You will often find what you are looking for faster because you are not wasting time scrolling through many irrelevant results.
- If you have chosen your sources well, you can be reasonably certain that you are getting accurate, up-to-date information.
- Images and informational graphics produced by reputable sources are likely to be high quality—easy to read and well designed.

If you do choose to use a search engine to help you locate visual media, make sure you use it wisely. Begin with a clear idea of what you are looking for. Use the advanced search settings to narrow your search. When you locate a relevant image, do not download it immediately. Read the page or site to make sure you understand the image in context. Finally, read the site's copyright or terms of use policy—usually found at the bottom of the home page—to make sure you may use the material.

If you are unable to find what you are looking for on the Internet consider using print sources of visual media. You may choose to mount these for display or scan them and incorporate the files into an electronic presentation. (Scanning printed pages may lower the quality of the image. However, if you are skilled at using photo-editing software, you may be able to improve the quality of the scanned image.)

Inserting Hyperlinks in an Electronic Presentation

If you are working with images, audio, or video footage available online, you may wish to insert a link within your presentation. Then, during your presentation, you can simply click the link to open the website in a separate window and toggle between windows to return to your presentation slides.

To insert a hyperlink within your presentation, click on "insert" in the toolbar and then select hyperlink from the menu. Doing so will open a dialog box where you can paste your link and modify the accompanying display text shown on your slide.

Copyright and Fair Use

Before you download (or scan) any visual media, make sure you have the right to use it. Most websites state their copyright and terms of use policy on their home page. In general, you may not use other people's visual media for any commercial purpose without contacting the copyright holder to obtain permission and pay any specified fees.

Copyright restrictions are somewhat more ambiguous when you wish to download visual media for educational uses. Some educational uses of copyrighted materials are generally considered fair use—meaning that it is legally and ethically acceptable to use the material in your work. However, do not assume that because you are using the media for an educational purpose, you are automatically in the clear. Make sure your work meets the guidelines in the following checklist. If it does, you can be reasonably confident that it would be considered fair use in a court of law and always give credit to the source.

Checklist 8.3

Media Fair Use Checklist

- You are using the media for educational purposes only.
- You will make the work available only for a short period and to a limited audience. For instance, showing a copyrighted image in a classroom presentation is acceptable. Posting a presentation with copyrighted images online is problematic. In addition, avoid any uses that would allow other people to easily access and reproduce the work.

- You have used only as much of the work as needed for your purposes. For video and audio footage, limit your use to no more than 10 percent of the media—five minutes of an hour-long television show, for example. Image use is harder to quantify, but you should avoid using many images from the same source.
- You are using the media to support your own ideas, not replace them. Your use should include some commentary or place the media in context. It should be a supporting player in your presentation—not the star of the show.
- You have obtained the material legally. Purchase the media if necessary rather than using illegally pirated material.
- Your use of the media will not affect the copyright holder or benefit you financially.

By following these guidelines, you are respecting the copyright holder's right to control the distribution of the work and to profit from it.

Writing at Work

In some fields, such as teaching, job applicants often submit a professional portfolio to a prospective employer. Recent college graduates may include relevant course work in their portfolios or in applications to graduate school. What should you do if your course work uses copyrighted visual media?

This use of media is acceptable according to fair use guidelines. Even though you are using the work for your personal professional advancement, it is not considered an infringement on copyright as long as you follow the additional guidelines listed in the previous checklist.

Crediting Sources

As you conduct your research, make sure you document sources as you proceed. Follow the guidelines when you download images, video, or other media from the Internet or capture media from other sources. Keep track of where you accessed the media and where you can find additional information about it. You may also provide a references page at the end of the presentation to cite not only media and images but also the information in the text of your presentation.

Write captions or other explanatory text for visual media created by others, just as you would for media you created. Doing so helps keep your audience informed. It also helps ensure that you are following fair use guidelines by presenting the media with your commentary, interpretation, or analysis. In your caption or elsewhere in your presentation, note the source of any media you did not create yourself. You do not need to provide a full bibliographical citation, but do give credit where it is due.

Exercise 3

In this exercise, you will locate visual aids created by others and continue developing the work you began earlier. Complete these steps.

1. Revisit the ideas you developed in Exercise 1. Choose at least two ideas for which it would make more sense to find the visual aid than to create it yourself.
2. Use the search tips provided in this section to locate at least two visual aids from reputable sources that you can use. Prepare them for your presentation by adding clarifying text as needed. Be sure to credit your source.
3. Incorporate the visual aids you created in Exercise 2 and Exercise 3 into your presentation. This may involve preparing physical copies for display or inserting graphic files into an electronic presentation.

4. Take some time now to review how you will integrate the visual and verbal components of your presentation.

- If you are working with presentation software, refine your slides. Make sure the visual approach is consistent and suits your topic. Give your text a final proofread.
- If you are not using presentation software, review the annotated outline you created in Exercise 1. Update it as needed to reflect your current plan. Also, determine how you will physically set up your visual aids.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020

This page titled 16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 8.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

16.3: Giving a Presentation



Figure: Image by Pixabay

By this time, you have already completed much of the preparation for your presentation. You have organized your ideas and planned both the textual and visual components of your presentation. Still, you may not feel quite ready to speak in front of a group.

Public speaking is stressful. In fact, some researchers have found that a large percentage of people surveyed rate public speaking as their number one fear. Most people feel at least a little bit nervous at the prospect of public speaking.

At the same time, it is an increasingly necessary skill in the workplace. A human resource manager presents company policies and benefits plans to large groups of employees. An entrepreneur presents the idea for a new business to potential investors. A nurse might chair a staff meeting to introduce new hospital procedures. A police officer might present crime-prevention tips at a community meeting. In some fields, such as training and teaching, speaking in public is a regular job requirement.

In this section, you will learn strategies for becoming a confident, effective speaker. You have already taken the major steps toward making your presentation successful, as a result of the content planning you did in Section 8.1 and Section 8.2. Now, it is time to plan and practice your delivery.

What Makes a Speaker Effective?

Think about times you have been part of the audience for a speech, lecture, or other presentation. You have probably noticed how certain traits and mannerisms work to engage you and make the experience enjoyable. Effective speakers project confidence and interest in both their audience and their subject matter. They present ideas clearly and come across as relaxed but in control.

In contrast, less effective speakers may seem anxious or, worse, apathetic. They may be difficult to hear or understand, or their body language may distract from their message. They have trouble making a connection with their audience. This can happen even when the speaker knows his or her material and has prepared effective visual aids.

In both cases, two factors contribute to your overall impression of the speaker: voice and body language. The following sections discuss specific points to focus on.

Finding Your Voice

Most people do not think much about how their voices come across in everyday conversations. Talking to other people feels

natural. Unfortunately, speaking in public does not, and that can affect your voice. For instance, many people talk faster when they give presentations, because they are nervous and want to finish quickly. In addition, some traits that do not matter too much in ordinary conversation, such as a tendency to speak quietly, can be a problem when speaking to a group. Think about the characteristics discussed in the following section and how your own voice might come across.

Resonance

One quality of a good speaking voice is resonance, meaning strength, depth, and force. This word is related to the word *resonate*. Resonant speech begins at the speaker's vocal cords and resonates throughout the upper body. The speaker does not simply use his or her mouth to form words, but instead projects from the lungs and chest. (That is why having a cold can make it hard to speak clearly.)

Some people happen to have powerful, resonant voices. But even if your voice is naturally softer or higher pitched, you can improve it with practice.

- Take a few deep breaths before you begin rehearsing.
- Hum a few times, gradually lowering the pitch so that you feel the vibration not only in your throat but also in your chest and diaphragm.
- Try to be conscious of that vibration and of your breathing while you speak. You may not feel the vibration as intensely, but you should feel your speech resonate in your upper body, and you should feel as though you are breathing easily.
- Keep practicing until it feels natural.

Enunciation

Enunciation refers to how clearly you articulate words while speaking. Try to pronounce words as clearly and accurately as you can, enunciating each syllable. Avoid mumbling or slurring words. As you rehearse your presentation, practice speaking a little more slowly and deliberately. Ask someone you know to give you feedback.

Volume

Volume is simply how loudly or softly you speak. Shyness, nervousness, or overenthusiasm can cause people to speak too softly or too loudly, which may make the audience feel frustrated or put off. Here are some tips for managing volume effectively:

- Afraid of being too loud, many people speak too quietly. As a rule, aim to use a slightly louder volume for public speaking than you use in conversation.
- Consider whether you might be an exception to the rule. If you know you tend to be loud, you might be better off using your normal voice or dialing back a bit. This also may depend on the size of the audience.
- Think about volume in relation to content. Main points should usually be delivered with more volume and force. However, lowering your voice at crucial points can also help draw in your audience or emphasize serious content.

Pitch

Pitch refers to how high or low a speaker's voice is. The overall pitch of people's voices varies among individuals. We also naturally vary our pitch when speaking. For instance, our pitch gets higher when we ask a question and often when we express excitement. It often gets lower when we give a command or want to convey seriousness.

A voice that does not vary in pitch sounds monotonous, like a musician playing the same note repeatedly. Keep these tips in mind to manage pitch:

- Pitch, like volume, should vary with your content. Evaluate your voice to make sure you are not speaking at the same pitch throughout your presentation.
- It is fine to raise your pitch slightly at the end of a sentence when you ask a question. However, some speakers do this for every sentence, and as a result, they come across as tentative and unsure. Notice places where your pitch rises, and make sure the change is appropriate to the content.
- Lower your pitch when you want to convey authority. But do not overdo it. Questions should sound different from statements and commands.

- Chances are, your overall pitch falls within a typical range. However, if your voice is very high or low, consciously try to lower or raise it slightly.

Pace

Pace is the speed or rate at which you speak. Speaking too fast makes it hard for an audience to follow the presentation. The audience may become impatient.

Many less experienced speakers tend to talk faster when giving a presentation because they are nervous, want to get the presentation over with, or fear that they will run out of time. If you find yourself rushing during your rehearsals, try these strategies:

- Take a few deep breaths before you speak. Make sure you are not forgetting to breathe during your presentation.
- Identify places where a brief, strategic pause is appropriate—for instance, when transitioning from one main point to the next. Build these pauses into your presentation.
- If you still find yourself rushing, you may need to edit your presentation content to ensure that you stay within the allotted time.

If, on the other hand, your pace seems sluggish, you will need to liven things up. A slow pace may stem from uncertainty about your content. If that is the case, additional practice should help you. It also helps to break down how much time you plan to spend on each part of the presentation and then make sure you are adhering to your plan.

Tip

Pace affects not only your physical presentation but also the point of view; slowing down the presentation may allow your audience to further comprehend and consider your topic. Pace may also refer to the rate at which PowerPoint slides appear. If either the slide or the animation on the slide automatically appears, make sure the audience has adequate time to read the information or view the animation before the presentation continues.

Tone

Tone is the emotion you convey when speaking—excitement, annoyance, nervousness, lightheartedness, and so forth. Various factors, such as volume, pitch, and body language, affect how your tone comes across to your audience.

Before you begin rehearsing your presentation, think about what tone is appropriate for the content. Should you sound forceful, concerned, or matter-of-fact? Are there places in your presentation where a more humorous or more serious tone is appropriate? Think about the tone you should project, and practice setting that tone.

Exercise 1

In this exercise, you will work on refining the oral delivery of the annotated outline you developed in Exercise 4 of Section 8.1.

1. Set up a microphone to record yourself. (You may use a webcam if you wish.) For this exercise, assess yourself on your verbal delivery only, not your body language.)
2. Rehearse and record your presentation.
3. Replay the recording and assess yourself using the following criteria: resonance, enunciation, volume, pitch, pace, and tone. Rate yourself from one to five on each criterion, with five being the highest rating. Determine which areas are strengths and which areas you need to improve.
4. If you wish, ask another person to evaluate your presentation.



Figure: Image by Pixabay

The Power of Body Language

The nonverbal content of a presentation is just as important as the verbal delivery. A person's body language—eye contact, facial expressions, posture, gestures, and movement—communicates a powerful message to an audience before any words are spoken.

People interpret and respond to each other's body language instinctively. When you talk to someone, you notice whether the other person is leaning forward or hanging back, nodding in agreement or disagreement, looking at you attentively or looking away. If your listener slouches, fidgets, or stares into space, you interpret these nonverbal cues as signs of discomfort or boredom. In everyday conversations, people often communicate through body language without giving it much conscious thought. Mastering this aspect of communication is a little more challenging, however, when you are giving a presentation. As a speaker, you are onstage. It is not easy to see yourself as your audience sees you.

Think about times you have been part of a speaker's audience. You have probably seen some presenters who seemed to own the room, projecting confidence and energy and easily connecting with the audience. Other presenters may have come across as nervous, gloomy, or disengaged. How did body language make a difference?

Three factors work together powerfully to convey a nonverbal message: eye contact, posture, and movement.

Eye Contact and Facial Expressions

"Maintain eye contact" is a common piece of public-speaking advice—so common it may sound elementary and clichéd. Why is that simple piece of advice so hard to follow?

Maintaining eye contact may not be as simple as it sounds. In everyday conversation, people establish eye contact but then look away from time to time, because staring into someone's eyes continuously feels uncomfortably intense. Two or three people conversing can establish a comfortable pattern of eye contact. But how do you manage that when you are addressing a group?

The trick is to focus on one person at a time. Zero in on one person, make eye contact, and maintain it just long enough to establish a connection. (A few seconds will suffice.) Then move on. This way, you connect with your audience, one person at a time. As you proceed, you may find that some people hold your gaze and others look away quickly. That is fine, as long as you connect with people in different parts of the room.

Pay attention to your facial expressions as well. If you have thought about how you want to convey emotion during different parts of your presentation, you are probably already monitoring your facial expressions as you rehearse. Be aware that the pressure of presenting can make your expression serious or tense without your realizing it.

Tip

If you are speaking to a very large group, it may be difficult to make eye contact with each individual. Instead, focus on a smaller group of persons or one row of people at time. Look in their direction for a few seconds and then shift your gaze to another small group in the room.

Posture

While eye contact establishes a connection with your audience, your posture establishes your confidence. Stand straight and tall with your head held high to project confidence and authority. Slouching or drooping, on the other hand, conveys timidity, uncertainty, or lack of interest in your own presentation.

It will not seem natural, but practice your posture in front of a mirror. Take a deep breath and let it out. Stand upright and imagine a straight line running from your shoulders to your hips to your feet. Rock back and forth slightly on the balls of your feet until your weight feels balanced. You should not be leaning forward, backward, or to either side. Let your arms and hands hang loosely at your sides, relaxed but not limp. Then lift your chin slightly and look into your own eyes. Do you feel more confident?

You might not just yet. In fact, you may feel overly self-conscious or downright silly. In time, however, maintaining good posture will come more naturally, and it will improve your effectiveness as a speaker.

Tip

Nervousness affects posture. When feeling tense, people often hunch up their shoulders without realizing it. (Doing so just makes them feel even tenser and may inhibit breathing, which can affect your delivery.) As you rehearse, relax your shoulders so they are not hunched forward or pushed back unnaturally far. Stand straight but not rigid. Do not try to suck in your stomach or push out your chest unnaturally. You do not need to stand like a military officer, just a more confident version of yourself.

Movement and Gestures

The final piece of body language that helps tie your presentation together is your use of gestures and movement. A speaker who barely moves may come across as wooden or lacking energy and emotion. Excessive movement and gestures, on the other hand, are distracting. Strive for balance.

A little movement can do a lot to help you connect with your audience and add energy to your presentation. Try stepping forward toward your audience at key moments where you really want to establish that personal connection. Consider where you might use gestures such as pointing, holding up your hand, or moving your hands for emphasis. Avoid putting your hands in your pockets or clasping them in front of or behind you.

Writing at Work

When you give a presentation at work, wearing the right outfit can help you feel more poised and confident. The right attire can also help you avoid making distracting gestures. While you talk, you do not want to be tugging on necktie tied too tight or wobbling on flimsy high-heeled shoes. Choose clothing that is appropriately professional and comfortable.

Exercise 2

In this exercise, present the same oral presentation from Exercise 1, but this time, evaluate your body language.

1. Set up a video camera to record yourself, or ask someone else to evaluate you.
2. Rehearse and, if applicable, record your presentation.

3. Replay the recording and assess yourself (or have your companion assess you) on the following criteria: eye contact, facial expressions, posture, movement, and gestures. Rate yourself from one to five on each criterion, with five being the highest rating. Determine in which areas you have strength and in which areas you need to improve.

Rehearsing Your Presentation and Making Final Preparations

Practice is essential if you want your presentation to be effective. Speaking in front of a group is a complicated task because there are so many components to stay on top of—your words, your visual aids, your voice, and your body language. If you are new to public speaking, the task can feel like juggling eggs while riding a unicycle. With experience, it gets easier, but even experienced speakers benefit from practice.

Take the time to rehearse your presentation more than once. Each time you go through it, pick another element to refine. For instance, once you are comfortable with the overall verbal content, work on integrating your visuals. Then focus on your vocal delivery and your body language. Multiple practice sessions will help you integrate all of these components into a smooth, effective presentation.

Practice in front of another person (or a small group) at least once. Practicing with a test audience will help you grow accustomed to interacting with other people as you talk, and it will give you a chance to get feedback from someone else's perspective. Your audience can help you identify areas to improve.

Just as important as identifying areas for improvement, your audience can encourage you not to be too hard on yourself. When preparing for an oral presentation, many people are their own worst critics. They are hyperconscious of any flaws in their presentation, real or imagined. A test audience can provide honest feedback from a neutral observer who can provide support and constructive critique.

Managing Your Environment

Part of being a good presenter is managing your environment effectively. Your environment may be the space, the sound levels, and any tools or equipment you will use. Take these factors into account as you rehearse. Consider the following questions:

- Will you have enough space to move around in? Consider whether you might need to rearrange chairs or tables in the room in advance.
- Do you have enough space to display your visual aids? If you are using slides, where will you project the images?
- Will the lighting in the room need to be adjusted for your presentation? If so, where are the light switches located? How are window coverings opened or closed?
- Will your audience be able to hear you? Does the environment have any distracting noises, such as heating or cooling vents, outside traffic, or noisy equipment or machines? If so, how can you minimize the problem? Will you need a microphone?
- Do you have access to any technical equipment you need, such as a laptop computer, a projector, or a CD or DVD player? Are electrical outlets conveniently placed and functional?

You may not be able to control every aspect of the environment to your liking. However, by thinking ahead, you can make the best of the space you have to work in. If you have a chance to rehearse in that environment, do so.

