HOW ARGUMENTS WORK (REMIX)



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How Arguments Work: An Adapted Open Textbook for Composition

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction

Learning Outcomes

- Recognize ourselves as participants in a larger academic conversation.
- Explain how learning to write will help us academically, professionally, and personally.
- See reading and writing as tools for careful critical thinking.

1.1: Why Study Argument?

1.2: A Closer Look at Fast and Slow Thinking



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1.1: Why Study Argument?

Media Alternative

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When I was starting college, friends and relatives told me "college teaches you to think." I found this idea both puzzling and exciting. It was puzzling of course, because everyone thinks all the time. What was it exactly that we needed to learn? It was exciting because it suggested there was a whole other level of skill at thinking. It implied that college was about training the mind, not just about specific areas of expertise. Learning to think would change me and how I approached everything.



Image by Hans Braxmeier on Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

I imagined that this challenge to my thinking habits would come from the class readings and discussions. What I didn't know was that the process of writing, the process of developing my own arguments, would challenge me even more and become the core practice that stretched my thinking. I use the term "argument" here broadly to mean a presentation of ideas that usually includes reasons to support those ideas.

Most of us are probably familiar with the practical reasons to study writing in college. It's worth getting good at because we're going to do it a lot. No matter our major, as we get into higher-level classes we will need to do more writing, whether that looks like lab reports, explanations of mathematical methods, or essays in psychology, political science, literature, or economics.

We probably recognize, too, that writing skills will help us succeed in a career. To get a job, we'll have to write cover letters, resumes, and emails. On the job, we'll have to explain things to colleagues in writing. Nurses and doctors write notes on patient care; software engineers comment on the structure of their programs, managers write plans and evaluations. In all these settings, a professional style of Standard English will boost credibility. We will benefit from the ability to switch to this more formal type of language from any dialect we speak within our family and community.

But why does academia make writing so central? And why do so many professions depend on it? What makes writing so valuable? I would argue that academia and the professions need writing because it is our best tool for sharpening our thinking. It helps us slow down and clarify our ideas. Humans are not innately great at this. Many psychologists have argued that people tend to make decisions quickly and base them heavily on emotion. In his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* Daniel Kahneman describes the human tendency toward quick reactions and snap judgments with the deeper consideration we need for complex topics (we'll talk more about fast and slow thinking and human biases in the next section).



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Perhaps the highest goal of academia is to advance our understanding as humans. We can think of academia as a conversation of many voices that speak to each other across time and place, through the medium of writing. It's a good thing that each argument becomes part of this larger conversation because slow thinking is hard. It takes mental sweat. It takes time. We need each other's help and input. Reading, writing, and revising help us get clearer about our own ideas and those of others. These processes demand effort from every student and scholar, no matter how skilled and experienced they are. And the effort pays off.



Sometimes we need to dive deep to reach the bottom and think slow to arrive at an insight.
Photo by Jakob Boman on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

The slow thinking skills that college cultivates also help us as professionals in fields beyond the academy. Reading, writing, and revising allow us to think carefully about each workplace decision, considering multiple factors and perspectives. They enable us to communicate and explain our decisions to colleagues and respond to their questions and critiques.

But slow thinking is not just for academic work and professional life. I believe I was right to get excited when I heard "college teaches thinking," because the slow thinking we practice as readers and writers is transformative for our personal lives. Slow thinking is a tool for soul searching. High-stakes life questions involve so many complex considerations that they demand extended thought. What major and career should I pursue? How much should I work while in school? These questions require research into the options, and a careful weighing of our values and interests, economic pressures, and family demands, as well as our dreams and desires. Even if we end up going with an intuition or first impulse, such decisions are worth confirming with slower thinking. As Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky put it in *From Inquiry to Academic Writing*, "[L]earning to consider information carefully and critically, and to weigh competing points of view before making our own judgments--gives us power over our own lives" (11).

Argument can help us gain power in society as well. Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor, authors of *A Rhetoric of Argument*, go so far as to see it as a tool "to equalize the unequal distribution of power that exists in every institution and situation" (8). Those of us who don't start out with power can try to build it by arguing well about the issues that matter to us and our communities. Argument doesn't always work, but it's always part of successful attempts to change things. The habits of mind we learn as readers and writers can also help us develop political opinions in the first place. Our participation in democracy, whether that means voting or any kind of political activity, local or national, requires myriad decisions on very complex issues. Which drugs should be legal? How should we address climate change? How should we ensure public safety? How much money should the government take from citizens, and how should it spend that money? How do we move toward a more just society? These big questions involve countless smaller ones that require ongoing debate and consideration.

Slow thinking doesn't come easily, even for supposed experts. As writers and thinkers, we will all feel at times that we are struggling in the dark. In writing this introduction, I have had to remind myself several times: "Just keep writing; it will eventually come together;" "The ideas are always foggy at first;" "Give yourself permission to write a shitty first draft;" "Remember, a bad first draft!" and other mantras. I remind myself of the many times I have been through this and the "aha" moments that came along the way. I remind myself that when I keep working, I eventually make it through the short-term frustration and gain increased clarity.

Even though slow thinking never gets easy, it does get easier. There are specific moves we can learn that will help a great deal. We pick up these moves unconsciously from other writers as we read. But we can also learn them directly. This textbook points out the

common moves writers make as they develop arguments. It shows how to recognize these moves as we read and how to make similar moves as we write.



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1.2: A Closer Look at Fast and Slow Thinking

Look at this picture, and notice your first reaction. Do you have an emotional reaction, good or bad? What is your opinion right off the bat? Going with your gut, what do you think? Notice I am asking you about two things: (1) your emotional reaction and (2) your first thought.



Image by Rhododentrites on Wikimedia Commons, licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

If you are a Dreamer yourself or if you have DACA protection or you were brought to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant as a child, you probably agree (your first thought) and your emotional reaction might be something like, “Yeah!” Even if you are not a Dreamer, you may have a similar positive reaction. If you haven't thought too much about Dreamers before or are unfamiliar with the issues surrounding them, you might be tempted to still respond positively because of the positive word "Dreamer" and the appeal to America's greatness. Or, if you lean to the right politically and are familiar with right-wing rhetoric on immigration, you may have the opposite reaction: you disagree with the protester and react negatively, something like, “this is BS!”

This instant reaction, your gut feeling and first thought, we will call “fast thinking.” In his book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman presents evidence from psychology about how the human mind works. Your quick reaction to the photo is what Kahneman calls fast thinking, which is quick, automatic, and little effort is involved. Other examples of fast thinking: looking up when you hear a loud noise, saying “fine” when someone says “how are you,” or finishing 2 + 2 = ___. In contrast, slow thinking takes time and effort. When you tell someone your phone number, park a car in a small spot, figure out 24 x 17 = _____, or write an essay for English, you must do slow thinking. As a human being, we do both fast and slow thinking every day. In this chapter, we will analyze the photo to explore the ways that people think fast and slow and to see how academic slow thinking approaches might lead to better understanding of the issues raised in the photo.

Fast thinking and emotion

“I have a bad feeling about this.” - Han Solo

Let’s start with the idea of emotion and fast thinking. In the U.S., illegal immigration is an emotional issue, and psychologists have found that people often make decisions based on their emotions. In *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt argues that people make moral decisions, make up their minds about right and wrong, very fast and largely based on gut feelings. People decide “immediately and emotionally,” and reasoning is “merely the servant of the passions.” Looking at the photo of the protester with a sign saying, “Dreamers make America great,” we will decide what we think fast and based largely on emotion. We don’t immediately do slow thinking; we don’t say “I have no opinion; I need to see if there is evidence proving that Dreamers are good for America; show me the stats.” Instead, we decide in an instant based on our feelings.

In a way, this is a bad thing: we shouldn’t be so quick to jump to conclusions, and we should examine the evidence! However, psychologists have also found that people *need* their emotions to think clearly. Antonio Damasio and others discovered that people who have lost their ability to feel emotion—based on a brain tumor or injury to the brain—also lose their ability to make rational decisions, and so end up making messes of their lives, losing their jobs and wrecking their marriages. Evidence has been piling up that feelings and reason are linked. We may do bad thinking when we allow emotions to cloud our thinking, but we also need emotions to think clearly. Think again about your emotional reaction to the photo, and then ask: are my feelings making me irrational, or are they helping me find the truth?