Engaging Your Audience: Planning a Question-and-Answer Session

Rehearsing your presentation will help you feel confident and in control. The most effective presenters do not simply rehearse the content they will deliver. They also think about how they will interact with their audience and respond effectively to audience input.

An effective way to interact is to plan a brief question-and-answer (Q&A) session to follow your presentation. Set aside a few minutes of your allotted time to address audience questions. Plan ahead. Try to anticipate what questions your audience might have, so you can be prepared to answer them. You probably will not have enough time to cover everything you know about the topic in your presentation. A Q&A session can give you an opportunity to fill in any gaps for your audience.

Finally, accept that interacting with your audience means going with the flow and giving up a little of your control. If someone

asks a question you were not anticipating and cannot answer, simply admit you do not know and make a note to follow up.

Writing at Work

Increasingly, employees need to manage a virtual environment when giving presentations in the workplace. You might need to conduct a webinar, a live presentation, meeting, workshop, or lecture delivered over the web; run an online Q&A chat session; or coordinate a conference call involving multiple time zones.

Preparation and rehearsal can help ensure that a virtual presentation goes smoothly. Complete a test run of any software you will use. Ask a coworker to assist you to ensure that both you and the audience have all the tools needed and that the tools are in working order. Make sure you have contact information for all the key meeting attendees. Finally, know whom to call if something goes wrong, and have a backup plan.

Exercise 3

If you have not yet rehearsed in front of an audience, now is the time. Ask a peer (or a small group of people) to observe your presentation, provide a question-and-answer session, and have your audience provide feedback on the following:

- The overall quality of your content (clarity, organization, level of detail)
- The effectiveness of your visual aids
- Your vocal delivery (resonance, enunciation, volume, pitch, pace, and tone)
- The effectiveness of your body language (eye contact, facial expressions, posture, movement, and gestures)
- Your response to questions the audience posed during the question-and-answer session

Use your audience's feedback to make any final adjustments to your presentation. For example, could you clarify your presentation to reduce the number of questions—or enhance the quality of the questions—the audience asked during the question-and-answer session?

Coping with Public-Speaking Anxiety

The tips in this chapter should help you reduce any nervousness you may feel about public speaking. Although most people are a little anxious about talking to a group, the task usually becomes less intimidating with experience and practice.

Preparation and practice are the best defenses against public-speaking anxiety. If you have made a serious effort to prepare and rehearse, you can be confident that your efforts will pay off. If you still feel shaky, try the following strategies:

- Take care of your health. In the days leading up to your presentation, make sure you get plenty of sleep and eat right. Exercise to help cope with tension. Avoid caffeine if it makes you jittery.
- Use relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, and stretching to help you feel calm and focused on the day of your presentation.
- Visualize yourself giving a successful presentation. Image yourself succeeding. It will make you feel more confident.
- Put things into perspective. What is the worst that could happen if anything went wrong? Many people have given less-than-perfect presentations and lived to tell about it! Of course, you should make your best effort, but if something does go wrong, you can use it as a learning experience.
- Understand that you may not be able to overcome your nervousness completely. Feeling a little anxious can help you stay alert and focused. If you do not feel confident, try to "fake it until you make it."

Exercise 4

To practice overcoming public-speaking anxiety, ask a family member, coworker, or peer to view a rehearsal of the presentation. Schedule the rehearsal at a time that works for you, and plan to get plenty of rest the night before. After the presentation, answer the following questions.

1. When did you feel most nervous during the presentation? Make a note on your outline of the most nervous moments. Next to this note, add one strategy that may ease your anxiety. For example, you could add a reminder to relax, such as, “Take a deep breath here!” or a few words of encouragement, such as, “You are doing a great job!”
2. Ask your rehearsal audience for feedback on which moments of the presentation seemed most nerve wrecking for you. What nonverbal or verbal clues indicated to your audience that you were nervous? Which were most distracting to the audience? Make a note of these clues and practice the presentation again; be aware of how you show your anxiety and try to lessen these distractions.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing for Success. **Provided by:** The Saylor Foundation. **License:** CC-NC-SA 3.0.

This page most recently updated on June 5, 2020.

This page titled 16.3: Giving a Presentation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 8.3: Giving a Presentation by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

16.4: Key Takeaways

- An effective presentation presents ideas more concisely than a written document and uses media to explain ideas and hold the audience's interest.
- Like an essay, a presentation should have a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Good writers structure their presentations based on the thesis, or point of view; main ideas; and key supporting details and create a presentation outline to organize their ideas.
- Annotating a presentation outline is a useful way to coordinate different parts of the presentation and manage time effectively.
- Visual aids are most effective when they are chosen with the purpose and audience in mind. They serve to add emotional impact to a presentation and to organize information more clearly.
- Visual aids should always be clearly related to the presenter's ideas. Captions, labels, and other explanatory text help make the connection clear for the audience.
- Like writing, developing the visual components of a presentation is a process. It involves generating ideas, working with them in a draft format, and then revising and editing one's work.
- Visual aids can be divided into two broad categories—image-based media and informational graphics.
- Widely available software programs make it relatively easy to create visual aids electronically, such as photo images, charts, and graphs.
- When using visual aids created by others, it is important to apply good research skills, follow guidelines for fair use, and credit sources appropriately.
- Delivering an effective speech requires paying attention to both verbal delivery and body language.
- Good speakers rehearse their presentation and, if necessary, get feedback from others to help them refine their presentation before they deliver it.
- Monitoring one's vocal delivery involves paying attention to resonance, enunciation, volume, pitch, pace, and tone.
- Monitoring one's body language involves paying attention to eye contact, facial expressions, posture, movement, and gestures.
- Good speakers plan ahead to help them manage the presentation effectively.

This page titled 16.4: Key Takeaways is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative).

- 8.4: Key Takeaways by Athena Kashyap and Erika Dyquisto is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

17: GRAMMAR

17.1: Grammar chapter overview
17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs
17.3: Appositives
17.4: Articles
17.5: Commas
17.6: Contractions
17.7: Coordinators
17.8: Dangling Modifiers
17.9: Fragments
17.10: Possessives
17.11: Run-Together Sentences
17.12: Subject and Verb Identification
17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement
17.14: Subordinators
17.15: Verb Tenses

This page titled 17: Grammar is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15: Grammar by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.1: Grammar chapter overview

Adjectives and Adverbs: These are words you can use to modify—to describe or add meaning to—other words. Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. Examples: young, small, loud, short, fat, pretty. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and even whole clauses. Examples: really, quickly, especially, early, well.

Appositives: Appositives modify nouns for the purpose of offering details or being specific. Appositives begin with a noun or an article (a, an, the), they don't have their own subject and verb, and they are usually set off with a comma. Example: The car, **an antique Stingray**, cost ten thousand dollars.

Articles: The English language has definite ("*the*") and indefinite articles ("*a*" and "*an*"). The use depends on whether you are referring a specific member of a group (definite) or to any member of a group (indefinite).

Commas: Commas have many uses in the English language. They are responsible for everything from setting apart items in a series to making your writing clearer and preventing misreading.

Contractions: Apostrophes can show possession (the girl's hamster is strange), and also can show the omission of one or more letters when words are combined into contractions (do not = don't).

Coordinators: Coordinators are words you can use to join simple sentences to equally stress both ideas you are connecting. You can easily remember the seven coordinators if you keep in mind the word FANBOYS
(For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So).

Dangling Modifiers: All modifiers, words that add clarity, describe, or add detail to other words in a sentence, must be clearly and logically connected to their implied subjects, the grammatical subject of the clause nearest to the modifier. When they are not logically connected, they are called dangling modifiers.

Fragments: A sentence must contain a subject-verb unit; a fragment is a group of words that pretends to be a sentence but doesn't actually have a valid subject-verb unit. Example: Since they broke up.

Possessives: To show ownership of things, people or concepts, we use possessives. A common way to form the possessive is to add apostrophe + s. Example: the books of the student → the student's books.

Run-Together Sentences: Run-together sentences are the result of combining two or more complete sentences together without an acceptable joiner. Acceptable joiners for connecting independent clauses include: coordinators, subordinators, and semi-colons (;).

Subject & Verb Identification: Two of the most important parts of speech are subjects and verbs. Verbs are words that indicate action or a state of being, words like: write, run, tell, have, be, look, feel. The subject of a sentence performs the action(s) indicated by the main verb; that is, the subject is the doer of the action.

Subject-Verb Agreement: In the present tense verbs must agree with their subjects: both must be singular, or both must be plural. Examples: I breathe the air. He breathes the air. You must add an –s or –es at the end of the verb when the subject is a singular third person (he, she, it).

Subordinators: Like coordinators, subordinators can join simple sentences but they de-emphasize one of the ideas. Sentences with a subordinator (words such as *although, since, when, even though, because)* need to be connected to an independent sentence. Example: *Since she studied*, she got an A.

Verb Tenses: Tense refers to the form a verb takes in a sentence, whether to express the present, past or future.

This page titled 17.1: Grammar chapter overview is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.1: Grammar chapter overview by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and Adverbs - What are they?

Adjectives and adverbs are words you can use to modify—to describe or add meaning to—other words

Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. Examples of some common adjectives are: young, small, loud, short, fat, pretty. You can also identify many adjectives by the following common endings.

Adjectives and Adverbs Examples		
***-able*:** honorable, useable	***-ic*:** frantic, scientific	-**less:** ruthless, careless
***-al*:** parental, economical	***-ive*:** festive, disruptive	**-ous:** joyous, rebellious
***-ful*:** forgetful, soulful	***-ish*:** selfish, boyish	

Adverbs, on the other hand, modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and even whole clauses. Adverbs can tell us *how* something is done, *when* it is done, and *where* it is done. Examples of some common adverbs are: really, quickly, especially, early, well, immediately, yesterday.

While many adverbs do end with *"–ly",* don't take this for granted: some adverbs, like "almost" and "very" do not end this way, and some words that do end in *"–ly",* like "lively," are actually adjectives.

Connections: See also "Commas" and "Dangling Modifiers."

Comparatives and Superlatives

Many adverbs and most adjectives generally have three forms: the normal form; the comparative form, which you can use to compare two things; and the superlative form, which you can use to compare three or more things. The following chart gives you some guidelines for forming the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs.

Examples of Comparatives and Superlatives

Rules	Normal	Comparative	Superlative
Short adjectives & adverbs: • **Add -err for comparative** • **Add -est for superlative**	Green	Greener	Greenest
	Big	Bigger	Biggest
	Hungry	Hungrier	Hungriest
	Soon	Sooner	Soonest
	Late	Later	Latest

Longer adjectives & most longer adverbs ending in -ly: • Add “more” + adjective/adverb for comparative • Add “most” +adjective/adverb for superlative	Delicious	More delicious	Most delicious
	Incredible	More incredible	Most incredible
	Slowly	More slowly	Most slowly
	Easily	More easily	Most easily
	Brightly	More brightly	Most brightly
Irregular adjectives and adverbs have special forms	Good	Better	Best
	Bad	Worse	Worst
	Little (amount)	Less	Least
	Many	More	Most
	Well	Better	Best
	Badly	Worse	Worst

When using comparative and superlative forms, keep the following in mind:

- Many adverbs indicating time, place, and degree (i.e. tomorrow, here, totally) do not have comparative or superlative forms.
- Adjectives and adverbs that indicate an absolute or unchangeable quality should not be used with comparative and superlative constructions. Such absolute modifiers include words like final, main, impossible, perfect, unavoidable, unique.

Placement of Adjectives & Adverbs

Misplaced adjective or adverbs can cause confusion, as in the following example:

- **Shaken not stirred**, James Bond drank his martinis.

The writer is probably referring to the martinis, but the way this sentence is written, it implies that James Bond himself is shaken and not stirred.

For more information about misplaced adjectives and adverbs, see “Dangling Modifiers.”

Adjectives

In order to avoid confusion, try to place adjectives as close as possible to the nouns or pronouns they modify. Most one-word adjectives come right before the nouns they modify. In the examples below, the adjectives are **in bold** and the nouns they modify are *italicized*.

- He made a **delicious** *dinner*.
- The **hungry** *girls* devoured it quickly.
- Their **full** *stomachs* pushed against their jeans.
- But they couldn’t resist the **incredible** *dessert*.

One major exception to this rule is when an adjective follows a linking verb (i.e. is/are, was/were, feel, smell, taste, look, believe). For example:

- *Dinner* was **delicious**.
- The *girls* were **hungry**.
- Their *stomachs* felt **full**.
- *Dessert* looked **incredible**.

Be careful. Sometimes writers will use adverbs with a linking verb when what they really want is an adjective, or vice-versa. Choosing the adjective versus the adverb form of the same word has big implications for the meaning of a sentence. For example:

Adjective	Adverb
I feel bad. (I feel ill, depressed, apologetic)	I feel badly (I'm bad at feeling)

Multiple-word adjective phrases generally follow the noun or pronoun they modify, but occasionally can come before.

- The *girl* **snoring in the next room** woke up her roommate.
- The *customer* **annoyed with the slow service** complained to the manager.
- **Proud of her youngest son**, his *mother* showed his picture to strangers on the bus.

Adjective clauses—easy to identify because they start with the words "who," "whom," "whose," "which," "that," "when," and "where"— follow the noun they modify. For example:

- She had a goat **that she loved very much**.
- His favorite girlfriend, **who he thought was coming over later that evening**, had just received an anonymous phone call.

Adverbs

As with adjectives, adverbs need to be placed where the reader can clearly understand the meaning you intend. Adverbs are a bit more flexible, however. Both single-word and multiple-word adverb phrases can generally be placed either before or after the words they modify. In the examples below, the adverbs and adverb phrases are i**n bold** and the words they modify are in *italics*. For example:

- The lion *jumped* **skillfully** through the flaming hoop.
- The lion **skillfully** *jumped* through the flaming hoop.
- **Before next Wednesday**, *she* needed to cash her paycheck.
- *She* needed to cash her paycheck **before next Wednesday**.

Punctuating Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives

To help you decide whether or not you should use a comma when separating two or more adjectives, ask yourself the following two questions:

- Can the order of the two adjectives be reversed?
- Can the word "and" be put between the adjectives?

If either answer is yes, then the adjectives are coordinate, and you should use a comma. For example:

- Jessica is an ambitious, intelligent woman.
- Jessica is an intelligent, ambitious woman. [order reversed]
- Jessica is an intelligent and ambitious woman. [added "and"]

If you cannot reverse the order of the adjectives or add "and" to the adjectives, then they are cumulative, and do not require a comma. For example:

- Roger has fourteen silver horns.
- Roger has silver fourteen horns. [The reversed order does not work.] ⊗
- Roger has fourteen and silver horns. [The added "and" does not work.] ⊗

Adverbs

Place a comma at the end of an adverb phrase when it comes at the beginning of the sentence. For example:

- **After some thought**, she decided to buy her cousin's used car.

For more detailed information on when to use commas with adjectives and adverbs, please see the "Commas."

Practice

A. **Identify the adjectives and adverbs in the following sentences by marking the adjectives and the adverbs. For example** (adjectives in *italics* and adverbs **in bold**): The *one-eyed green* aliens stepped **cautiously** out of their spaceship.
   1. Their timid leader tentatively put one fat, calloused foot on the grass.
   2. She then gingerly placed the other foot down.
   3. She paused, thoughtfully scratched her forehead, and then started to waddle quite gracelessly toward a dim light.
   4. Soon the braver aliens followed her but the more cowardly aliens hung back inside the door of the silver spaceship.
   5. Suddenly, they heard a short, high-pitched yelp.
   6. The youngest alien had stepped accidentally on the tail of a small furry creature, and both of them cried out instinctively.
   7. The little alien regained his composure right away and, curious about the strange creature, he carefully reached down to pick up the frightened mouse.
   8. The mouse, still terrified, dashed away.
   9. It ran over the sensitive toes of several aliens who squealed loudly
   10. The resulting commotion distracted the group, and they didn't notice the two young children slowly riding up on their creaky three-speed bicycles.

B. Create more detailed sentences by adding your own adjectives and adverbs to modify the words in italics. For example: The *star punched* the *photographer*.
   1. The **reclusive** movie star **violently** punched the *pushy* photographer.
   2. The *island* was populated by *birds* that *soared* over the trees.
   3. It was also populated by *tourists* who stayed at the *resort* and *sat* by the *pool*.
   4. The *man* in a *suit* was *reading* a *magazine* on his morning commute to work.
   5. The *woman* next to him *sighed* as the train *stopped* in a tunnel.
   6. The neighbors *gossiped* about the *people* who lived in the *house* on the corner.
   7. UPS delivered *packages* to the back door and *strangers* in *cars* visited.
   8. The students in the computer lab *talked* to each other and *worked* on their *essays*.
   9. The *tutor helped* the *boy* with his *homework*.
   10. The *children ate* the *ice cream*.
   11. A *bully grabbed* one of the cones and *stuffed* it in his *mouth*.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

A. **Exercise A** (adjectives in *italics* and adverbs **in bold**)
   1. Their *timid* leader **tentatively** put *one fat, calloused* foot on the grass.
   2. She **then gingerly** placed the *other* foot down.
   3. She paused, **thoughtfully** scratched her forehead, and then started to waddle *quite gracelessly* toward a *dim* light.
   4. **Soon** the *braver* aliens followed her but the *more cowardly* aliens hung back inside the door of the *silver* spaceship.
   5. **Suddenly**, they heard a *short, high-pitched* yelp.
   6. The *youngest* alien had stepped **accidentally** on the tail of a *small furry* creature, and both of them cried out **instinctively**.
   7. The *little* alien regained his composure **right away** and, *curious about the strange creature*, he **carefully** reached down to pick up the *frightened* mouse.

["Curious about the strange creature" is an adjective phrase that modifies "he", and "strange" is an adjective that modifies "creature"]

8. The mouse, **still** *terrified*, dashed away.
9. It ran over the *sensitive* toes of *several* aliens *who squealed loudly* ["Who squealed loudly" is an adjective clause modifying "aliens"; within that clause, "loudly" is an adverb modifying "squealed"]
10. The *resulting* commotion distracted the group, and they didn't notice the *two young* children **slowly** riding up on their *creaky three-speed* bicycles.

B. **Exercise B:** Individual answers will vary.

This page titled 17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.2: Adjectives and Adverbs by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.3: Appositives

Appositives - What are they?