Fast thinking and bias

Even when we are not having an obvious emotional reaction, fast thinking can lead to errors because of bias more generally. We may be the smartest creatures on Earth, but have numerous cognitive biases; that is, there are errors in reasoning that are common to all people. For example, we suffer from *confirmation bias*: we tend to look for evidence that confirms what we already believe, and have trouble dealing with anything that goes against what we already believe. Look at the photo again. If you already believed that Dreamers are good young people going to college and they should be allowed to stay in the U.S., then based on confirmation bias, your fast thinking will tell you that the protester is right. On the opposing side, if you think illegal immigration is a bad thing and Dreamers should be deported, or if you like Trump's slogan, "Make America great again," then your fast thinking will be different: your confirmation bias will kick in and the photo will confirm all the negative thoughts you have about immigrants and liberals.



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Another bias we all carry around is called *availability bias*: we tend to decide what we think based on the examples, evidence, or experiences we can easily call up in our minds, and based on information we have been exposed to recently. I will use myself as an example here. I am a California community college professor, and I have been teaching in California since the 1990s. That means I have had countless Dreamers in my classes, I have known thousands of students who are immigrants or whose parents are immigrants, and most of the immigrants I meet are college students. I can easily call to mind many examples of young people, some of whom are immigrants or Dreamers, who are going to college and contributing to society in the most positive ways, so based on my availability bias, the evidence easily available to me will lead me to agree with the protester in the photo.

Google "cognitive bias" and you will find there are dozens of different kinds of bias. In this sense of the word "bias," we are all biased because we are human. When we do fast thinking, we may be on the right track, or we may be in error due to cognitive bias. Daniel Kahneman and others have shown that bias is very powerful. Even when presented with evidence showing they are wrong, confirmation bias is so strong that you often get the "backfire effect": people will dig in their heels and believe even more strongly when they are given evidence that contradicts their beliefs. We can overcome our biases, we can do slow thinking and examine the evidence and logic, but our brains are hardwired to have bias.

Fast thinking and the "post-truth era"

The information environment of the 2020s encourages fast thinking. Once many people read newspapers daily. Now, many of us get daily news and information from social media sources such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. As we scroll social media or the web, images like the photo of the protester appear constantly and in such a large quantity that most of us are exposed to hundreds of images, posts, videos, or tweets every day. In this information environment, *fast thinking rules*: we look for a second, we read a headline without reading the whole article, we decide to click like or not, we decide to share with friends or not —all based on fast thinking, emotion, and our biases.

Certainly, technology can help us be well-informed, but there are dangers. Unlike traditional media, where there are reporters who majored in journalism, editors, and fact-checkers, *anyone* can post in social media or on the internet, and often an unreliable source looks just like a reliable one—so how do we know what is true? Moreover, social media, web search engines, and YouTube have algorithms that give you more of what you've already looked at, so you may end up in a filter bubble, or echo chamber: only information and ideas you already agree with (remember confirmation bias?) will appear in your feed. Sometimes social media will

suggest new things that are more outrageous or extreme, and studies have found that social media posts are far more likely to go viral if they *appeal to emotion*.

In fact, studies of misinformation in the 2016 election season showed that falsehoods spread faster and farther than true stories. American politics has become angrier and more divided, and the "outrage" style of political opinion—lots of name-calling, wild exaggerations of the views of opponents, and appeals to emotion--has grown in recent decades. On top of all that, we have a problem of trust: more and more Americans do not trust traditional sources of information such as newspapers, government research agencies, network TV, colleges and universities, and even science itself.

The result? There is a lot of BS out there. Misinformation is such a problem that "fake news" is now an ordinary word in the U.S.A., and many have argued that we are now in the era of "post-truth." In the post-truth era, facts don't matter, and people make up their minds based on emotion, biases, and political loyalty. (For a good summary, see the book, *Post-Truth*, by Lee McIntyre.) According to Eric Oliver of the University of Chicago, over half of Americans subscribe to at least one conspiracy theory. About 10% of Americans still believe that vaccines cause autism even though this claim has been thoroughly debunked. Some Americans read and share articles from fake news websites as if they were real. For example, look up *America's Last Line of Defense;* this website declares itself to be satire, completely made-up stories, but so many people were sharing these stories that Factcheck.org felt the need to debunk stories from this site 24 times. Magazines such as *The Atlantic* publish stories such as "Stop Trusting Viral Videos." If you Google "misinformation about coronavirus," you will find many websites devoted to combatting myths and disinformation about Covid 19. And climate change? There is no controversy among scientists, but a significant portion of Americans still believe the problem does not exist or that the science is uncertain. Speaking of established science, surveys show that a large proportion of Americans don't believe in evolution—again, there is no disagreement here among scientists. Distrust of science is so strong that Sara and Jack Gorman wrote a whole book about science denial called *Denying to the Grave: Why We Ignore the Facts That Will Save Us*.