In your essays, you often want to use long, complex sentences to draw your reader in, to avoid the choppiness that comes from a series of short sentences, and to provide clear and vivid detail. While adjectives can modify nouns (the *blue* car), sometimes nouns themselves—appositives—also modify nouns for the purpose of offering details or being specific. Sometimes these appositives will be called noun phrase appositives (or NPAs).

Connections: For more help combining sentences, see "Adjectives and Adverbs."

What does an appositive look like?

- It will begin with a noun or an article (a, an, the).
- As a phrase, it **will not** have its own subject *and* verb.
- It will be usually set off with a comma, but occasionally is separated with a colon (:) or dash (—).

Examples:

- The **car** (noun), **an antique Stingray** (appositive), cost ten thousand dollars.
- Martha, **Beth's older sister,** came to the open-mic night with her guitar.
- To the baseball game Roger brought all his goodies: **balls, a glove, a hat and a sign**.
- She took her medication—**pain killers and cold medicine**—and hid them in her suitcase.

Create Your Own Appositives

Because you may be writing a whole new sentence to give just a little piece of information to your reader, try to make your writing less choppy and repetitive by using an appositive to combine the ideas.

You might have:

- I wanted to give Droopy to the SPCA before she attacked.
- Droopy is my sister's ferocious pit bull.

These sentences could easily be combined:

- I wanted to give Droopy, my sister's ferocious pit bull, to the SPCA before she attacked.

What happened to create the appositive? The writer noticed that the second sentence, "Droopy is my sister's ferocious pit bull" only gave more information about Droopy, who had already been introduced in the previous sentence. That additional information is dropped into the first sentence after the noun it modifies. Remember to use commas to set off the NPA.

A Note on Colons and Dashes:

You may be wondering when a colon or dash is appropriate to set off an NPA. Most of the time a comma will do just fine. Sometimes, though, you will wish to call more attention to the information in apposition—draw the reader's eyes to it—and in those instances, a dash (which is made with *two* hyphens "—") may do the trick. A colon is usually used when the NPA is a series or list of items ("I brought her favorite fruit: apples, oranges and peaches.")

Practice

Exercise 1 – Noun Phrase Appositives – Sentence Combining

Combine the following sentences using NPAs.

Example: I want to take the painting to the museum for donation. The painting is a Van Gogh.

COMBINED: I want to take the painting, a Van Gogh, to the museum for donation.

---

1. The lunch was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late. The lunch was a bowl of soup.
2. Maxwell's car topped fifty miles per hour—but barely. His car was a sleek Corvair.
3. The student body voted "no" on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly. The student body is a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college's location.
4. The pilot was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet. The pilot was a former Air Force mechanic. His jet was a Cessna Skylane.
5. I want to speak on the important subjects. The important subjects are philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.
6. After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal. The goal was a scholarship to a good college.
7. Even though you're willing to forfeit the prize, I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won't need the money. The prize would be my salary for a whole year.
8. The bear came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way. The bear was a sleepy grizzly.
9. Camped around the fire, each of us stared at the night sky. The fire was a glowing source of warmth. The night sky was a bowl full of sparkling stars.
10. Mrs. Peterson warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment. Mrs. Peterson is my least favorite teacher.

Exercise 2 – NPAs – Sentence Combining

For each of the following sentences, add one or more NPA to give the reader additional information. Make up whatever you like! (Hint: find the noun(s) in the sentence to look to see what can take an NPA.)

Example:

- The textbook fell from my desk.

CORRECT: The textbook, **a giant collection of poetry,** fell from my desk.

---

1. My best friend lost the race.
2. Bill Clinton took first prize for his book.
3. Joanne told Larry to go for a ride on his boat.
4. Napoleon discovered the "trapple."
5. My binder contains one hundred papers and two pamphlets.
6. The dog bit Bill in the leg before he could run into a house.
7. Her shirt nearly blinded me.

8. Abe Lincoln probably didn't use Log Cabin syrup.
9. I like the school's newest building.
10. Cindy took the money to the bank.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Noun Phrase Appositives – Sentence Combining

Combine the following sentences using NPAs.

1. The lunch was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late. The lunch was a bowl of soup.

The lunch, a bowl of soup, was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late.

2. Maxwell's car topped fifty miles per hour—but barely. His car was a sleek Corvair.

Maxwell's car, a sleek Corvair, topped fifty miles per hour—but barely.

3. The student body voted "no" on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly. The student body is a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college's location.

The student body, a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college's location, voted "no" on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly.

4. The pilot was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet. The pilot was a former Air Force mechanic. His jet was a Cessna Skylane.

The pilot, a former Air Force mechanic, was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet, a Cessna Skylane.

5. I want to speak on the important subjects. The important subjects are philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.

I want to speak on the important subjects: philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.

6. After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal. The goal was a scholarship to a good college.

After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal: a scholarship to a good college.

7. Even though you're willing to forfeit the prize, I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won't need the money. The prize would be my salary for a whole year.

Even though you're willing to forfeit the prize—my salary for a whole year—I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won't need the money.

8. The bear came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way. The bear was a sleepy grizzly.

The bear, a sleepy grizzly, came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way.

9. Camped around the fire, each of us stared at the night sky. The fire was a glowing source of warmth. The night sky was a bowl full of sparkling stars.

Camped around the fire, a glowing source of warmth, each of us stared at the night sky, a bowl full of sparkling stars.

10. Mrs. Peterson warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment. Mrs. Peterson is my least favorite teacher.

Mrs. Peterson, my least favorite teacher, warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment.

Exercise 2 – NPAs – Sentence Combining

For each of the following sentences, add one or more NPAs to give the reader additional information. Make up whatever you like! (Hint: find the noun(s) in the sentence to see what can take an NPA.)

NOTE: Answers will vary but one of the nouns in bold must be modified in each sentence.

1. My best **friend** lost the **race**.
2. **Bill Clinton** took first prize for his **book**.
3. **Joanne** told **Larry** to go for a ride on his **boat**.
4. **Napoleon** discovered the **"trapple."**
5. My **binder** contains one hundred **papers** and two **pamphlets**.
6. The **dog** bit **Bill** in the **leg** before he could run into a **house**.
7. Her **shirt** nearly blinded **me**.
8. **Abe Lincoln** probably didn't use **Log Cabin syrup**.
9. I like the school's newest **building**.
10. **Cindy** took the **money** to the **bank**.

This page titled 17.3: Appositives is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.3: Appositives by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.4: Articles

Articles - What are they?

The English language has definite ("the") and indefinite articles ("a" and "an"). The use depends on whether you are referring to a specific member of a group (definite) or to any member of a group (indefinite).

Indefinite Articles: "*a*" and "*an*"	Definite Article: "*the*"
You will use an indefinite article when referring to any member of a group or one your readers are not yet familiar with.	You will use the definite article when referring to a specific member of a group.
The indefinite article "*a*" is used when the word following it (which may be a noun or an adjective) begins with a consonant or with a consonant sound. • a dog • a computer • a onetime sale The indefinite article "*an*" is used when the word following it begins with a vowel (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, or *u*). • an apple • an ellipsis • an umbrella	The consonant and vowel rules that apply to "*a*" and "*an*" do not apply to the use of "*the*." • the neighbor's dog • the nice nephew • the mooing cows • the building • the red hairdryer • the airplane
If you were to say, "Juan set his keys on *a* table," it would tell the reader that Juan chose any table, an unspecific table, one of many. If you were to say, "Marcus goes swimming in *a* lake on Fridays," the reader understands that *which* lake Marcus chose really isn't important, and might even change from week to week.	If you were to say, "Juan set his keys on *the* table," it would tell the reader that Juan chose a specific table, one you may have already mentioned. If you were to say, "Marcus goes swimming in *the* lake on Fridays," the reader understands that it is a specific lake, and that he goes to the same place each week.

Plural Indefinite Article - *some*

You will use the word "some" before a plural noun (or its modifying adjective):

- some hairs
- some boxes

The singular: I put all of my clothes in *a* box I found in the basement.

The plural: I put all of my clothes in *some* boxes I found in the basement.

Plural Nouns

Plural nouns do not require an indefinite article: "I love apples," instead of "I love an apples." (You must use the definite article if you have already introduced the idea or are referring to a specific member of a group: "I love *the* apples grown across the street.")

Non-count Nouns

Non-count nouns, which include concepts and ideas that cannot be counted in number, may or may not require an article: no one hard and fast rule applies. You can write “Kindness spreads like wildfire,” **instead of** “A kindness spreads like wildfire,” or “The kindness spreads like wildfire” (unless you are referring to a specific kindness mentioned elsewhere in your writing, as in “the kindness you showed me”).

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns, which name a particular person, place or thing, sometimes take the article “*the*” and sometimes do not.

- Soda is damaging to your teeth, but everyone still drinks it.
- *The* soda in my cup is flat, so I think I will throw it out.
- We are going to meet at *the* White House.

Do not use “*the*” before:

- names of countries (except *the* Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and *the* United States)
- names of cities, towns or states
- names of streets
- names of lakes and bays (except a group of lakes—*the* Great lakes)
- names of mountains (except mountain ranges—*the* Rockies)
- names of continents
- names of islands (except island chains—*the* Canary islands)

Do use “*the*” before:

- names of rivers, oceans and seas
- points on the globe
- geographical areas
- deserts, forests, gulfs and peninsulas

Adapted from:

Owl Purdue English & *The Brief Holt Handbook*, Fourth Edition, Kirszner & Mandell, 2004.

Practice

Exercise 1 – Definite and Indefinite Articles

Fill in the blank for each sentence using either *a*, *an*, or *the*, or leave the space blank if none is needed.

Example:

I was going to **the** beach where my cousin Willie lost his board in the waves.

---

1. Last week _____ seagull dropped his fish onto my car.
2. Maria took out _____ garbage before reading.
3. _____ surfboard cut through the waves as she sped toward the beach.
4. Sculpture is _____ interesting art form, whether in metal, clay or uranium.
5. I love picnics—especially when I remember _____ food.
6. My house is falling apart, _____ shutters are in disrepair, and _____ windows are broken.

7. The brothers met to discuss _____ possible solution.
8. I went to the lab to work on _____ computer, but they were all taken.
9. Well, professor, _____ alien came and stole my gray matter before I could finish my homework.
10. This semester _____ same student violated his restraining order.
11. She passed him to avoid _____ confrontation involving _____ police.
12. I want to go to _____ part of Ukraine where they speak _____ Russian dialect.
13. The assistants found _____ theme that meant the most to them, and they wove it carefully into _____ handbook they could be proud of.
14. _____ airplane's tires skidded down _____ Los Angeles Airport's main runway before knocking out _____ baggage cart and _____ fuel truck.
15. I am studying _____ American history in school, but only after I pass my Biology class and ace _____ final exam.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Definite and Indefinite Articles

Fill in the blank for each sentence using either *a*, *an*, or *the*, or leave the space blank if none is needed.

1. Last week **a** seagull dropped his fish onto my car.
2. Maria took out **the** garbage before reading.
3. **The** surfboard cut through the waves as she sped toward the beach.
4. Sculpture is **an** interesting art form, whether in metal, clay or uranium.
5. I love picnics—especially when I remember **the** food.
6. My house is falling apart, **the** shutters are in disrepair, and **the** windows are broken.
7. The brothers met to discuss **a** possible solution.
8. I went to the lab to work on **a** computer, but they were all taken.
9. Well, professor, **an** alien came and stole my gray matter before I could finish my homework.
10. This semester **the** same student violated his restraining order.
11. She passed him to avoid **a** confrontation involving **the** police.
12. I want to go to **the** part of Ukraine where they speak **a** Russian dialect.
13. The assistants found **the** theme that meant the most to them, and they wove it carefully into **a** handbook they could be proud of.
14. **The** airplane's tires skidded down **X** Los Angeles Airport's main runway before knocking out **a** baggage cart and **a** fuel truck.
15. I am studying **X** American history in school, but only after I pass my Biology class and ace **the** final exam.

This page titled 17.4: Articles is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.4: Articles by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.5: Commas

Commas - What are they?

Commas have many uses in the English language. They are responsible for everything from setting apart items in a series to making your writing clearer and preventing misreading. Correct comma use is a difficult skill to master since it requires a combination of grammar knowledge and independent stylistic judgment.

Connections: For more help understanding sentence combining, turn to "Coordinators" and "Subordinators."

Sentence Combining

When you are joining ideas, phrases or clauses within a sentence, you often will use a comma for punctuation.

An **independent clause**, also known as a simple sentence, is a group of words that contains a subject (in *italics)* and a verb (in **bold**) AND can stand alone as a sentence. For example

- *The child* **went** to the dentist.
- *His girlfriend* **is** angry.
- *She* **will buy** a new pair of shoes.

You can join an independent clause with another independent clause using a coordinator (FANBOYS) and a comma:

- Angelo rides his bike**, and** Mary takes the bus.
- Marguerite grabbed the diamonds**, but** Oliver sold them on the black market.

You can easily remember the seven coordinators by keeping in mind the word "FANBOYS"

For And Nor

But Or Yet So

A dependent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb BUT it cannot stand alone because it starts with a **subordinator**, words like although, while, since, because, if, until, after. **For example:** the subordinators are **in bold,** and the subjects are *italicized,* and the verbs are ***bold and italicized***:

- **When** *the child* ***went*** to the dentist
- Because *his girlfriend* ***is*** angry
- Although *she* ***will buy*** new shoes

You will use a comma after a dependent clause to join it to the independent clause that finishes the thought:

- Even though Michael was allowed to go to the concert, his mother made sure he had completed all his homework.

However, if you reverse the order and put the independent clause first and the dependent clause second, you do not need a comma:

- His mother made sure he had completed all his homework even though Michael was allowed to go to the game.

Series

You will use commas to separate items in a series containing three or more coordinate elements.

- Ron, Maria, and Jessica play soccer every day after school.
- My favorite vegetables are Brussels sprouts, spinach, and cauliflower.
- I want either Fettuccine Alfredo, eggplant parmesan, or the linguine with clams in a white sauce.

You will use commas to separate items in a series of two or more coordinate adjectives—adjectives modifying the same idea independent of each other.

- It should be a *slow*, *lazy* day.
- Seven years passed in a *destructive*, *whirling* blur.
- He brought his *sleek*, *shiny* bicycle.

Commas are **not** required when the adjectives are cumulative, or when they describe different aspects of the same noun.

- Donnie sold me *ten gold* bowling balls.
- My favorites are the *lazy white* clouds.
- He ordered a *delicious chocolate* cake for the party.

Comma-Adjective Rule

To help you decide whether or not you should use a comma when separating two or more adjectives, ask yourself the following two questions:

- Can the order of the two adjectives be reversed?
- Can the word "*and*" be put between the adjectives?

If either answer is yes, then the adjectives are coordinate, and you should **use** a comma.

- Jessica is an ambitious, intelligent woman.
- Jessica is an intelligent, ambitious woman. [order reversed]
- Jessica is an intelligent *and* ambitious woman. [added "*and*"]

If you cannot reverse the order of or add "*and*" to the adjectives, then they are cumulative, and **do not** require a comma.

- Roger has fourteen silver horns.
- Roger has silver fourteen horns. [The reversed order does not work.]
- Roger has fourteen *and* silver horns. [The added "and" does not work.]

Setting off Nonessential Elements

Some modifying elements of a sentence are essential, restricting the meaning of a modified term, while others are nonessential and do not restrict the modified term's meaning. These nonessential elements, which can be words, phrases, or clauses, are set off with commas.

	Nonessential (Nonrestrictive)	Essential (Restrictive)
Adjective Clause	Students, *who use the majority of the Health Center's services*, claim to be especially sick this year. All students claim to be sick this year.	Students *who play any school sport* will receive free tickets to final game. Only students who play a school sport receive the tickets, not all students.
Prepositional Phrase	The professor, *with a wink*, dismissed her class early. Removing the phrase "with a wink" doesn't change the meaning of the sentence.	The professor *with no students* is good for very little. The prepositional phrase "with no students" tells what kind of professor is good for very little; it is essential.
Verbal Phrase	Popular politicians, campaigning in every small town in America, wave the American flag and kiss babies.	The politician campaigning for president has no time for a meaningful personal life.

	Nonessential (Nonrestrictive)	Essential (Restrictive)
Appositives	*The Big Lebowski*, a 1997 Coen Brothers film, is a modern mystery and a Western rolled into one.	The great American movie *The Big Lebowski* popularized the nickname “Dude.”

When deciding whether information is nonessential or essential, ask yourself this question:

- Is the modifier essential to the meaning of the noun or subject it modifies?

  NO: Nonrestrictive (use commas)

  YES: Restrictive (no commas)

Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitional words and phrases qualify, clarify, and make connections between ideas. They are usually set off with commas when they introduce, interrupt, or come at the end of a clause.

Transitions	
however	for example
therefore	on the other hand
thus	typically speaking
nevertheless	as a result
furthermore	alternatively

- Nevertheless, she took the bus knowing it would be late.
- On the other hand, money is money and I have to pay my rent.
- Rare horses, however, are something I would consider buying.

Note: When you use a transitional word to combine two independent clauses, you must use a semicolon or punctuate them as two separate sentences.

- Diamonds are rare; however, the coal that makes them is abundant.
- The best dogs raced first; therefore, the spectators all went home before it rained.
- Laughter is the best medicine; of course, penicillin also comes in handy sometimes.
- I wanted to finish quickly. Unfortunately, I still had three exams afterward.

Quotations

In most cases, use commas to set off a direct quotation from the identifying tag (*he said*, *she screamed*, *I wrote* and so on).

- Thoreau said, “To be awake is to be alive.”
- “To be awake is to be alive,” Thoreau said.
- “To be awake,” Thoreau said, “is to be alive.”
- “To be awake is to be alive,” Thoreau said. “I have never yet met a man who was quite awake.”

If the quoted text contains an exclamation point or a question mark, do not use a comma in addition:

- “Should we bring the casserole tonight?” he asked.
- “I love those children!” the father screamed.

Adapted from:

Practice

Exercise 1 – Commas – Dependent & Independent Clauses

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

Examples:

Although my mother told me not to get her a gift**,** I decided to make her a scrapbook.

I want to give more money to her charity**,** but I think the IRS already took too much of my salary.

---

1. Lately Katherine has wanted more companionship even though she rather likes to be alone.
2. Jerry vies for her attention but she has so much on her own mind as she suffers through this ordeal.
3. But whereas Alec acts like a friend he also wants Katherine's admiration.
4. So that she will be found innocent Miss Smatter will write another's confession.
5. Jerry eats his sandwich as coolly as the others do yet he can't shake the feeling of deception and mistrust.
6. Sabrina thinks that the apartment's rent is trivial while Kelly thinks it crucial.
7. Although Rachel has little say in the matter her friends could use the advice.
8. Because her dog was hit by a car he walks with a substantial limp.
9. The doctor set it with pins and even though he didn't scratch at it he was still forced to wear a giant collar.
10. Either the bill is paid within the month or the doctor will send a collection agency for the money.

Exercise 2 – Commas – Series and Adjectives

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

Example:

I want to pick fragrant**,** colorful daffodils**,** roses**,** and lilies for my sister's birthday party.

1. Lately Martin has been picking giant swollen mushrooms from his yard.
2. Sue won the "Vegetable Prize of the Day" that included carrots turnips and leeks.
3. Most people don't know that their favorite chips contain preservatives artificial flavors and MSG.
4. The three tall brothers took the brilliant shining vitamins before playing sports.
5. Watching movies reading books sleeping and exercising are my favorite weekend activities.

Exercise 3 – Commas – Essential and Nonessential Items

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

Example:

The racing fans**,** who rarely wave pennants**,** showed up in full force on Sunday.

---

1. Shelly my mother's step-sister gave me thirty dollars last week.
2. The campus police who rarely arrest any faculty members are responsible for patrolling all night long.
3. The man walking his dog down the street looks like my great-uncle Ted.
4. My grandmother with a terrible scream alerted me to the fire in her closet.
5. Doug gave me three helpings of dessert which was a crème brûlée.
6. Speaking as if he was consumed with fury Louis yelled to the audience.
7. The actor with no siblings starred in the blockbuster movie *Grammar Cop*.
8. The helicopter a Grasker A-7 flew over the vast and empty desert.
9. His wife the fifth one before Jane and after Cecilia always worried their marriage wouldn't last.

10. “Sonny’s Blues” the famous story by Baldwin contains rich allegory that weaves along with fascinating symbolism a rich fabric of text accessible to most readers.

Exercise 4 – Commas – Transitions

Add commas and/or semicolons where necessary in the sentences below.

Example:

Nevertheless, I wanted to go to the farm to see the llamas.

---

1. I didn’t want to see the whole country however I did want to visit the biggest states and prettiest parks.
2. On the other hand Martin said that Oklahoma is worth skipping.
3. Alternatively I dream about the open road even if it is scary sometimes.
4. My car takes five quarts of oil typically speaking.
5. I made the motel reservations already therefore I should leave next week.
6. Pharmaceuticals as a result are becoming more and more expensive.
7. Thus I will need to buy a new car before I set off on Sunday.

Exercise 5 – Commas – Quotations

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below.

---

1. “Imagination is more important than knowledge” Albert Einstein wisely once asserted.
2. Walt Disney offered excellent advice when he said “The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”
3. Do you agree with the assertion made by Socrates “An unexamined life is not worth living”?
4. "To be or not to be?” is one of the most quoted phrases from Shakespeare’s plays.
5. “Live as if you were to die tomorrow” Gandhi advised. “Learn as if you were to live forever.”
6. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley puts a forth a shocking assertion “Most men and women will grow up to love their servitude and will never dream of revolution.”

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Commas – Dependent & Independent Clauses

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

---

1. Lately Katherine has wanted more companionship even though she rather likes to be alone.
2. Jerry vies for her attention, but she has so much on her own mind as she suffers through this ordeal.
3. But whereas Alec acts like a friend, he also wants Katherine’s admiration.
4. So that she will be found innocent, Miss Smatter will write another’s confession.
5. Jerry eats his sandwich as coolly as the others do, yet he can’t shake the feeling of deception and mistrust.
6. Sabrina thinks that the apartment’s rent is trivial while Kelly thinks it crucial.
7. Although Rachel has little say in the matter, her friends could use the advice.
8. Because her dog was hit by a car, he walks with a substantial limp.
9. The doctor set it with pins, and even though he didn’t scratch at it, he was still forced to wear a giant collar.
10. Either the bill is paid within the month, or the doctor will send a collection agency for the money.

Exercise 2 – Commas – Series and Adjectives

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

---

1. Lately Martin has been picking giant, swollen mushrooms from his yard.
2. Sue won the “Vegetable Prize of the Day” that included carrots, turnips, and leeks.
3. Most people don’t know that their favorite chips contain preservatives, artificial flavors, and MSG.
4. The three tall brothers took the brilliant, shining vitamins before playing sports.
5. Watching movies, reading books, sleeping, and exercising are my favorite weekend activities.

Exercise 3 – Commas – Essential and Nonessential Items

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below. Some sentences will not require one.

---

1. Shelly, my mother’s step-sister, gave me thirty dollars last week.
2. The campus police, who rarely arrest any faculty members, are responsible for patrolling all night long.

3. The man walking his dog down the street looks like my great-uncle Ted.
4. My grandmother, with a terrible scream, alerted me to the fire in her closet.
5. Doug gave me three helpings of dessert, which was a crème brûlée.
6. Speaking as if he was consumed with fury, Louis yelled to the audience.
7. The actor with no siblings starred in the blockbuster movie *Grammar Cop*.
8. The helicopter, a Grasker A-7, flew over the vast and empty desert.
9. His wife, the fifth one before Jane and after Cecilia, always worried their marriage wouldn't last.
10. "Sonny's Blues," the famous story by Baldwin, contains rich allegory that weaves, along with fascinating symbolism, a rich fabric of text accessible to most readers.

Exercise 4 – Commas – Transitions

Add commas and/or semicolons where necessary in the sentences below.

1. I didn't want to see the whole country; however, I did want to visit the biggest states and prettiest parks.
2. On the other hand, Martin said that Oklahoma is worth skipping.
3. Alternatively, I dream about the open road even if it is scary sometimes.
4. My car takes five quarts of oil, typically speaking.
5. I made the motel reservations already; therefore, I should leave next week.
6. Pharmaceuticals, as a result, are becoming more and more expensive.
7. Thus, I will need to buy a new car before I set off on Sunday.

Exercise 5 – Commas – Quotations

Add commas where necessary in the sentences below.

1. "Imagination is more important than knowledge," Albert Einstein wisely once asserted.
2. Walt Disney offered excellent advice when he said, "The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."
3. Do you agree with the assertion made by Socrates, "An unexamined life is not worth living"?
4. "To be or not to be?" is one of the most quoted phrases from Shakespeare's plays. (no added comma)
5. "Live as if you were to die tomorrow," Gandhi advised. "Learn as if you were to live forever."
6. In Brave New World, Aldous Huxley puts a forth a shocking assertion, "Most men and women will grow up to love their servitude and will never dream of revolution."

This page titled 17.5: Commas is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.5: Commas by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.6: Contractions

Contractions - What are they?

Apostrophes can show possession (*the girl's hamster is strange*), and also can show the omission of one or more letters when words are combined into contractions. You would use a contraction to shorten and combine words. This is a list of the most common contractions.

Connections: For more help with contractions, see "Possessives."

Contractions

Long Form	Contraction
I am	I'm
I had	I'd
I have	I've
it is	it's
we will	we'll
they will	they'll
we are	we're
they are	they're
do not	don't
does not	doesn't
did not	didn't
let us	let's
is not	isn't
are not	aren't
should not	shouldn't
will not	won't
cannot	can't
would not	wouldn't
could not	couldn't
you would	you'd
who is	who's

In formal writing, contractions are not used as frequently (if at all). Some instructors allow contractions in assignments, and some do not. You should check with them about their policy if it is not clear from the syllabus. If you do use contractions, however, be sure to include the apostrophe in place of the letters you omit.

Practice

Exercise 1 – Contractions

In each of the sentences below, combine the words in long form into contractions.

Example: When John returns, he (will not) _____ want to eat dinner.

Correct: When John returns, he **won't** want to eat dinner.

---

1. The team is busy typing at the desk, but (they are) _____ not going to stay long.
2. It (is not) _____ that their parents are mean, but they (do not) _____ spend any time with them.
3. (You would) _____ have to be crazy to eat that fast food.
4. Paragraphs (are not) _____ my favorite thing to study, but they beat spelling.
5. In two more days (we will) _____ be sailing around the world.
6. The second student from the left (would not) _____turn in his test on time.
7. (Let us) _____ see what (I am) _____ doing next week so I (do not) _____ double-book.
8. (Who is) _____ coming to the party tomorrow?
9. This really (is not) _____ what I envisioned when I agreed to get paid.
10. The co-op (does not) _____ have any cereal unless (you are) _____ buying it in bulk.
11. In fact, (it is) _____ cheaper, healthier, and (should not) _____ be any less fresh.
12. (I have) _____ had a good experience at that store.
13. The food I brought home (would not) _____ ever go to waste.
14. (They will) _____ bag it for you and (will not) _____ drop anything.
15. (I am) _____ a fan of going to a co-op like this instead of the large chain stores.

Adapted from *Fog City Fundamentals*, Fourth Edition, Altman & Deicke, 1998.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Contractions

1. The team is busy typing at the desk, but **they're** not going to stay long.
2. It **isn't** that their parents are mean, but they **don't** spend any time with them.
3. **You'd** have to be crazy to eat that fast food.
4. Paragraphs **aren't** my favorite thing to study, but they beat spelling.
5. In two more days **we'll** be sailing around the world.
6. The second student from the left **wouldn't** turn in his test on time.
7. **Let's** see what **I'm** doing next week so I **don't** double-book.
8. **Who's** coming to the party tomorrow?
9. This really **isn't** what I envisioned when I agreed to get paid.
10. The co-op **doesn't** have any cereal unless **you're** buying it in bulk.
11. In fact, **it's** cheaper, healthier, and **shouldn't** be any less fresh.
12. **I've** had a good experience at that store.
13. The food I brought home **wouldn't** ever go to waste.
14. **They'll** bag it for you and **won't** drop anything.
15. **I'm** a fan of going to a co-op like this instead of the large chain stores.

Adapted from *Fog City Fundamentals*, Fourth Edition, Altman & Deicke, 1998.

This page titled 17.6: Contractions is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.6: Contractions by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.7: Coordinators

Coordinators - What are they?

Coordinators are words you can use to join simple sentences (aka **independent clauses**) and show the logical connections between ideas.

Use **coordinators** when you want to equally stress both ideas you are connecting; if instead you want to de-emphasize one of the ideas, use a **subordinator**.

You can easily remember the seven coordinators if you keep in mind the word **FANBOYS:**

Connections: See also the "Subordinators" and "Commas."

Coordinators

"FANBOYS" Mnemonic	Coordinators	Logical Relationship	Sample Sentences
F	**FOR**	Cause/Effect	I expect to see lots of green on Friday, *for* it is St.Patrick's Day.
A	**AND**	Addition	The Irish bars will be packed, *and* the beer will be flowing.
N	**NOR**	Addition of negatives	I won't drink green beer, *nor* will I drink a Shamrock Shake.
B	**BUT**	Contrast	I like the color green, *but* I don't think it's an appetizing color for a beverage.
O	**OR**	Alternative	Guinness is always a good choice, *or* if you're driving, water is a better choice.
Y	**YET**	Condition	I have to wake up early the next morning, *yet* I don't want to be anti-social.
S	**SO**	Cause/Effect	One of my friends is having a party, *so* I will probably drop by for a while.

Punctuation

Unless the clauses are quite short, put a comma before the conjunction when it joins two independent clauses.

- She brought home a big bag of Halloween candy that should have lasted weeks, but by the next day her little brother had eaten it all.
- He's tall but she's short.

Practice

Join the following sentences with the coordinator that most clearly expresses the logical relationship between the two ideas being connected. Hint: you should use each coordinator only once.

For Example: Calvin had his heart set on being a physics major. ~~He~~ **, but he** was horrible at math.

1. He could not understand geometry. He could not understand physics.
2. He took extra classes. The tutor couldn't seem to help.
3. He worked incredibly hard. Everyone in the math department was willing to help him.
4. He realized he would have to improve. He was going to have to give up his ambition to become a great physicist.

5. The other students could build catapults out of popsicle sticks and rubber bands. Calvin's catapult couldn't even launch a pebble.
6. Calvin's experiments were always unique. They proved that some basic law of nature no longer existed.
7. Calvin finally realized that he did not have it in him to be the next Stephen Hawking. He changed his major to English.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

1. He could not understand geometry**, nor** could he understand physics.
2. He took extra classes**, but/yet** the tutor couldn't seem to help.
3. He worked incredibly hard, **and** everyone in the math department was willing to help him.
4. He realized he would have to improve, **or** he was going to have to give up his ambition to become a great physicist.
5. The other students could build catapults out of popsicle sticks and rubber bands, **but/yet** Calvin's catapult couldn't even launch a pebble.
6. Calvin's experiments were always unique, **for** they proved that some basic law of nature no longer existed.
7. Calvin finally realized that he did not have it in him to be the next Stephen Hawking, **so** he changed his major to English.

This page titled 17.7: Coordinators is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.7: Coordinators by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.8: Dangling Modifiers

Dangling Modifiers - What are they?

All modifiers, words that add clarity, describe, or add detail to other words in a sentence, must be clearly and logically connected to their implied subjects, the grammatical subject of the clause nearest to the modifier. For example, in the following sentences we can easily connect the *italicized* modifiers with their implied subjects, which are **in bold**.

- *Happy with her new hula hoop*, the young **girl** skipped down the street.
- *Invigorated by the sunny weather*, **we** decided to go on a picnic in Golden Gate Park.
- *Before buying a hybrid car*, my **brother** used to ride a motorcycle.

Connections: *See also the "Identifying Verbs & Subjects" and "Adjectives & Adverbs."*

But sometimes, when writers use modifiers carelessly, their implied subjects are illogical. For example:

- *In examining his argument closely,* the **point** at which he went wrong can be seen.
- *To network more effectively,* **Scientology** is practiced by many actors.
- *Polite and respectful,* the visiting **teacher** was impressed with the children's manners.

The way the first two sentences are written, they imply that the point somehow examined his argument and that Scientology is trying to network more effectively— neither of these ideas make any sense. The third sentence, while not as obviously illogical, suggests that the visiting teacher was polite and respectful, not the children—almost certainly not what the writer intends.

Misleading or illogical constructions like these are called dangling modifiers. Dangling modifiers most often come at the beginning of a sentence, as in the examples above, but they can also come at the end of a sentence.

- In my English class, **attendance** was stressed, *taking off points for late arrivals and early departures*.

The way this sentence is written, it implies that attendance takes points off for late arrivals and early departures—an illogical statement.

Fixing Dangling Modifiers

In order to fix a dangling modifier, you need to revise your sentence so that the implied subject makes sense. You can do this by asking yourself *"who is logically doing the action of the modifier"*? For example:

EXAMPLES

Original Sentence	Revised Sentence
In examining his argument closely, the **point** at which he went wrong can be seen.	*Who is examining his argument?* **we** *In examining his argument closely,* **we** can see the point at which he went wrong.
To network more effectively, **Scientology** is practiced by many actors.	*Who is trying to network more effectively?* **actors** *To network more effectively,* many **actors** practice Scientology.

Original Sentence	Revised Sentence
Polite and respectful, the visiting teacher was impressed with the children's manners.	*Who is polite and respectful?* **the children** *Polite and respectful,* **the children** impressed the visiting teacher with their manners.
In my English class, **attendance** was stressed, *taking off points for late arrivals and early departures.*	Who stresses attendance? **the teacher** In my English class, the **teacher** stressed attendance, *taking off points for late arrivals and early departures.*

Practice

Read each sentence, marking the introductory modifier and the implied subject. Does the modifier logically connect with the implied subject? If the implied subject does not make sense, revise the sentence.

> For example: *Thought to have originated in the Indian Subcontinent*, **Eastern Europe** is now home to many Roma, better known as gypsies.
>
> *(Is Eastern Europe thought to have originated in India?* No, the Roma are, so we need to revise this sentence.)
>
> Revised: Thought to have originated in the Indian Subcontinent, many Roma, better known as gypsies, now live in Eastern Europe.

1. Reacting with suspicion and hostility to the Roma's distinct culture and nomadic lifestyles, they have historically been discriminated against by some native Europeans.
2. Taken to the extreme, persecution included enslavement and executions.
3. Known as the *Porajmos*, or the "devouring," in World War II, the Nazis carried out an attempted genocide that killed between 200,000 and 800,000 Roma.
4. Derogatory stereotypes are still perpetuated, characterizing the Roma as tramps and thieves.
5. Both embodying and transcending the sadness of this history, an important expression of traditional Rom culture is music.
6. Developed in Spanish Roma communities, the outside world is probably most familiar with flamenco music.
7. Brought to the Americas, Roma music has contributed to Cuban salsa, mambo, rumba and guajira music: Mexican mariachi music; and even American country music.
8. A celebration of the range and vitality of gypsy music, the Roma director Tony Gatlif made the excellent documentary Latcho Drom.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

1. Reacting with suspicion and hostility to the Roma's distinct culture and nomadic lifestyles, some native Europeans have historically discriminated against them.
2. No corrections needed.
3. In World War II, the Nazis carried out an attempted genocide known as the Porajmos, or the "devouring," that killed between 200,000 and 800,000 Roma.
4. Some people continue to perpetuate derogatory stereotypes, characterizing the Roma as tramps and thieves.

5. Both embodying and transcending the sadness of this history, music is an important expression of traditional Rom culture.
6. Developed in Spanish Roma communities, flamenco is probably the style of Roma music most familiar to the outside world.
7. No corrections needed.
8. A celebration of the range and vitality of gypsy music, Latcho Drom, is an excellent documentary by the Roma director Tony Gatlif.

OR

The Roma director Tony Gatlif made the excellent documentary Latcho Drom, a celebration of the range and vitality of gypsy music.

This page titled 17.8: Dangling Modifiers is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.8: Dangling Modifiers by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.9: Fragments

Fragments - What are they?

In English, a sentence must contain a subject-verb unit; a fragment is a group of words that *pretends* to be a sentence but doesn't actually have a valid subject-verb unit.

Connections: For a more detailed discussion of these terms, see the "Subjects & Verbs" and "Subordinators."

Common Sources of Fragments

1. The fragment is a **dependent clause**, a group of words that contains a subject-verb unit but cannot stand alone because it begins with a **subordinator**. For example:

    - *Since* they broke up
    - *Although* I am her cousin
    - *Unless* you stop doing that
    - *Because* he was tired

Other common subordinators include: though, even though, while, whereas before, after, if, when, as soon as.