Possibly the most dramatic post-truth event of our lifetimes happened in the wake of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Joe Biden won the election with 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232, and Biden won the popular vote by 7 million votes. Voter turnout was high and it was not a close election (even Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell admitted this). However, Trump claimed with no evidence that the election was stolen. Spurred on by Trump's falsehoods, supporters stormed the Unites States Capitol on January 6, 2021, resulting in five deaths and 140 injuries. And as of April 2021, a poll by *Forbes* showed that 60% of Republicans still believed Trump's lie that the election was somehow rigged. In some cases, the spread of a lie may be dangerous to democracy itself. According to Timothy Snyder, professor of history at Yale University and author of *On Tyranny*, "To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so."

When American media users in 2020 saw the photo of the protester with a sign about Dreamers, it was in this sort of information environment. Fast, emotion, and bias are always there, but on top of all that people don't even agree on the most basic facts, like who won an election.

Thinking fast and slow—in college

To summarize so far: looking at the photo of the protester, people will form an opinion immediately based on fast thinking and emotion, and under the influence of cognitive bias. We need fast thinking to get through the day—emotions, gut instincts, reflexes, intuitions serve us well most of the time—but we need to develop slow thinking too. Let's go back to our photo of the Dreamer protester and do some slow thinking. Of course, it's good to notice your fast thinking–your feelings and gut reactions and snap judgments–when looking at this picture. But then it's time to slow down, think it through, do some research.

Often this begins with defining key terms and clarifying what exactly is being said. The word "Dreamer" can be found in any online dictionary, and is usually defined as follows: undocumented immigrant, came to the U.S. as a child, qualifies for the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act was first proposed in 2001 but has never been passed by Congress. The act would grant Dreamers legal residency and possibly a path to citizenship if they met a list of qualifications (including "good moral character").



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Back to the picture: a young woman is holding a sign saying that “Dreamers make America great.” Slow thinking: what does that mean? Is this an argument that Dreamers contribute to the economy? That they bring cultural contributions? That they benefit the USA overall? That the way America treats Dreamers should show greatness of heart? We don’t know. Maybe should consider context. The protesters were in the streets because Trump was going to rescind DACA, a move by Obama that gave temporary legal residency (but not a path to citizenship) to some Dreamers. So maybe the exact words of the sign aren’t the point; maybe the real claim being made is something like: “Trump, you are wrong to rescind DACA!”

Beyond interpreting the photo, your next slow-thinking move would likely be research, but what research you do would depend on your purpose. As a college student writing a paper or doing a project, this could mean many different things. You could gather evidence about people who were brought to the U.S. as undocumented immigrants when they were children: how many are there? Where did they come from? How long have they been here? What percent attend college? What kind of jobs do they have? What would happen to them if they were deported?

You could also research DACA itself–what its provisions are, how long it’s been in place, how DACA status is different from having a green card, and more. In addition to gathering facts, slow thinking might mean examining ethical questions such as this one: do undocumented people who arrived as children have a moral right to stay and become legal residents or citizens?

Given your feelings and biases, some information may confirm your fast thinking, but research can also disappoint. Let’s say your fast thinking about the photo was “Yes!” You are a college student, your undocumented friend just transferred to UC Berkeley from your community college honors program, and you generally think Dreamers truly are a positive influence on America. But then in your research you find that only a small minority of DACA recipients have attended and graduate from college. Here’s what you found from a 2017 study by the Migration Policy Institute: “While DACA recipients are almost as likely as U.S. adults in the same age group (15-32) to be enrolled in college (18 percent versus 20 percent), they are far less likely to have completed college (4 percent versus 18 percent).” Well! What does that show? Do Dreamers have trouble completing college because they lack financial resources or aid? Or because they get deported before they can finish? Because of internalized prejudice? Or for some other reason? How do they do in comparison to non-immigrants whose parents have the same level of education and economic resources? Is college completion a good measure of contribution to society? How should this statistic influence our opinion of Dreamers and their contribution to America?