2. The fragment is a **phrase**, a group of words that does not contain a subject-verb unit (a subject doing a verb). Many times, phrases are easy to identify. For example:

    - A long, strange trip
    - Lost in the supermarket
    - Jenny from the block
    - The richest man in Babylon

Two types of phrases can be a bit trickier to spot, however, because they contain words that *look* like verbs but aren't acting as part of a valid subject-verb unit:

A. ***-ing clauses***: Without a form of the verb "to be," **–ing** words cannot be part of the main subject-verb unit. For example:

    - The man **eating** a fig
    - The coyote **howling** at the moon

B. ***"Who, whom etc." clauses***: Verbs that are separated from the subject by the words "who," "whom," "whose," "when," "where," "that," and "which" cannot be part of the main subject-verb unit. For example:

    - The woman *who* disobeyed and got a ticket
    - The apple *that* she ate
    - The garden *which* she had to leave

Strategies for Fixing Fragments

In order to turn a fragment into a complete sentence, you have a couple of options.

1. **Often you simply need to combine a fragment with a neighboring sentence to produce a grammatically complete sentence. For example:**

FIXING FRAGMENTS

Fragment (in italics)	Complete sentence
Rocio made that mistake too. *But only when she wasn't paying attention.*	Rocio made that mistake too, but only when she wasn't paying attention.
Daydreaming about the weekend. I missed my exit.	Daydreaming about the weekend, I missed my exit.
My chatty next door neighbor. She loves to gossip.	My chatty next door neighbor loves to gossip.
I've never been back to El Salvador. *Since I left ten years ago.*	I've never been back to El Salvador since I left ten years ago.

2. **Other times, you'll need to complete the sentence by supplying the missing subject or verb, or by attaching an independent clause**

FIXING FRAGMENTS

Fragment (in italics)	Complete sentence
A laboratory for the study of animal life in the South Pacific.	A laboratory for the study of animal life is situated in the South Pacific.
The girl who wanted an 'A' in her English class.	The girl who wanted an 'A' in her English class re-wrote each essay three times.
The man thoughtfully scratching his beard.	The man was thoughtfully scratching his beard.
Since I only had a cookie for breakfast.	Since I only had a cookie for breakfast, I was starving by lunchtime.

Practice

A) Read the following groups of words and determine if they are grammatically complete sentences or if they are fragments.

For example: Going to community college FRAGMENT

1. A noticeable mistake which was on the flyer.
2. Whenever I get tired of doing my math homework.
3. The building across from the library is condemned.
4. My roommate who intends to finish college in four years.
5. My other roommate has been in college seven years.
6. Before the semester began.

7. The teacher who liked to listen to the sound of his own voice.
8. Because mid-terms are just about to start.
9. If I could be left alone to do my homework.
10. Although I don't usually enjoy hard work, I love studying Japanese.
11. Listening to tapes in the language lab is really time consuming.
12. The boy typed on the Mac in the computer lab.
13. The essay that I have to write.
14. While I was eating my lunch at the campus center.

B) Read the following sentences and fix any fragments you find.

For example: Sometimes, life is like a movie. A cheesy romantic comedy to be exact. Sometimes, life is like a movie, a cheesy romance comedy to be exact.

1. Anxious about his love life. He decided to visit a fortune-teller.
2. The fortune-teller asked for fifty dollars. And the names of his favorite movie stars.
3. Consulted her astrology charts and closely examined his palms.
4. She predicted someone important would soon come into his life. A tall, dark stranger.
5. While he was skeptical that such a clichéd prediction could come true.
6. The day that he would meet the stranger was cold and foggy. He was sipping hot chocolate at his favorite café.
7. The stranger who would change his life. She walked in the door and ordered a hot chai.
8. She asked if she could share his table. Because the other tables were full of students studying for their midterms.
9. Looking up from his crossword. He smiled and said yes.
10. As she sat down in the table across from him.

C) Now, read the following paragraph and a) underline any sentence fragments that you find b) fix these fragments by combining them with adjacent sentences or supplying missing words.

In "The Lottery," author Shirley Jackson implies that human beings are mindless, static creatures. Who cannot or will not free themselves from the domination of tradition. Even when a ritual has lost all purpose or value. This theme is dramatized in her own tale of a town's annual selection of one of its residents. For sacrifice at the hands of his or her neighbors. On June 27th of every year, the head of each household draws a lot from an old black box. To see whether someone in the household is the fated one.

On the day of the story's action, the proceedings are supervised by Joe Summers. An old-timer who oversees square dances, the teenager's club, and the Halloween program. The townsfolk are in a festive mood. Approaching the oncoming massacre of a neighbor with no more concern than they give to the milking of a cow. They are not troubled that they no longer know the reason for the ritual. The purpose that prompted their forebears to initiate the proceedings. They simply consider the drawing a necessity. One of the town's vital activities. Old Man Warner exemplifies the majority of the villagers. Sheep-like, he follows the dictates of tradition unquestioningly. "There's always been a lottery," he says. And, by implication, always will be.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise A

1. A noticeable mistake which was on the flyer**--fragment**
2. Whenever I get tired of doing my math homework**--fragment**
3. The building across from the library is condemned. **–sentence**
4. My roommate who intends to finish college in four years**--fragment**
5. My other roommate has been in college seven years**--sentence**
6. Before the semester began**--fragment**
7. The teacher who liked to listen to the sound of his own voice**--fragment**
8. Because mid-terms are just about to start**--fragment**
9. If I could be left alone to do my homework**--fragment**
10. Although I don't usually enjoy hard work, I love studying Japanese. **--sentence**
11. Listening to tapes in the language lab is really time consuming**--sentence**
12. The boy typed on the Mac in the computer lab**--sentence**
13. The essay that I have to write**—fragment**
14. While I was eating my lunch at the campus center**—fragment**

Exercise B

1. Anxious about his love life, he decided to visit a fortune-teller.
2. The fortune-teller asked for fifty dollars and the names of his favorite movie stars.
3. **She** consulted her astrology charts and closely examined his palms. *OR* **Consulting** her astrology charts, **she** closely examined his palms.
4. She predicted someone important, **a tall, dark stranger**, would soon come into his life.
5. **He** was skeptical that such a clichéd prediction could come true. *OR* While he was skeptical that such a clichéd prediction could come true, **he was secretly hoping it would**. [Any independent clause that would complete the sentence is acceptable.]
6. No revisions necessary.
7. The stranger who would change his life walked in the door and ordered a hot chai.
8. She asked if she could share his table because the other tables were full of students studying for their midterms.
9. Looking up from his crossword puzzle, he smiled and said yes.
10. As she sat down in the table across from him, **she helped him find the answer to seven across**. [Any independent clause that would complete the sentence is acceptable.]

Exercise C

In "The Lottery," author Shirley Jackson implies that human beings are mindless, static creatures who cannot or will not free themselves from the domination of tradition, even when a ritual has lost all purpose or value. This theme is dramatized in her own tale of a town's annual selection of one of its residents for sacrifice at the hands of his or her neighbors. On June 27th of every year, the head of each household draws a lot from an old black box to see whether someone in the household is the fated one.

On the day of the story's action, the proceedings are supervised by Joe Summers, an old-timer who oversees square dances, the teenager's club, and the Halloween program. The townsfolk are in a festive mood, approaching the oncoming massacre of a neighbor with no more concern than they give to the milking of a cow. They are not troubled that they no longer know the reason for the ritual, the purpose that prompted their forebears to initiate the proceedings. They simply consider the drawing a necessity, one of the town's vital activities. Old Man Warner exemplifies the majority of the villagers. Sheep-like, he follows the dictates of tradition unquestioningly. "There's always been a lottery," he says. And, by implication, there always will be.

This page titled 17.9: Fragments is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.9: Fragments by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.10: Possessives

Possessives - What are they?

Connections: For additional apostrophe-related material, see "Contractions."

To show ownership of things, people or concepts, we use possessives. The possessive form looks like this:

- The dog belonging to the boy shed hair on the floor.
- The talent of the singer is apparent after seeing her show.

But a simpler, more common and concise way, is to change the noun that does the possessing:

- The *boy's* dog shed hair on the floor.
- The *singer's* talent is apparent after seeing her show.

With a few exceptions, the following two rules cover nearly all you need to know about forming possessives:

1. To form the possessive of a noun, add apostrophe + s.
   - the books of the *student* → the *student's* books
   - the toys of the *girl* → the *girl's* toys
2. If the noun already ends in s, just add an apostrophe at the end of the word.
   - the books of the *students* → the students' books
   - the toys of the *girls* → the *girls'* toys

If a proper noun (a name) ends in -s, you may choose to add either apostrophe + s, or just the apostrophe alone, depending on whether you would pronounce the extra -s.

Moses' followers OR *Moses's* followers

Remember: Do not use -'s when you are simply showing the plural form:

CORRECT: Charbroiled eggplants are served here.

INCORRECT: Charbroiled eggplant's are served here.

Adapted from *Fog City Fundamentals*, Fourth Edition, Altman & Deicke, 1998

Practice

Exercise 1 – Possessives

Rewrite each group of words **in bold**, using apostrophes to show possession.

Examples: Nancy liked **the shape of the laptop**.

Revised: the laptop's shape

Jo often borrowed **the comb belonging to Nancy**.

Revised: Nancy's comb

---

1. Nancy was driving along with Jo in **the car owned by Beth**.
2. **The tires of the car** screeched to a halt after a confession.

3. Not even the defroster could fight **the fog of the windows**.
4. The two avoided the snow by walking underneath **the leaves of the trees**.
5. **The hands of Jo** were cold; warming them wasn't entirely out of the question.
6. "**The attitudes of people** just aren't ready for this," Nancy said.
7. The two looked to **the snowflakes of the sky** and saw white dusty stars floating by.
8. "We should go home and sit before **the heat of the fireplace**," Jo said.
9. "**The mugs that belong to Beth** should hold enough hot chocolate to warm us up."

Answer available at the end of this section.

Other Forms of Possessives

Joint Possession: The following pairs of nouns show joint ownership; two or more people own the same thing.

the string belonging to Rich and Eddie ⇨ Rich and Eddie's duck

the children of Bob and Edward ⇨ Bob and Edward's children

Rule: Nouns showing joint ownership have apostrophe + s added to the noun nearest the thing possessed.

Individual Possession: The following pairs of nouns show individual ownership. (Rich and Eddie probably do not own the same socks, nor do Bob and Edward use the same toothbrush.)

the socks belonging to Rich and Eddie ⇨ Rich's and Eddie's socks

the toothbrushes of Bob and Edward ⇨ Bob's and Edward's toothbrush

Rule: Nouns showing individual ownership have apostrophe + s added to **each noun**.

When NOT to use apostrophe + s:

Do not use 's to form possessive pronouns:

When NOT to use apostrophe + s

Pronouns	Adjective Possessive Pronoun (requires a subject to modify)	Possessive Pronoun
he	his	his
she	her	hers
it	its	n/a
we	our	ours
you	your	yours
they	their	theirs
I	my	mine

Practice

Which possessive pronouns belong in the following examples?

This is Kimberly's handbook. This is **her** handbook. The handbook is **hers**.

Those are Jessie's records. Those are _____ records. The records are _____.

That is Frank and Todd's car. That is _____ car. The car is _____.

The tall vase belongs to you. The tall one is _____ vase. The vase is _____.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Practice

Exercise 2 – Possessives

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

Examples:

- **The flavor of the coffee** was unusual. ⇨ the coffee's flavor
- I live in the **home of my parents.** ⇨ my parents' home
- We went to **the wedding of Joe and Kay.** ⇨ Joe and Kay's wedding
- He ironed **the clothes of Pete and May.** ⇨ Pete's and May's clothing.

---

1. **The combined losses of the North and South** were the greatest in any American war.
2. The president took away some of **the responsibilities of the chief-of-staff**.
3. We loved **the shoes of George and Sara**.
4. She was insulted by **the rude remarks of her sister-in-law**.
5. I couldn't stand **the behavior of Alan and Jennifer**.
6. **The information of the ambassador** was mostly incorrect.
7. **The voyages of Magellan and Columbus** were controversial.
8. **The novels of Fitzgerald and Nabokov** are among the most admired in modern literature.
9. One of the most famous events in American history is **the journey west of Lewis and Clark**.
10. Don't forget **the birthday of your mother-in-law.**

Answer available at the end of this section.

Adapted from *Fog City Fundamentals*, Fourth Edition, Altman & Deicke, 1998.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Possessives

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

1. Nancy was driving along with Jo in **the car owned by Beth (Beth's car)**.
2. **The tires of the car (The car's tires)** screeched to a halt after a confession.
3. Not even the defroster could fight **the fog of the windows (the windows' fog)**.
4. The two avoided the snow by walking underneath the **leaves of the trees (the trees' leaves)**.
5. **The hands of Jo (Jo's hands)** were cold; warming them wasn't entirely out of the question.
6. "**The attitudes of people (People's attitudes)** just aren't ready for this," Nancy said.
7. The two looked to **the snowflakes of the sky (the sky's snowflakes)** and saw white dusty stars floating by.
8. "We should go home and sit before **the heat of the fireplace," (the fireplace's heat)** Jo said.
9. "**The mugs that belong to Beth (Beth's mugs)** should hold enough hot chocolate to warm us up."

Practice

This is Kimberly's handbook. This is **her** handbook. The handbook is **hers .**

Those are Jessie's records. Those are **her** records. The records are **hers .**

That is Frank and Todd's car. That is **his** car. The car is **his .**

The tall vase belongs to you. The tall one is **your** vase. The vase is **yours .**

Practice

1. **The combined losses of the North and South (The North's and South's combined losses)** were the greatest in any American war.
2. The president took away some of **the responsibilities of the chief-of-staff (the chief-of-staff's responsibilities)**.
3. We loved **the shoes of George and Sara (George's and Sara's shoes)**.
4. She was insulted by **the rude remarks of her sister-in-law (her sister-in-law's rude remarks)**.
5. I couldn't stand **the behavior of Alan and Jennifer (Alan and Jennifer's behavior)**.
6. **The information of the ambassador (The ambassador's information)** was mostly incorrect.
7. **The voyages of Magellan and Columbus (Magellan's and Columbus's voyages)** were controversial.
8. **The novels of Fitzgerald and Nabokov (Fitzgerald's and Nabokov's novels)** are among the most admired in modern literature.
9. One of the most famous events in American history is **the journey west of Lewis and Clark (Lewis and Clark's journey west)**.
10. Don't forget **the birthday of your mother-in-law (your mother-in-law's birthday)**.

This page titled 17.10: Possessives is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.10: Possessives by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.11: Run-Together Sentences

Run-Together Sentences - What are they?

Contrary to popular belief, run-together sentences are not simply sentences that are too long. Instead, run-together sentences are the result of combining two or more **complete sentences** together without an **acceptable joiner**.

Connections: See also the "Subject & Verb Identification," "Coordination," and "Subordination."

A **complete sentence**, also known as an **independent clause**, contains a subject-verb unit and can stand alone.

Acceptable joiners for connecting independent clauses include:

- Coordinators (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
- Subordinators (words such as although, since, when, even though, if)
- Semi-colons (**;**)

We'll look at these acceptable joiners more closely in a moment, but first let's take a look at what CANNOT connect complete sentences. In the example sentences below, subjects are *italicized* and verbs are **in bold** so you can see the different independent clauses.

FIXING RUN-TOGETHER SENTENCES

Problem	RTS example:
Commas cannot connect two complete sentences—this type of RTS also referred to as a *comma splice*	His older *sister* **hit** him, the *boy* **started** to cry.
Transition words, with or without a comma, cannot connect two complete sentences—this can be another type of *comma splice*	*He* **took** four **ibuprofen**, then his headache **faded** away.
Not using anything to connect complete sentences is also incorrect—this is also known as a run-on sentence	My *teacher* **writes** RTS in the margins of my essay *I* **do** not **know** what she means.

Since it is easy to confuse transition words with coordinators and subordinators, we've included a chart on the next page to help you out:

USING CONNECTING WORDS

Logical Relationship	Coordinators (CAN join sentences)	Subordinators (CAN join sentences)	Transition Words (CANNOT join sentences)
Addition	and		also, further, additionally, furthermore, moreover, similarly
Contrast	but, yet	although, while, even though, even if, whereas, though	however, still, nevertheless, otherwise, on the other hand, instead, nonetheless, alternatively
Cause	for	because, since	
Effect	so	so that, in that, in order that	therefore, thus, consequently, hence, as a result

Logical Relationship	Coordinators (CAN join sentences)	Subordinators (CAN join sentences)	Transition Words (CANNOT join sentences)
Choice/ Alternative	or, nor		on the other hand, conversely
Condition		if, unless, provided that	otherwise
Time		after, before, as soon as, since, when, while, until, as	then, next, previously, subsequently, afterwards

How to Fix Run-Together Sentences

Use a coordinator (also known as a conjunction)

One way to fix a run-together sentence is to insert a comma and a coordinator to join the two independent clauses. For example:

USING COMMAS

Original RTS	Grammatically Correct Sentence
Her older *sister* **hit** him, the *boy* **started to cry**.	His older *sister* **hit** him, **so** the *boy* **started to cry**.

When you use a coordinator to fix a run-together sentence, make sure that you choose one that indicates the correct logical relationship between the two ideas you are connecting; the chart on the previous page can help you figure this out.

Use a subordinator

Another way to fix a run-together sentence is to use a subordinator to join the two independent clauses. For example:

USING SUBORDINATORS

Original RTS	Grammatically Correct Sentence
He **took** four **ibuprofen**, his *headache* **faded** away.	His *headache* **faded** away **as soon as** *he* **took** four **ibuprofen**. **As soon as** *he* **took** four **ibuprofen**, his *headache* **faded** away.

As you can see from the examples above, subordinators don't always need to be placed in the middle of sentence; they can also come at the beginning. When you do place the subordinator at the beginning of a sentence, you need to put a comma after the end of the first clause.

As with coordinators, when you use a subordinator to fix a run-together sentence, you need to make sure that you choose one that indicates the correct logical relationship between the two ideas you are connecting.

Use a semi-colon

A third way fix run-together sentences is by joining the two independent clauses with a semi-colon.

USING SEMI-COLONS

Original RTS	Grammatically Correct Sentence
My *teacher* **writes** RTS in the margins of my essay *I* **do** not **know** what she means.	My teacher writes RTS in the margins of my essay***; (however,)*** I don't know what she means.

You can pair a semi-colon with a transition word, but remember that transition words alone *cannot* join sentences. If you do use a transition word, be sure that it is one that indicates the correct logical relationship between the ideas you are connecting.