Slow thinking is partly this: realize that it’s complicated, get confused, spend some time thinking about the information and what it means. And by the time you’ve done all the slow thinking for a college research paper, you’ve changed: your gut reaction isn’t all there is, you have a head full of facts and ideas. You may still have a strong opinion, but you might add, “It’s complicated.” You have a lot more to share in conversation about the Dreamers in America, and many more questions to continue exploring.

Attributions

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Reflective Learning

2.1: Reflection
2.2: Reflective Learning

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2.1: Reflection



***Figure* 2.1.1**

Sometimes the process of figuring out who you are as writers requires reflection, a “looking back” to determine what you were thinking and how your thinking changed over time, relative to key experiences. Mature learners set goals, and achieve them by charting a course of action and making adjustments along the way when they encounter obstacles. They also build on strengths and seek reinforcement when weaknesses surface. What makes them *mature*? They’re not afraid to make mistakes (own them even), and they know that struggle can be a rewarding part of the process. By equal measure, mature learners celebrate their strengths and use them strategically. By adopting a reflective position, they can pinpoint areas that work well and areas that require further help —and all of this without losing sight of their goals.

You have come to this course with your own writing goals. Now is a good time to think back on your writing practices with reflective writing, also called metacognitive writing. Reflective writing helps you think through and develop your intentions as writers. Leveraging reflective writing also creates learning habits that extend to any discipline of learning. It’s a set of procedures that helps you step back from the work you have done and ask a series of questions: Is this really what I wanted to do? Is this really what I wanted to say? Is this the best way to communicate my intentions? Reflective writing helps you authenticate your intentions and start identifying places where you either hit the target or miss the mark. You may find, also, that when you communicate your struggles, you can ask others for help! Reflective writing helps you trace and articulate the patterns you have developed, and it fosters independence from relying too heavily on an instructor to tell you what you are doing.

Throughout this course, you have been working toward an authentic voice in your writing. Your reflection on writing should be equally authentic or honest when you look at your purposes for writing and the strategies you have been leveraging all the while.

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2.2: Reflective Learning

Reflective thinking is a powerful learning tool. As we have seen throughout this course, proficient readers are reflective readers, constantly stepping back from the learning process to think about their reading. They understand that just as they need to activate prior knowledge at the beginning of a learning task and monitor their progress as they learn, they also need to make time during learning as well as at the end of learning to think about their learning process, to recognize what they have accomplished, how they have accomplished it, and set goals for future learning. This process of "thinking about thinking" is called metacognition. When we think about our thinking—articulating what we now know and how we came to know it—we close the loop in the learning process.

How do we engage in reflection? Educator Peter Pappas modified Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning to focus on reflection:

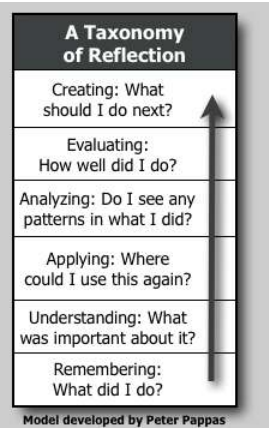


***Figure* 2.2.1**

This "taxonomy of reflection" provides a structure for metacognition. Educator Silvia Rosenthal Tolisano has modified Pappas's taxonomy into a pyramid and expanded upon his reflection questions:



***Figure* 2.2.2**

Use Pappas's and Tolisano's taxonomies of reflection to help you reflect on your learning, growth and development as a reader, writer, and thinker in this course.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Critical Thinking

Barriers to Critical Thinking

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3.1.1: What is Critical Thinking?

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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3.1.1: What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is one of those things that most people are in favor of – especially in colleges and universities. But people in different fields and traditions have varying definitions, and it is not obvious that all are in favor of the same thing. How should we decide on a definition?

The American Association of Colleges and Universities came up with a definition of critical thinking that we will use as a starting place.

“Critical Thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas and artifacts before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion” (AAC&U, 2017).

Here are a few things to notice about this definition as we begin exploring this topic:

- Critical thinking is characterized as a habit of mind. One college class is not enough to develop a habit, so one college class is not going to create “critical thinkers.” Instead, this class will introduce you to some component skills of the habit. Your routine and daily decisions will determine whether you develop (or deepen) the habit — or leave what you learn as you go on about your life.
- We assume that the people reading this book will vary with respect to critical thinking habits. Some people will come in already practiced and quite skilled. For them, our discussion about critical thinking will offer ways to think about and double-check their current habits. Others will enter the read believing they are already critical thinkers — already skilled in the habits of thoughtfulness — but will be exposed to vocabulary and ideas that challenge that pre-existing belief.
- The basic value judgment involved in critical thinking, as this field has grown out of the European philosophical tradition, is this: when issues are important, reflective opinions are more valuable than opinions of the moment. It follows from this that when an issue is important, it is worthwhile to have the skills available to think deeply and well. Those are the skills we will be focusing on in this book.
- The definition of critical thinking doesn’t state it, but there is a value judgment implicit in the attention within colleges and universities to critical thinking. The assumption is that it is good to be reasonable and bad to be unreasonable. As a critical thinker, one issue you will be asked to confront over and over in this class: IS CRITICAL THINKING SO IMPORTANT AS TO WARRANT ALL THIS ATTENTION AND ENTHUSIASM? As you get increasingly clear about what critical thinking looks like (in academia), you will be able to think more clearly about the value assumption. Is it worth all the work?

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3.1.2: Thinking Fast and Slow



One way of thinking about thinking focuses attention to the fact that humans have two different ways of arriving at beliefs or opinions. Similar to the contrast between opinions of the moment and reflective or deliberative opinions, one method is FAST and easy but less reliable and the other is SLOW and takes lots of hard work but is more reliable. In the discipline of critical thinking, reasoning is judged better if it is more reliable.

The goal of slow thinking or critical thinking is to determine which claims are true. So accuracy is the standard by which slow thinking is considered better thinking. But from an evolutionary perspective, there are times when "jumping to a conclusion" is better than taking the time to reflect and deliberate, even if it is less reliable. If a dangerous predator is coming your way, moving to safety FAST will keep you alive. It may be that you will jump and run for cover in situations where there is no real danger. But better to be wrong and alive, according to the people doing evolutionary psychology.

Slow thinking is often referred to as "deliberative," and the verb form is to deliberate.

We all come up against all sorts of occasions in our lives requiring fast action, with no time to deliberate. But the skills you will practice all take time. They are for when you can think ahead or you have lived through a fast decision and want to think critically about the decision you made, keeping open that you might well have done something else if you had the luxury of time to reflect.

A process like this has been developed and routinely used by the U.S. military. The idea is not to point fingers at people who had to choose fast, and whose decisions in hindsight can be seen clearly to not have been the best. Instead, the point of an after-action review is to take time, after the fact of action, to think over the available options and the pros and cons of each choice with the intention to deepen our learning in preparation for future contexts requiring fast choice. Much of what we will be doing in the class is like an after-action review.

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3.1.3: How Confident Are You in Your Reasoning Skills?

Many people tend to overestimate their critical thinking skills. Here is just one example of documentation of this trend, from a business website, MindEdge, focused on helping students develop skills many employers say they want in college graduates:

“The second annual State of Critical Thinking survey from MindEdge asked respondents to complete a brief quiz requiring them to use digital literacy and critical thinking skills. “[…] In 2017, 44 percent of survey respondents received an ‘F’ on the critical thinking quiz. In 2018, 52 percent of respondents failed the quiz” (Ascione, 2020).



Many students taking a critical thinking course report a curve in their sense of confidence as thinkers. Like people in the MindEdge survey, they start out thinking they are pretty good thinkers. Then somewhere in the first third of the class, that sense of confidence takes a hit. The complexities of slow thinking can be hard to grasp at first. The homework and quizzes can feel confusing or tough. But as the term progresses, the techniques become more routine and less bewildering. Though slow thinking ALWAYS requires us to use a limited supply of our mental energy. This short excerpt from Kahneman’s work is a nice introduction.

Before you move further along there are some tenets to keep in mind. These will be covered in the next section.

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3.1.4: Thinking in an Informed Way



Informed reasoning is based on claims that can be substantiated. In other words, your opinion should be based on fact and not on personal opinion. In today's world where we've become ever more involved in using technology as a resource for information, it is crucial that we have the ability to think in an informed way in order to be able to decipher the barrage of information available to us.

The ability to form and articulate opinions is extremely important in all facets of life. As citizens, people need to form opinions about political issues and leaders in order to vote responsibly. We must form opinions about social issues, and we form opinions about the people we work and interact with on a daily basis. However, simply having an opinion about a given topic is not enough. In this age of information, if we want to effectively share our opinions with others, we must be educated about the topics we are discussing.