Split the RTS into two sentences

One final way to fix a run-together sentence is to spit it up into two independent clauses. For example:

SEPARATING SENTENCES

Original RTS	Grammatically Correct Sentence
My *teacher* **writes** RTS in the margins of my essay *I* **do** not **know** what she means.	My teacher writes RTS in the margins of my essay**. I** don't know what she means.

When you fix run-together sentences in this way, just be careful that you don't end up with a series of short, choppy sentences.

Practice

A) Fix the following run-together sentences using one of the seven coordinators (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

For example: I don't usually watch reality TV, **(yet)** I do love a show called *Project Runway*.

1. At the beginning of the season there are fourteen aspiring fashion designers, in the end only three people get to show at Olympus Fashion Week in New York.
2. The supermodel Heidi Klum hosts, famous designers serve as guest judges.
3. The contestants must take the design challenges seriously every week the loser goes home.
4. Some of the contestants have huge egos, they are unnecessarily competitive.
5. I don't have TiVo I am going to my friend's house to watch the season finale.

B) Fix the following run-together sentences using a subordinator:

For example: **(Since)** Many students have to cover their own living expenses, they work full-time.

1. She needed a part-time job, books and tuition were expensive this year.
2. She would have preferred not to have to work retail, the only job she could find was at a shoe store in the mall.
3. The customers were frequently demanding and rude, she liked her co-workers.
4. She had been working for a month, her employee discount kicked in.
5. She paid off her credit card bill, she was planning to buy a new pair of shoes.

C) Fix the following run-together sentences using a semi-colon; you can also include an appropriate transition word:

For example: As people get older they tend to get wiser**;** sometimes they also get fatter.

1. Orville was almost thirty-five his tummy had started to stick out.
2. His wife worried that his eating habits were unhealthy, she tried to encourage him to eat more fruits and vegetables.
3. Orville was not as concerned he would eat six cookies a meal without feeling guilty.
4. On the radio, Orville had heard that drinking green tea could help you lose weight he decided to stop drinking coffee that very day and put his coffee machine away.
5. Only he didn't really stop drinking coffee, he just stopped making it at home and went to the neighborhood café instead.

D) The following sentences are taken from actual student essays. Fix the RTS errors using an appropriate strategy; remember to think about the logical relationship between ideas when choosing a strategy:

1. The legalization of prostitution would actually help reduce crime, the prostitute wouldn't be a victim of extortion or beatings.
2. Police could stake out a street crime area instead of a brothel the effect would be safer streets and more efficient use of the police.
3. Not everybody is going to be so ambitious and work many will probably do nothing.
4. At one time people had responsibilities to their families and communities, now you only have to answer to yourself and no one else.

5. To some, divorce provides an easy out to their problems of getting along together, therefore they dissolve the marriage rather than work it out.

E) Now that you've had a chance to correct isolated sentences, try to find and fix the run-together sentences in the following paragraph:

Sleep is a subject we should all know a lot about, we spend one third of our lives sleeping. Even though everyone sleeps, scientists have only recently begun to understand what goes on when we sleep. They used to believe that the body repairs itself while asleep, there is some truth to this but the body also does this while awake. The brain does not simply shut itself off at night, it goes through a complicated series of chemical changes. Scientists have begun to chart these changes, working with complex instruments that measure brain-wave patterns. They have found that we do not move smoothly from being awake to being asleep, we pass through a cycle of four sleep stages. At each stage blood pressure and pulse rate drop, the body temperature also goes down. In the second stage the number and length of brain waves go up, while the sleeper's eyes begin to move rapidly back and forth behind their lids. Scientists call this activity rapid eye movements, or REMs, the activity that accompanies most of our dreaming. If a person is deprived of REM sleep, that person will soon become bad-tempered and irritable. A full night's sleep is not a single, unbroken state but consists of four or five of these multi-stage sleep cycles.

F) One more time! Some of the sentences in the following paragraph are run-together; find these sentences and fix them using the most appropriate strategy:

In 1867, a chef at a hotel in Saratoga Springs accidentally dropped some thinly sliced potatoes into hot cooking oil, instantly the world found a new delicacy: the potato chip. At the time, Saratoga Springs was America's most fashionable resort, fads that started there usually found immediate success. Almost overnight, the potato chip became Saratoga's hottest item. The wide, tree-lined avenues were filled with people eating potato chips, the huge veranda of the United States Hotel was no different; it was filled with chip-eaters too. Some of the richest, most powerful people in the world consumed them regularly, for instance, the Vanderbilts could often be seen daintily plucking chips from paper cups on their stroll back to their mansion. The elegant "Saratoga chips" remained the delicacy of the wealthy until 1925, when the first chip factory was constructed in Albany, New York. The potato chip was no longer the snack of only the rich and famous, it became a common household item. Of course potato chips have changed a great deal in the last hundred years, now they come in various textures and flavors, some even stacked in paper tubes. Still, the next time you grab a handful of greasy, flavor-dusted chips, you might pause to remember the noble origins of that humble food.

---

[3] Ibid.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Note that in correcting RTS errors, you will often have had a choice between two or more equally logical coordinators or subordinators; therefore, where appropriate, several possibilities are given for each sentence.

Exercise A

1. At the beginning of the season there are fourteen aspiring fashion designers, ***but/yet*** in the end only three people get to show at Olympus Fashion Week in New York.
2. The supermodel Heidi Klum hosts, ***and*** famous designers serve as guest judges.
3. The contestants must take the design challenges seriously every week, ***for*** the loser goes home.
4. Some of the contestants have huge egos, ***so*** they are unnecessarily competitive.
5. I don't have TiVo, ***so*** I am going to my friend's house to watch the season finale.

Exercise B

Although the original order of sentences has been retained in this answer key, you could also reasonably switch the order of ideas, so that the subordinate clause comes first, or vise-versa. This is demonstrated with the first sentence.

1. She needed a part-time job ***because*** books and tuition were expensive this year. OR ***Because*** books and tuition were expensive this year, she needed a part-time job.
2. ***Although/even though/though/while*** she would have preferred not to have to work retail, the only job she could find was at a shoe store in the mall.
3. ***Although/even though/though/while*** the customers were frequently demanding and rude, she liked her co-workers.
4. ***When/after/as soon as*** she had been working for a month, her employee discount kicked in.
5. ***When/after/as soon as*** she paid off her credit card bill, she was planning to buy a new pair of shoes.

Exercise C

In the following sentences, using a transition word—the words in brackets—is optional.

1. Orville was almost thirty-five***;*** his tummy had started to stick out.

2. His wife worried that his eating habits were unhealthy***; [therefore]*** she tried to encourage him to eat more fruits and vegetables.
3. Orville was not as concerned***;*** he would eat six cookies a meal without feeling guilty.
4. On the radio, Orville had heard that drinking green tea could help you lose weight***;*** he decided to stop drinking coffee that very day and put his coffee machine away.
5. Only he didn't really stop drinking coffee***; [instead]*** he just stopped making it at home and went to the neighborhood café instead.

Exercise D

1. The legalization of prostitution would actually help reduce crime ***because*** the prostitute wouldn't be a victim of extortion or beatings. OR The legalization of prostitution would actually help reduce crime, ***for*** the prostitute wouldn't be a victim of extortion or beatings.
2. ***If*** police could stake out a street crime area instead of a brothel, the effect would be safer streets and more efficient use of the police.
3. Not everybody is going to be so ambitious and work***;*** many will probably do nothing.
4. ***Although/even though/though/while*** at one time people had responsibilities to their families and communities, now you only have to answer to yourself and no one else. OR At one time people had responsibilities to their families and communities, ***but/yet*** now you only have to answer to yourself and no one else.
5. To some, divorce provides an easy out to their problems of getting along together***;*** therefore they dissolve the marriage rather than work it out.

Exercise E

Only the run-together sentences from the original paragraph have been reproduced below.

1. Sleep is a subject we should all know a lot about, for we spend one third of our lives sleeping. OR Sleep is a subject we should all know a lot about because we spend one third of our lives sleeping.
2. They used to believe that the body repairs itself while asleep; there is some truth to this, but the body also does this while awake.
3. The brain does not simply shut itself off at night, but it goes through a complicated series of chemical changes. OR The brain does not simply shut itself off at night; it goes through a complicated series of chemical changes.
4. They have found that we do not move smoothly from being awake to being asleep, but we pass through a cycle of four sleep stages. OR They have found that we do not move smoothly from being awake to being asleep; [instead,] we pass through a cycle of four sleep stages.
5. At each stage blood pressure and pulse rate drop, and the body temperature also goes down. OR At each stage blood pressure and pulse rate drop; the body temperature also goes down.[2]

[2] Altman, Pam and Doreen Deicke, Eds. Fog City Fundamentals, 4th ed. Pearson Custom Publishing: Boston, 1998.

Exercise F

1. In 1867, ***when*** a chef at a hotel in Saratoga Springs accidentally dropped some thinly sliced potatoes into hot cooking oil, instantly the world found a new delicacy: the potato chip. OR In 1867, a chef at a hotel in Saratoga Springs accidentally dropped some thinly sliced potatoes into hot cooking oil; instantly the world found a new delicacy: the potato chip.
2. At the time, Saratoga Springs was America's most fashionable resort, *and* fads that started there usually found immediate success. OR At the time, Saratoga Springs was America's most fashionable resort, *so* fads that started there usually found immediate success.
3. The wide, tree-lined avenues were filled with people eating potato chips, *and* the huge veranda of the United States Hotel was no different; it was filled with chip-eaters too. OR The wide, tree-lined avenues were filled with people eating potato chips. The huge veranda of the United States Hotel was no different; it was filled with chip-eaters too.
4. Some of the richest, most powerful people in the world consumed them regularly; for instance, the Vanderbilts could often be seen daintily plucking chips from paper cups on their stroll back to their mansion.
5. The potato chip was no longer the snack of only the rich and famous, ***for*** it became a common household item.
6. Of course potato chips have changed a great deal in the last hundred years; now they come in various textures and flavors, some even stacked in paper tubes.[3]

[3] Ibid.

This page titled 17.11: Run-Together Sentences is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.11: Run-Together Sentences by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.12: Subject and Verb Identification

Subject and Verb Identification - What are they?

Two of the most important parts of a sentence are subjects and verbs. Being able to identify subjects and verbs will allow you to create complete and clear sentences; it will also help you understand other grammatical concepts like fragments and run-together sentences.

Connections: See also the "Verb Tenses."

Identifying Verbs

Verbs are easy to identify because they are words that indicate action or a state of being, words like: write, run, tell, have, be, look, feel. Verbs are the only part of speech that gets **conjugated**, that is, that changes tense in order to indicate a particular time frame. This chart contains examples of some of the more common verb tenses:

CONJUGATING VERBS

Present (today)	Past (yesterday)	Future (tomorrow)	Present Progressive	Present Perfect	Past Perfect
I **learn**	I **learned**	I **will learn**	I **am learning**	I **have learned**	I **had learned**
I **swim**	I **swam**	I **will swim**	I **am swimming**	I **have swum**	I **had swum**

For more a comprehensive description of verb tenses and guidelines for using them correctly, see "Verb Tenses."

Sentences can contain several types of verbs and verb-like words; what we're interested in is finding the **main verbs**, the words that drive the action of a sentence. While all verbs *can* be conjugated, main verbs are the ones that actually *do* change when the entire sentence changes tense. To find which words are acting as the main verbs in a sentence, then, try changing the tense. For example:

LOCATING MAIN VERBS

Original sentence:	New tense:
Running a marathon **is** not fun.	Running a marathon **will** not **be** fun.
Hoping to build up her portfolio, the supermodel **is going** to Paris.	Hoping to build up her portfolio, the supermodel **went** to Paris.
To escape their stress, Liz and Ryan **have been watching** bad reality TV.	To escape their stress, Liz and Ryan **will be watching** bad reality TV.
The bicycle **had been** left in the rain.	The bicycle **was** left in the rain.

Identifying Subjects

The **subject** of a sentence performs the action(s) indicated by the main verb; that is, the subject is the *doer* of the action: the **diva was singing** (the diva is doing the action of "singing"), the **glass broke** (the glass is doing the action of "breaking"), the **audience started to applaud** (the audience is doing the action of "applauding).

To identify the subject of the sentence, you can ask yourself "who or what is (verb)?"

In the following examples, the subjects are *italicized* and the verbs are **in bold**.

LOCATING SUBJECTS

Sentence	Question --> Subject
Running a marathon **is** not fun.	>***What*** *is not fun? running*
The *supermodel* **is going** to Paris.	>***Who*** *is going to Paris?* the *supermodel*
Liz and *Ryan* **have been watching** bad reality TV.	>***Who*** *is watching TV? Liz* and *Ryan*
The *bicycle* **had been** left in the rain.	>***What*** *had been left in the rain?* the *bicycle*

As you might have noticed, words that end in **–ing** can are sometimes act like subjects:

- *Running* a marathon **is** not fun.

and sometimes they act as verbs:

- *Liz* and *Ryan* **are watching** bad reality TV.

As a general guideline, when an **-ing** word is preceded by a form of "be" (i.e. is, are, was, were), it is acting as a verb.

Practice

Find the subjects and main verbs in the following sentences. Mark the subject(s) and the main verb(s).

For example: To cheer himself up, *he* **watched** old detective movies and **ate** ice cream (the subject is *italicized* and the verbs are **in bold**)

1. After a long, rainy winter, the woman and her husband had become tired of their small apartment, so they decided to drive to a seedy part of town in search of excitement.
2. The couple had been cruising slowly down a side street, looking for some local nightlife, when they heard music coming from a small bar on the corner.
3. They had just left their car when some stray cats started fighting in a side alley.
4. When the couple walked in and sat down at the bar, nobody bothered to look up.
5. At one end of the bar, a tired-looking woman was languidly smoking her cigarette and expertly blowing out smoke rings.
6. The bartender was wiping down the counter and softly whistling to himself.
7. Hunched over a table in the back corner, four men were enjoying a friendly game of cards.
8. A sad Billie Holiday tune had been playing softly from an old jukebox, but once the song was over, the room went silent.
9. Suddenly, a man in the back stood and threw his cards down on the table, cursing loudly.
10. When he began to reach into his pocket, the couple looked at each other anxiously and then hurriedly backed out the door.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

The subjects are in *italics* and the verbs are **in bold:**

1. After a long, rainy winter, the *woman* and her *husband* **had become** tired of their small apartment, so *they* **decided** to drive to a seedy part of town in search of excitement.
2. The *couple* **had been cruising** slowly down a side street, looking for some local nightlife, when *they* **heard** music coming from a small bar on the corner.
3. *They* **had** just **left** their car when some stray *cats* **started fighting** in a side alley.
4. When the *couple* **walked** in and **sat** down at the bar, *nobody* **bothered** to look up.
5. At one end of the bar, a tired-looking *woman* **was** languidly **smoking** her cigarette and expertly **blowing** out smoke rings.
6. The *bartender* **was wiping** down the counter and softly **whistling** to himself.
7. Hunched over a table in the back corner, four *men* **were enjoying** a friendly game of cards.
8. A sad Billie Holiday *tune* **had been playing** softly from an old jukebox, but once the *song* **was** over, the *room* **went** silent.
9. Suddenly, a *man* in the back **stood** and **threw** his cards down on the table, cursing loudly.
10. When *he* **began** to reach into his pocket, the *couple* **looked** at each other anxiously and then hurriedly **backed** out the door.

This page titled 17.12: Subject and Verb Identification is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.12: Subject and Verb Identification by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-Verb Agreement - What are they?

In the present tense **verbs** must agree with their *subjects:* both must be singular, or both must be plural.

I breathe the air. He breathe**s** the air.

You breathe the air. She breathe**s** the air.

They breathe the air. It breathe**s** the air.

You must add an **–s** or **–es** at the end of the **verb** when the *subject* (or the entity performing the action) is a singular third person: **he**, **she**, **it**, or words for which these pronouns could substitute.

Examples: the subjects are *in italics* and the verbs are **in bold**

USING HE, SHE, IT

He, She, It	All others
Roberto **eats** all of the oranges.	*They* **eat** everything but the rind.
She **wonders** which constellations are hidden.	*I* **wonder** if Leo has already passed.
It **lasts** for another three hours or until they score.	*Veronica and Kevin* **last** as long as they can.

To Create the plural/singular

To make a **noun** plural, we usually add an **–s** or **–es**, as in the case of jar to jar**s** or box to box**es**.

A **verb** is singular, by contrast, when it is matched with a singular subject. A singular verb, then, usually has an **–s** or **–es** ending, as in the case of talk**s** and fix**es**.

Finding the subject and verb

To successfully determine whether or not your subjects and verbs agree, you need to be able to locate them in your writing. The subject in a sentence is the agent that is doing whatever is done in the sentence. The verb is the action--what is actually done. Look at this example:

- The zebra runs down the street.

  "*The zebra*" is the subject of this sentence, and "**runs**" is the verb.

Use Pronouns to Help

When the **pronouns** *he*, *she* or *it* are used as a subject in a sentence, the verb is always singular, and therefore will contain an –**s** or –**es** ending.

- *He* **takes** the money.
- *She* **stacks** the papers.
- *It* **chimes** hourly.

All other pronouns (I, you, we, they) require a plural verb (one without an –**s** or –**es** ending).

- *They* **skate** until March if the ice holds.

- *We* **borrow** money to pay our loans.

You can use these pronoun rules to determine whether your verb should be plural or singular. Let's look at a variety of subjects, and see which pronouns can replace them.

USING PRONOUNS

Subject	Pronoun substitute	Verb
John, Marion and Isaac	They...	grow.
The community forest	It...	grows.
The leading investigator	She...	
The Leaning Tower of Pisa	It...	

Practice

Mark the correct verb for each sentence:

Tip: write the pronoun above the subject to help you identify whether the verb should be singular or plural.

(He)

1. Jordan (hang / hangs) the picture upside down above his futon.
2. *Starry Night* (contain / contains) eleven stars and one swirling moon.
3. The hammers (pound / pounds) the nails until each corner is flush against the wall.
4. Van Gogh's sister (take / takes) most of the credit for his genius.
5. The yellows in the painting (swirl / swirls) around the blue sky rather than the other way around.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Complicated subjects

Some subjects include phrases that might confuse you into choosing the wrong verb. **The verb** agrees with the *subject*, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase.

- The *person* who loathes cats **plays** only with their tails.
- *One* of the brothers **is** missing.
- *The computer building*, including all of the labs, **closes** its doors promptly at seven.