Whether writing a letter to the editor about a local issue or trying to convince your boss that you've developed a great business strategy or convincing your parents that you should have a specific privilege, presenting an informed, educated opinion is much more effective than sharing one based on emotion or personal experience alone.

In addition to being informed, you must consider both your values and assumptions. All color your thinking and require you to reflect and practice slow thinking as you develop your own opinions.

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3.1.5: A Word About Values



Three types of values

Values are standards or ideals with which we evaluate actions, people, things, or situations. Beauty, honesty, justice, peace, generosity are all examples of values that many people endorse. In thinking about values it is useful to distinguish them into three types:

- Personal values: values endorsed by an individual. For example, some people regard family as their most important value and structure their lives so that they can spend more time with their family. Other people might value success instead, and give less time to their families in order to achieve their goals.
- Moral values: values that help determine what is morally right or wrong, e.g. freedom, fairness, equality, well-being, etc… Those which are used to evaluate social institutions are sometimes also known as political values.
- Aesthetic values: values associated with the evaluation of artwork or beauty.

The Role of Facts and Values

The following are descriptive statements. they purport to describe facts :

- This is a sharp knife.
- Mozart and Beethoven are composers.
- Ann believes that freedom of speech is important.

These, however, are statements about values :

- This knife is a very useful kitchen tool
- Mozart is a greater composer than Beethoven
- Freedom of speech should be protected

Philosophers usually distinguish between two kinds of values: intrinsic and extrinsic. Something is supposed to have extrinsic value when it is not valued for its own sake, but because it contributes to some further purpose, or because it helps bring about something else of value. So a particular kitchen knife might be said to be very valuable in this extrinsic sense – it is valued not for its own sake but because it can be used to satisfy certain culinary purposes that we treasure.

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3.1.6: What About Assumptions?

Like any human activity, the practice of critical thinking requires several assumptions to make sense. For people who don't share



the assumptions, the whole process can be experienced as confusing or nonsensical. Here is a partial list of assumptions that sometimes cause trouble for people new to critical thinking.

1. Critical thinking (CT) is evaluative. An evaluation is a statement that compares what is the case to a standard about how things should be. CT requires people to make lots of judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, what we should or shouldn't do. The standard of evaluation used in critical thinking for reasoning is reliability. Good reasoning is reliable, and bad reasoning is unreliable.
2. In CT, reasoning implies evaluation, both individual ("You should recycle your aluminum!") and collective ("We should abolish the death penalty!"). Each statement can be supported by reasons, and the reasons can be evaluated as better or worse.
3. In CT, truth is treated as absolute — not partial, changing, or relative to different points of view.
4. The ultimate "should" in critical thinking is this: you should not contradict yourself. There are other "should" statements, but they are all based on this idea that self-contradiction is bad. Contradictory statements, by definition, cannot all be true, and based on #3 above that means they can't be partly true, or true to some people but not others. A statement that is self-contradictory is absolutely, eternally, necessarily and inevitably not true.

If you don't agree with one or more of the above assumptions, expect some trouble even understanding what is going on when trying to use critical thinking. The assumptions listed above are offered not to convince you to accept any of these assumptions or to "prove" them in the formal (CT) sense, but just to offer a bit more about what is assumed in this field.

There is also one more assumption to consider, that is people shouldn't judge other people's opinions.

Critical thinking requires energetically judging other people's opinions (along with our own!) – not in isolation, but in relation to each other. That is, CT requires asking if the reason given to support or back up an opinion is a good one. If no good reason can be found to support an opinion, that opinion is treated as unsupported or unproved. Generally, opinions are better if proved, and not as good if unproved. By extension, there is a preference for reflective opinions arrived at through slow thinking over opinions of the moment which are formed in fast thinking.