Subjects connected by "and" require a plural verb. Subjects connected by "or" or "nor" require a singular.

- *John* and *Jeff* **drive** downtown.
- *A sandwich* or *muffin* **is** fine.
- Neither *rain* nor *shine* **helps** the soccer field.

If a compound subject has both plural and singular nouns, follow the pronoun rule for the noun closest to the verb.

- *One walnut* or *two acorns* **fill** a squirrel for a day.

Practice

Fill in the verb for each sentence below

SELECTING THE CORRECT VERB

Subject	Verb	Object
Martin and his mother	play [to play]	backgammon every day after work.
The junior or senior	[to march]	in the Homecoming parade.
A plum, and not the carrots,	[to provide]	valuable nutrients to the body.
Martha or Dan's children	[to scribble]	on the wall to create their art.
The banana's peel	[to stretch]	across the floor to make them trip.
Saving of electricity	[to take]	strong initiative, but benefits all of us.
The group of friends	[to call]	each card aloud to win the game.

Agreement Practice Paragraph: The Supreme Court

Mark each *subject* and **verb**, and fix any incorrect verbs. The first sentence is done for you:

The Supreme Court Justices **rejoices** after a particularly difficult decision. Though they usually lean on the chief justice to announce the ruling (unless he is in the minority) each celebrate in his or her own way. A reporter, speaking on the condition of anonymity, tells that in each session, the justices bickers back and forth even when they seem to agree. One or two bicker more than the others, but no one keep silent for long. All this bickering produces so much tension that when they finish a case, they all must go their separate ways until at least the following week when they repeat the whole process.

Answers

Practice

(***He***)

1. Jordan (**hang** / hangs) the picture upside down above his futon.

(***It***)

2. *Starry Night* (contain / **contains**) eleven stars and one swirling moon.

(***They***)

3. The hammers (**pound** / pounds) the nails until each corner is flush against the wall.

(***She***)

4. Van Gogh's sister (take / **takes**) most of the credit for his genius.

(***They***)

5. The yellows in the painting (**swirl** / swirls) around the blue sky rather than the other way around.

This page titled 17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.13: Subject-Verb Agreement by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.14: Subordinators

Subordinators - What are they?

Like coordinators (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), **subordinators** (see chart below) can join **independent clauses**, *aka* simple sentences, and can help you:

- Make your writing more fluid by connecting short sentences
- Make your writing more precise by showing your reader the logical relationships between ideas.

Connections: See also the "Coordinators" and "Fragments."

Let's take a look at some of the most common subordinators. As you can see from the sample sentences below, subordinators can appear either at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence.

Logical Relationship	Subordinators	Sample Sentence
Contrast/ Concession	although, while, even though, even if, whereas, though	***Although*** the young blond heiress was often in the news, she had no talent.
Cause	because, since	He started to worry about finding a job ***because*** he was almost finished with his last semester of college.
Effect/ Result	so that, in that, in order that	She enrolled in cooking school ***so that*** she could become a pastry chef.
Condition	if, unless, provided that	***If*** it is sunny this weekend, they are planning to have a barbeque.
Time	after, before, as soon as, since, when, while, until, as	***Until*** my brother pays me back for last time, I am not lending him any more money.

Subordinators & Dependent Clauses (aka Subordinate Clauses)

Joining two independent clauses with a subordinator transforms one of them—the one which begins with the subordinator—into a dependent clause. Even though this clause will still contain a subject-verb unit, it cannot stand alone as a sentence.

JOINING CLAUSES

Independent Clause (a complete sentence)	Dependent clause (no longer a complete sentence)
The young blond *heiress* **was** often in the news.	***Although*** the young blond *heiress* **was** often in the news
He **was** almost **finished** with his last semester of college.	***Because*** *he* **was** almost **finished** with his last semester of college

Dependent clauses pretending to be sentences are actually **fragments**, a grammar error you can read more about the "Fragments" section.

Subordinators & Emphasis

Unlike coordinators, subordinators do not give equal emphasis to the ideas they connect; instead, the clause that begins with a subordinator—the dependent clause— receives less emphasis. Compare the following two sentences:

- Although he wanted to see the movie, Guillermo did not want to spend ten dollars.
- Although he did not want to spend ten dollars, Guillermo wanted to see the movie.

In the first sentence, the subordinator "although" de-emphasizes Guillermo's desire to see the movie; his reluctance to spend the money seems more important. In the second sentence, however, the subordinator "although" de-emphasizes Guillermo's

reluctance to spend the money, and his desire to see the movie seems more important.

Be careful, then, when deciding where to place the subordinator—this placement can change the meaning of your sentence.

Punctuation

When a subordinator introduces a sentence, put a comma after the first clause.

- *After* she went to bed**,** she started to hear noises downstairs.

But if the subordinator comes in the middle of a clause, you don't need to set it off with a comma.

- She started to hear noises downstairs *after* she went to bed.

Practice

A) Join the following sentences using an appropriate subordinator. For the first four sets of sentences, you'll see a hint about the logical relationship you should show.

For example: Some rodents and birds prey on cockroaches.

Man is their biggest foe. [CONTRAST]

While some rodents and birds prey on cockroaches, man is their biggest foe.

1. Cockroaches are a health menace to humans. They carry viruses and bacteria that result in diseases from hepatitis to salmonella. [CAUSE]
2. Humans try to defeat cockroaches. Cockroaches are very successful at surviving our attacks. [CAUSE]
3. Cockroaches are smaller than the humans who chase them. They have extremely fast responses and sensitive receptors. [CONTRAST/CONCESSION]
4. There is no food. Cockroaches subsist on glue, paper, and soap. [TIME]
5. They can't find glue, paper or soap. They can draw on their body stores for three months.
6. Cockroaches are really desperate. They will turn into cannibals.
7. Female Suriname cockroaches produce generation after generation of identical females. They are able to clone themselves.

B) Join the following sentences with subordinators, making sure the word you choose indicates the appropriate logical connection between ideas.

1. They sat down with Red Cloud to discuss the purchase of the Black Hills. Whatever calmness the government commissioners still possessed must have been shaken.
2. Red Cloud calmly proposed that $600 million seemed like a fair price. The region was so valuable to the Native Americans and appeared even more valuable to the commissioners.
3. The Native Americans had reconsidered their price tag. They suggested that $6 million would be a reasonable offer.
4. The commissioners were too intimidated to negotiate. They returned to Washington and angrily recommended teaching the Native Americans a lesson.
5. The government immediately ordered all Native Americans to come onto the reservation at once. The demand was both illegal and impossible to comply with.

6. Most of the Native Americans could never know about the order. They were spread out all over the Black Hills.
7. The deadline came. Only one small band of Native Americans had come in.
8. The other Native Americans were now assumed at war with the government. The Indian Bureau turned the matter over to General Philip Sheridan.
9. It was a totally unprovoked war. No Sioux or Cheyenne had ever violated a treaty or actually attacked a U.S. citizen.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Note that in joining the two sentences, you will often have had a choice between two or more equally logical subordinators; therefore, several possibilities are given for each sentence. Note too that although the original order of sentences has been retained in this answer key, you could also reasonably switch the order of ideas, so that the subordinate clause comes first, or vise-versa. This is demonstrated with the first example in exercise A.

Exercise A:

1. Cockroaches are a health menace to humans ***because/since*** they carry viruses and bacteria that cause diseases from hepatitis to salmonella. OR ***Because/since*** they carry viruses and bacteria that cause diseases from hepatitis to salmonella, cockroaches are a health menace to humans.
2. ***Even though/although/though*** humans try to defeat cockroaches, they are very successful at surviving our attacks.
3. ***Although/even though/though*** cockroaches are smaller than the humans who chase them, they have extremely fast responses and sensitive receptors.
4. ***If/when*** there is no food, cockroaches subsist on glue, paper, and soap.
5. ***If/when*** they can't find glue, paper or soap, they can draw on their body stores for three months.
6. ***If/when*** cockroaches are really desperate, they will turn into cannibals.
7. Female Suriname cockroaches can produce generation after generation of identical females ***because/since*** they are able to clone themselves.

Exercise B:

1. ***When*** they sat down with Red Cloud to discuss the purchase of the Black Hills, whatever calmness the government commissioners still possessed must have been shaken.
2. ***Because/since*** the region was so valuable to the Native Americans, Red Cloud calmly proposed that $600 million seemed like a fair price.
3. ***After*** the Native Americans had reconsidered their price tag, they suggested that $6 million would be a reasonable offer.
4. ***Because/since*** commissioners were too intimidated to negotiate, they returned to Washington and angrily recommended teaching the Native Americans a lesson.
5. The government immediately ordered all Native Americans to come onto the reservation at once ***even though/although/though*** the demand was both illegal and impossible to comply with.
6. Most of the Native Americans could never know about the order ***because/since*** they were spread out all over the Black Hills.
7. ***When*** the deadline came, only one small band of Native Americans had come in.
8. ***Because/since*** the other Native Americans were now assumed at war with the government, the Indian Bureau turned the matter over to General Philip Sheridan.
9. It was a totally unprovoked war ***because/since*** no Sioux or Cheyenne had ever violated a treaty or actually attacked a U.S. citizen.

This page titled 17.14: Subordinators is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.14: Subordinators by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

17.15: Verb Tenses

Verb Tenses - What are they?

Tense refers to the form a verb takes in a sentence, whether to express the present, past or future.

Connections: For more help identifying subjects and verbs, turn to "Subject & Verb Identification."

VERB TENSE EXAMPLES

Simple Tenses	Perfect Tenses
Present: I *learn*.	**Present perfect: I *have learned*.**
Past: I *learned*.	**Past perfect: I *had learned*.**
Future: I *will learn*.	**Future perfect: I *will have learned*.**

Progressive Tenses

Present progressive: I *am learning*.

Past progressive: I *was learning*.

Future progressive: I *will be learning*.

Present perfect progressive: I *have been learning*.

Past perfect progressive: I *had been learning*.

Future perfect progressive: I *will have been learning*.

Simple Tenses

Present

The present tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *wear* organic cotton shirts [an action taking place when it is expressed].
- I *watch* the documentary on PBS each Sunday night [an action that occurs regularly].

Past

The past tense indicates that an action is completed and has already taken place.

- Martin Luther King, Jr. *gave* his most famous speech in 1963 [an action completed in the past].
- As a girl, she *wondered* how her college degree would help her career [an action that occurred once or many times in the past but did not extend to the present].

Future

The future tense indicates that an action will or is likely to take place.

- Later today I *will rinse* the dishes [a future action that will definitely occur].
- The defendant probably *will plead* innocent [a future action that is likely to occur].

Perfect Tenses

Perfect tenses designate actions that were or will be completed before other actions. You can form the perfect tenses with the appropriate tense form of the helping, or auxiliary, verb *have* plus the past participle.

Present perfect

The present tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *have worn* organic cotton shirts [an action that began in the past and is finished at the present].
- She *has donated* extensively to UNICEF [an action that began in the past and extends into the present].

Past perfect

The past perfect tense indicates an action occurring before a certain time in the past.

- By 1995, Doctor Harvey *had built* the first artificial brain.

Future perfect

The future perfect tense indicates that an action will be finished by a certain time.

- By Thursday, the President *will have apologized* for his mistake.

Progressive Tenses

The progressive tenses express continuing action. You can form them with the appropriate tense of the verb *be* plus the present participle.

Present progressive

The present progressive tense indicates that something is happening at the time you express it.

- The worker *is hammering*, and her foreman *is watching* lazily.

Past progressive

The past progressive tense indicates two kinds of past action.

- Poe's writing *was becoming* increasingly bizarre and dark [a continuing action in the past].
- The mob tackled Jean-Luc Goddard while he *was introducing* the film [an action occurring at the same time in the past as another action].

Future progressive

The future progressive tense indicates a continuing action in the future.

- The government *will be monitoring* the phones in the lab.

Present perfect progressive

The present perfect progressive tense indicates action continuing from the past into the present and possibly into the future.

- The teacher *has been grading* since yesterday afternoon.

Past perfect progressive

The past perfect progressive tense indicates that a past action went on until another occurred.

- Before her promotion, Nico *had been working* on restoring open space on campus.

Future perfect progressive

The future perfect progressive tense indicates that an action will continue until a certain future time.

- On Tuesday I *will have been working* on this paper for six weeks.

Adapted from *The Brief Holt Handbook*, Fourth Edition, Kirsner & Mandell, 2004.

Practice

Exercise 1 – Simple Past Tense

Fill in each blank with the correct past tense form of the verb provided.

Example:
PLAY We **played** dodge ball all afternoon.

FRY 1. We _____ the fish we caught in the lake.

STUDY 2. All of us _____ hard for the physics exam.

CRY 3. Mary _____ on his shoulder all through the movie.

MARRY 4. She _____ him on Tuesday and played slots that night.

TRY 5. Fred _____ to get in the concert by posing as a security guard.

SHOP 6. I _____ for all of my birthday presents at the art fair.

ADMIT 7. No one _____ that he was tired.

PLAN 8. Marty and Isabel _____ their marriage simply and loosely.

TERRIFY 9. The fireworks _____ the younger children.

Exercise 2 – Simple Past Tense

In each of the following sentences, mark any verbs that should have –ed or –d endings and supply the missing letters. Watch for time expressions (last week, yesterday, years ago) that indicate past time.

incorrect: The committee **vote** to adjourn yesterday.

correct: The committee **voted** to adjourn yesterday.

1. The driver ask for the exact fare last week.
2. Oliver use to live in Berkeley when he was a college student.
3. Katerina studied all the time and so she graduate from college last year.
4. College students are suppose to attend every class meeting.
5. Last Sunday, Laura listen to the drummers in the park.
6. Until I started school, I work twenty hours per week and study the rest of the time.
7. Finally Gayle's cat return home.
8. Several years ago I witness a crime and identify the criminal.

Exercise 3 – Perfect Tenses

Use the perfect tense to fill in the blank using the same time period (past, present, future) as the sample.

Example: Joan **licks** the popsicle. (present tense)

Joan **has licked** the popsicle. (present perfect tense)

(Remember: Perfect tenses for the verb *to run* are:

Present: she *has run*

Past: she *had run*

Future: she *will have run*)

1. Eric **took** piano lessons.

   Eric _____ piano lessons since he was ten years old.

2. Tara **raises** as many children as she can.

   Tara _____ as many children as she can.

3. Bill, on the other hand, **will join** the Coast Guard.

   Bill, on the other hand, _____ the Coast Guard.

4. Alyssa **gives** a drawing to each of her friends.

   Alyssa _____ a drawing to each of her friends.

5. Chickens **pecked** at bugs and fruit in the garden.

   Chickens _____ at bugs and fruit in the garden.

6. Each egg **will travel** a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

   Each egg _____ a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

7. The wings **had** plenty of room to spread.

   The wings _____ plenty of room to spread.

8. Madison **collects** the hay in the morning after breakfast.

   Madison _____ the hay in the morning after breakfast.

Exercise 4 – Progressive Tenses

In the following sentences, change the simple tense verbs to progressive tense verbs using the same time period (present, past, future). Avoid the perfect tense for this exercise.

Example: Martians land on the planet Earth. (present)

Martians **are landing** on the planet Earth. (present progressive)

(Remember: Progressive tenses for the verb *to run* are:

Present: she *is running*

Past: she *was running*

Future: she *will be running*)

1. Ferdinand **scoffed** when his friends all left for college.

Ferdinand _____ when his friends all left for college.

2. He **enjoys** his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

He _____ his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

3. The pumpkins **ripened** too long last year.

The pumpkins _____ too long last year.

4. His friends **will call** at the next holiday or break.

His friends _____ at the next holiday or break.

5. Ferdinand **answers** the phone saying “What?”

Ferdinand _____ the phone saying “What?”

6. He **screened** his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

He _____ his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

7. His money **goes** under his mattress until he needs it.

His money _____ under his mattress until he needs it.

8. He **will go fishing** next week if he gets his license.

He _____ next week if he gets his license.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Answers

Practice

Exercise 1 – Simple Past Tense

Fill in each blank with the correct past tense form of the verb provided.

Example:

PLAY We **played** dodge ball all afternoon.

FRY 1. We **fried** the fish we caught in the lake.

STUDY 2. All of us **studied** hard for the physics exam.

CRY 3. Mary **cried** on his shoulder all through the movie.

MARRY 4. She **married** him on Tuesday and played slots that night.

TRY 5. Fred **tried** to get in the concert by posing as a security guard.

SHOP 6. I **shopped** for all of my birthday presents at the art fair

ADMIT 7. No one **admitted** that he was tired.

PLAN 8. Marty and Isabel **planned** their marriage simply and loosely.

TERRIFY 9. The fireworks **terrified** the younger children.

COMPILE 10. The assistants **compiled** the materials into a great handbook.

Exercise 2 – Simple Past Tense

In each of the following sentences, underline any verbs that should have –ed or –d endings and supply the missing letters. Watch for time expressions (last week, yesterday, years ago) that indicate past time.

incorrect: The committee **vote** to adjourn yesterday.

correct: The committee **voted** to adjourn yesterday.

1. The driver **asked** for the exact fare last week.
2. Oliver **used to live** in Berkeley when he was a college student.
3. Katerina studied all the time and so she **graduated** from college last year.
4. College students are **supposed** to attend every class meeting.
5. Last Sunday, Laura **listened** to the drummers in the park.
6. Until I started school, I **worked** twenty hours per week and study the rest of the time.
7. Finally Gayle's cat **returned** home.
8. Several years ago I **witnessed** a crime and identify the criminal.

Adapted from *Fog City Fundamentals*, Fourth Edition, Altman & Deicke, 1998.

Exercise 3 – Perfect Tenses

Use the perfect tense to fill in the blank using the same time period (past, present, future) as the sample.

Example: Joan **licks** the popsicle. (present tense)

Joan **has licked** the popsicle. (present perfect tense)

(Remember: Perfect tenses for the verb *to run* are:

Present: she *has run*

Past: she *had run*

Future: she *will have run*)

1. Eric **took** piano lessons.

Eric **had taken** piano lessons since he was ten years old.

2. Tara **raises** as many children as she can.

Tara **has raised** as many children as she can.

3. Bill, on the other hand, **will join** the Coast Guard.

Bill, on the other hand, **will have joined** the Coast Guard.

4. Alyssa **gives** a drawing to each of her friends.

Alyssa **has given** a drawing to each of her friends.

5. Chickens **pecked** at bugs and fruit in the garden.

Chickens **had pecked** at bugs and fruit in the garden.

6. Each egg **will travel** a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

Each egg **will have traveled** a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

7. The wings **had** plenty of room to spread.

The wings **had had** plenty of room to spread.

8. Madison **collects** the hay in the morning after breakfast.

Madison **has collected** the hay in the morning after breakfast.

Exercise 4 – Progressive Tenses

In the following sentences, change the simple tense verbs to progressive tense verbs using the same time period (present, past, future). Avoid the perfect tense for this exercise.

1. Ferdinand **scoffed** when his friends all left for college.

Ferdinand **was scoffing** when his friends all left for college.

2. He **enjoys** his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

He **is enjoying** his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

3. The pumpkins **ripened** too long last year.

The pumpkins **were ripening** too long last year.

4. His friends **will call** at the next holiday or break.

His friends **will be calling** at the next holiday or break.

5. Ferdinand **answers** the phone saying "What?"

Ferdinand **is answering** the phone saying “What?”

6. He **screened** his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

He **was screening** his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

7. His money **goes** under his mattress until he needs it.

His money **is going** under his mattress until he needs it.

8. He **will go fishing** next week if he gets his license.

He **will be going fishing** next week if he gets his license.

This page titled 17.15: Verb Tenses is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Rachel Bell, Jim Bowsher, Eric Brenner, Serena Chu-Mraz, Liza Erpelo, Kathleen Feinblum, Nina Floro, Gwen Fuller, Chris Gibson, Katharine Harer, Cheryl Hertig, Lucia Lachmayr, Eve Lerman, Nancy Kaplan-Beigel, Nathan Jones, Garry Nicol, Janice Sapigao, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, Susan Zoughbie, Leigh Anne Shaw, Paula Silva, Jessica Silver-Sharp, Mine Suer, Mike Urquidez, Rob Williams, Karen Wong, and Susan Zoughbie.

- 15.15: Verb Tenses by Skyline English Department is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

DETAILED LICENSING

Detailed licensing information for this resource is not available at this time.

This page titled Reading and Composition (Urban) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

INDEX

A

academia
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

academic conversation
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

academic databases
11: The Research Process

academic journals
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles

academic publications
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

academic writing
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

add to the conversation
14: Responding to an Argument
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

adding an original point
14.6: Common Response Phrases

additional point
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

alternate argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate claim
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate frame
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate search terms
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

ambiguity
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

annotated bibliography
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography example
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography sample
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography template
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotation
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

argument response
14: Responding to an Argument

attribution
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

autonumheader:yes3
1: Readers, Writers, and Rule Breakers
1.1: You Are A Writer.
1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises[14]
1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches
1.3: The "White People" Language
1.4: Your Voice
1.5: Audience
1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises
1.6: There Are No Rules
1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules
1.8: You Are Also A Reader
1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises
10: Popular Culture + Literacy
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.10: MLA Essay Format
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
12: Evaluating Sources
12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources
12.2: Researching
13: Integrating Sources
13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing
13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations
13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper
13.4: Using Multiple Sources
13.5: Defining Plagiarism
13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information
14.3: “Yes, if…”- Suggest a way to limit the argument
14.4: “Yes, and…”- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
15: Style
15.1: Style Chapter Overview
15.2: Simplicity
15.3: Point of View
15.4: Word Choice
15.5: Sentence Crafting
15.6: Sentence Combining
15.7: Parallelism
15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words
16: Creating Presentations and Sharing Your Ideas
16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation
16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation
16.3: Giving a Presentation
16.4: Key Takeaways
17: Grammar
17.1: Grammar chapter overview
17.10: Possessives
17.11: Run-Together Sentences
17.12: Subject and Verb Identification
17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement
17.14: Subordinators
17.15: Verb Tenses
17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs
17.3: Appositives
17.4: Articles
17.5: Commas
17.6: Contractions
17.7: Coordinators
17.8: Dangling Modifiers
17.9: Fragments
2: Writing and College Success
2.1: Writing and College Success
2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology
2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student
2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner
2.1.4: Time Management
2.1.5: Key Takeaways
2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology
2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student
2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner
2.5: Time Management
2.6: Key Takeaways
3: Writing and the Art of Rhetoric
3.1: Writing as Conversation
3.2: What is Academic Writing?
3.3: Critical Thinking
3.4: The Art of Rhetoric
3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them
3.6: Rhetorical Analysis
3.7: Key Takeaways
4: The Reading-Writing Connection
4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection
4.10: How to Read Like a Writer
4.11: Key Takeaways
4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context
4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing
4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics
4.4: Questioning Strategies
4.5: Inferences
4.6: Vocabulary
4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes
4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details
4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing
5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting
5.1: The Reading-Writing Process
5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process
5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking
5.4: Argument
5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment
5.6: Prewriting Strategies
5.7: Outlining
5.8: Key Takeaways
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft
6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement
6.2: Topic Sentences
6.3: Writing the Essay Draft
6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs
6.5: Key Takeaways
7: Body Paragraphs
7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs
7.2: Types of Support
7.3: Working with Sources- Part I
7.4: Working with Sources- Part II
7.5: Creating Coherence
7.6: Key Takeaways
8: Revising and Editing
8.1: Revising and Editing
8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture
8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas
8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format
8.5: Proofreading
8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words
8.7: Key Takeaways
9: Critical Thinking + Information Literacy
9.1: Research Process and Scope
9.10: Information Value and Privilege
9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details
9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege
9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic
9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic
9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles
9.12: Misinformation and Fake News
9.13: Professional Conversations
9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors
9.2: Research Questions and Strategy
9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description
9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details
9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description
9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques
9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details
9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description
9.4: Evaluating Sources
9.5: Critical Reading
9.6: Persuasive Appeals
9.7: Using and Organizing Information
9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details
9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description
9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style
9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details
9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation
9.9: Information Power and Privilege
9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details
9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description
Reading and Composition (Urban)

B

better argument
14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument
bibliography
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
brainstorm
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
brainstorming
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
brainstorming keywords
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
building on a critique
14: Responding to an Argument

C

call for more information
14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information
call for support
14.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information
change
14.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument
choosing a topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

cid:engl100
- 11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
- 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
- 11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
- 11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
- 11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
- 14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
- 14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
- 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument
- 14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

cid:engl105
- 11: The Research Process
- 11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
- 11.5: Types of Sources
- 11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
- 11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
- 11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
- 14: Responding to an Argument
- 14.6: Common Response Phrases
- 14.7: Sample Response Essays
- 14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
- 14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

cid:engl110
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

circumstances
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

citations
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

clarification
- 14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

college essay
- 11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

college writing
- 11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

conclusion
- 14: Responding to an Argument

conclusions
- 14: Responding to an Argument
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

critical response
- 14: Responding to an Argument
- 14.7: Sample Response Essays
- 14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

critical response essay
- 14.7: Sample Response Essays
- 14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

critical response paper
- 14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

E

end notes
- 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

evidence
- 14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

exception
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

F

finding a voice
- 14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

fix
- 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

focused topic
- 11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

formatting
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

framing an argument
- 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

framing an issue
- 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

framing the argument
- 14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

further the discussion
- 14: Responding to an Argument

H

how to end a critique
- 14: Responding to an Argument

how to write a conclusion
- 14: Responding to an Argument

I

idea generator
- 14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

Implications
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

K

Key words
- 11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

keywords
- 11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

L

levels of credibility
- 11.5: Types of Sources

limit
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

literature
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

logical fallacies
- 3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

M

making a recommendation
- 14: Responding to an Argument

MLA
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
- 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
- 11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

MLA 9
- 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

mla annotation
- 11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

MLA essay
- 11.10: MLA Essay Format

MLA format
- 11.10: MLA Essay Format

MLA works cited
- 11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

Modern Language Association
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

N

narrowing the topic
- 11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

new idea
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

new point
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

O

opinion
- 14: Responding to an Argument
- 14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
- 14.7: Sample Response Essays

opinion essay
- 14: Responding to an Argument

original
- 14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

original point
- 14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
- 14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
- 14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

P

parenthetical
- 11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

peer review
- 11.5: Types of Sources
- 11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

phrases for responding
- 14.6: Common Response Phrases

prewriting
- 5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting

Q

qualification
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

qualify
- 14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

R

reason
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

recommendation
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays

research
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

research paper
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

research process
11: The Research Process

research question
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

research topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

responding
14: Responding to an Argument

responding to an argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases

response
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

response essay
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

response ideas
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

response templates
14.6: Common Response Phrases

response writing
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

S

sample analysis and response
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical analysis
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample critical response
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical response essay
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical response paper
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample critique
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample opinion essay
14.7: Sample Response Essays

sample opinion paper
14.7: Sample Response Essays

sample response
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample response essay
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample response paper
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

scholarly databases
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

search terms
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

searching databases
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

self expression
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

slow thinking
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

specific cases
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

student ideas
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

support
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

T

take the conversation a step further
14.6: Common Response Phrases

templates for responding
14.6: Common Response Phrases

thesis
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft

thesis statements
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft

topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

topic search
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

two cents
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays

V

vagueness
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

W

ways to respond
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

working thesis
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

works cited
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

Works Cited entry
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

This page titled Index is shared under a license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

This page titled Glossary is shared under a license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

DETAILED LICENSING

Detailed licensing information for this resource is not available at this time.

This page titled Reading and Composition (Urban) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.

INDEX

A

academia
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

academic conversation
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

academic databases
11: The Research Process

academic journals
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles

academic publications
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

academic writing
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

add to the conversation
14: Responding to an Argument
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

adding an original point
14.6: Common Response Phrases

additional point
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

alternate argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate claim
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate frame
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

alternate search terms
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

ambiguity
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

annotated bibliography
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography example
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography sample
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotated bibliography template
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

annotation
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

argument response
14: Responding to an Argument

attribution
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

autonumheader:yes3

1: Readers, Writers, and Rule Breakers
1.1: You Are A Writer.
1.1.1: First Batch of Exercises[14]
1.2: Red Pens and Elbow Patches
1.3: The "White People" Language
1.4: Your Voice
1.5: Audience
1.5.1: Second Batch of Exercises
1.6: There Are No Rules
1.7: Yes, There Are No Rules
1.8: You Are Also A Reader
1.8.1: Third Batch of Exercises
10: Popular Culture + Literacy
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.10: MLA Essay Format
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
12: Evaluating Sources
12.1: Tools for Evaluating Sources
12.2: Researching
13: Integrating Sources
13.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing
13.2: Smoothly Integrating Quotations
13.3: Using Sources in Your Paper
13.4: Using Multiple Sources
13.5: Defining Plagiarism
13.6: Avoiding Plagiarism
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
15: Style
15.1: Style Chapter Overview
15.2: Simplicity
15.3: Point of View
15.4: Word Choice
15.5: Sentence Crafting
15.6: Sentence Combining
15.7: Parallelism
15.8: Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words
16: Creating Presentations and Sharing Your Ideas
16.1: Organizing a Visual Presentation
16.2: Incorporating Effective Visuals into a Presentation
16.3: Giving a Presentation
16.4: Key Takeaways
17: Grammar
17.1: Grammar chapter overview
17.10: Possessives
17.11: Run-Together Sentences
17.12: Subject and Verb Identification
17.13: Subject-Verb Agreement
17.14: Subordinators
17.15: Verb Tenses
17.2: Adjectives and Adverbs
17.3: Appositives
17.4: Articles
17.5: Commas
17.6: Contractions
17.7: Coordinators
17.8: Dangling Modifiers
17.9: Fragments
2: Writing and College Success
2.1: Writing and College Success
2.1.1: Writing in an Age of Technology
2.1.2: Becoming a Successful College Student
2.1.3: Understanding Yourself as a Learner
2.1.4: Time Management
2.1.5: Key Takeaways
2.2: Writing in an Age of Technology
2.3: Becoming a Successful College Student
2.4: Understanding Yourself as a Learner
2.5: Time Management
2.6: Key Takeaways
3: Writing and the Art of Rhetoric
3.1: Writing as Conversation
3.2: What is Academic Writing?
3.3: Critical Thinking
3.4: The Art of Rhetoric
3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them
3.6: Rhetorical Analysis
3.7: Key Takeaways
4: The Reading-Writing Connection
4.1: The Reading-Writing Connection
4.10: How to Read Like a Writer
4.11: Key Takeaways
4.2: Critical Reading and Rhetorical Context
4.3: Reading Strategies - Previewing
4.3.1: 3.4 Annotation Basics
4.4: Questioning Strategies
4.5: Inferences
4.6: Vocabulary
4.7: Reading Strategies - Taking Notes
4.8: Main Ideas and Supporting Details
4.9: Paraphrasing and Summarizing
5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting
5.1: The Reading-Writing Process
5.2: Steps in the Reading-Writing Process
5.3: The College Essay Assignment- Analysis, Rubrics, and Critical Thinking
5.4: Argument
5.5: Purpose, Tone, Audience, Content in an Assignment
5.6: Prewriting Strategies
5.7: Outlining
5.8: Key Takeaways
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft
6.1: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement
6.2: Topic Sentences
6.3: Writing the Essay Draft
6.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs
6.5: Key Takeaways
7: Body Paragraphs
7.1: Strategies for Developing Paragraphs
7.2: Types of Support
7.3: Working with Sources- Part I
7.4: Working with Sources- Part II
7.5: Creating Coherence
7.6: Key Takeaways
8: Revising and Editing
8.1: Revising and Editing
8.2: Stage 1- The Big Picture
8.3: Stage 2- Fleshing Out Your Ideas
8.4: Stage 3- Sentences, Words, Format
8.5: Proofreading
8.6: How to Say Nothing in 500 Words
8.7: Key Takeaways
9: Critical Thinking + Information Literacy
9.1: Research Process and Scope
9.10: Information Value and Privilege
9.10.1: Information Value and Privilege Details
9.10.2: Text Description - Invisible Knapsack of Information Privilege
9.10.3: Text Description - Digital Divide Information Graphic
9.10.4: Text Description Profits by Industry Graphic
9.11: Confirmation Bias and Filter Bubbles
9.12: Misinformation and Fake News
9.13: Professional Conversations
9.14: Assignment Resources for Instructors
9.2: Research Questions and Strategy
9.2.1: Keywords Machine Readable Description
9.2.2: Research Questions and Strategy Details
9.2.3: Sarah's Keywords Machine Readable Description
9.3: Advanced Searching Techniques
9.3.1: Advanced Searching Techniques Details
9.3.2: Sarah's Keywords With Truncation Machine Readable Description
9.4: Evaluating Sources
9.5: Critical Reading
9.6: Persuasive Appeals
9.7: Using and Organizing Information
9.7.1: Using and Organizing Information Details
9.7.2: Common Knowledge Information Graphic Description
9.8: Citing Sources and APA Style
9.8.1: Citing Sources and APA Style Details
9.8.2: Text Description - Anatomy of a Citation
9.9: Information Power and Privilege
9.9.1: Information Power and Privilege Details
9.9.2: CCC Demographics - Machine Readable Text Description
Reading and Composition (Urban)

B

better argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument
bibliography
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
brainstorm
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
brainstorming
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing
brainstorming keywords
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
building on a critique
14: Responding to an Argument

C

call for more information
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
call for support
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
change
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument
choosing a topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

cid:engl100
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

cid:engl105
11: The Research Process
11.2: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles
11.7: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process
14: Responding to an Argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

cid:engl110
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

circumstances
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

citations
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

clarification
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

college essay
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

college writing
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

conclusion
14: Responding to an Argument

conclusions
14: Responding to an Argument
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

critical response
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

critical response essay
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

critical response paper
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

E

end notes
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

evidence
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

exception
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

F

finding a voice
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

fix
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

focused topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

formatting
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

framing an argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

framing an issue
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

framing the argument
14.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

further the discussion
14: Responding to an Argument

H

how to end a critique
14: Responding to an Argument

how to write a conclusion
14: Responding to an Argument

I

idea generator
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

Implications
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

K

Key words
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

keywords
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

L

levels of credibility
11.5: Types of Sources

limit
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

literature
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

logical fallacies
3.5: Logical Fallacies - How to Spot Them and Avoid Making Them

M

making a recommendation
14: Responding to an Argument

MLA
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

MLA 9
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

mla annotation
11.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

MLA essay
11.10: MLA Essay Format

MLA format
11.10: MLA Essay Format

MLA works cited
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

Modern Language Association
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

N

narrowing the topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

new idea
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

new point
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

O

opinion
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays

opinion essay
14: Responding to an Argument

original
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

original point
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

P

parenthetical
11.11: MLA In-Text Citations

peer review
11.5: Types of Sources
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

phrases for responding
14.6: Common Response Phrases

prewriting
5: The Reading-Writing Process- Prewriting

Q

qualification
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

qualify
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

R

reason
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

recommendation
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays

research
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts
11.4: Find the Conversation That Interests You

research paper
11: The Research Process
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

research process
11: The Research Process

research question
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

research topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

responding
14: Responding to an Argument

responding to an argument
14.6: Common Response Phrases

response
14: Responding to an Argument
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

response essay
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

response ideas
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

response templates
14.6: Common Response Phrases

response writing
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

S

sample analysis and response
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical analysis
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample critical response
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical response essay
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample critical response paper
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample critique
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample opinion essay
14.7: Sample Response Essays

sample opinion paper
14.7: Sample Response Essays

sample response
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

sample response essay
14.7: Sample Response Essays
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

sample response paper
14.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"
14.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

scholarly databases
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

search terms
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

searching databases
11.6: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

self expression
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

slow thinking
11.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

specific cases
14.3: "Yes, if..."- Suggest a way to limit the argument

student ideas
14.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

support
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information
14.4: "Yes, and..."- Suggest a way to add to the argument

T

take the conversation a step further
14.6: Common Response Phrases

templates for responding
14.6: Common Response Phrases

thesis
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft

thesis statements
6: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences and the First Draft

topic
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

topic search
11.8: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

two cents
14: Responding to an Argument
14.7: Sample Response Essays

V

vagueness
14.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

W

ways to respond
14.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

working thesis
11.3: Choosing a Focused Topic

works cited
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

Works Cited entry
11.12: MLA Works Cited Pages

This page titled Index is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

This page titled Glossary is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

DETAILED LICENSING

Detailed licensing information for this resource is not available at this time.

This page titled Reading and Composition (Urban) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Urban.