Many people put the majority of their critical thinking energy into judging the thinking of those they disagree with. Our hope is that you will have come to understand that thinking carefully about your own beliefs is worth more of your time, and that you will have come to appreciate the vital importance of people who do not share your same ideas to your process of slow thinking.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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3.2.1: Barriers to Critical Thinking

3.2.2: Social Conditioning

3.2.3: Labeling

3.2.4: Stereotypes

3.2.5: Fallacies

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3.2.1: Barriers to Critical Thinking



Preconceived ideas are ideas that decisively influence our thinking, but which we have not critically reflected upon. Not all preconceived ideas are fallacious (based on false assumptions). However, we must constantly consider our preconceived ideas critically to test their validity. In critical reflection we ask about the grounds for holding a belief. Do these grounds withstand rational scrutiny? Is there sufficient evidence to support the belief? Is the belief appropriate in its context? What weight should we give to counterarguments and counterexamples? And so on.

There are two main obstacles to clear thinking: preconceived ideas and fallacies. Preconceived ideas could be broadened to include social conditioning, labeling, and stereotypes. The section below will give you the opportunity to learn to recognize these obstacles to clear thinking.

Try your luck with this riddle

“A man and his son are driving together on a stormy night. They have an accident in which the father is killed and his son badly injured. The boy is taken to the local hospital and requires urgent surgery. He is prepared for the operation and wheeled into the operating room. The surgeon arrives, looks at the boy and says, “I cannot operate on my own son”.

How is this possible?

1. The man is the boy’s _____
2. The boy is the surgeon’s _____
3. The surgeon is the boy’s _____

Ask a few friends, colleagues or family. See how they fare with the same riddle.

Answer: To many people the story presents a riddle. But the answer is obvious. The surgeon is the boy’s mother. The story is a riddle only if we have a preconceived idea which associates being a surgeon with being male. There is no good reason to hold this idea.

Now we will explore how preconceived ideas such as social conditioning, labeling and stereotyping affect our capacity for critical reasoning. The topic of preconceived ideas is an interesting field and it is worth exploring the various forms they take ranging from racial and gender stereotypes to the inability to see ourselves clearly.

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3.2.2: Social Conditioning

We are sure you will agree that we all inherit or assimilate certain biased attitudes and values from our parents, schools, friends, and so on. Many of these attitudes and values come to us before we are able to test them for their validity. Later on in life, some of these attitudes and values seem to be obviously true



and we do not think about whether we need to question them. Simply by the accident of birth, we find ourselves in a particular place at a particular time in history. The customs, social institutions and material setting of that place and time decisively influence the way we see the world. This background frames our view so much that it is only with difficulty that we can turn around and critically assess the framework itself.

Here is an interesting activity illustrating that we are conditioned to see only what we want to see. Access your own preconceived ideas by doing the activity. Read aloud the colors, and not the words, you see in the list below.



Think about it: Did you read the correct colors or were you influenced by the visual colors of the words? This activity clearly illustrates our social conditioning.

Preconceived ideas are embedded in, and borrow their “obviousness” from, our social conditioning framework. The ideal of critical thinking is to step outside this framework and make judgments in the manner of an ideal observer. While the standard of absolute objectivity may be regarded as a regulative ideal, it would be naïve to think that this can be achieved, especially when it comes to issues such as morality, justice and aesthetics. But skepticism about the possibility of absolute objectivity need not deflect us from attempting to achieve some distance from our social backgrounds and the preconceived ideas we grew up with. Social conditioning is an obstacle to critical reasoning, but it is not an insurmountable obstacle.

As we learn the names for different things and how to go about operating as human beings in society, we are told what is good and what is bad, what is to be desired and what is to be avoided, and what it means to be in the world in general. Most of this is perfectly innocent and practical, but our parents’ or guardians’ various judgments of themselves and of the world will creep in whether we are aware of it or not. In simplified terms, some people have a positive outlook on life while others have a negative outlook, and whether our parents believe they live in a world that is threatening and negative, or one that is helpful and positive, will have a deep impact on our psyche.

If our parents live in the illusion that money is important, politicians are corrupt, marriage is nothing special, and work is tedious, then that becomes part of our own outlook as well. Some of these negative beliefs are so deeply ingrained in our society that we don’t even notice them, and they then become stuck in our subconscious while our context and perspective are still relatively limited.

Consider the following claims (or opinions) about two people from different backgrounds and then answer the questions that follow:

- Peter grew up in the wealthy northern suburbs of New York City. Therefore, Peter is likely to believe in the values of individuality and the superiority of capitalism.
- Paul grew up in a poor suburb of Detroit, MI. Therefore, Paul is likely to believe in the value of community and the superiority of socialism.

1. Do you think that these claims are based on sound reasoning? Why? Why not?

2. Would you say that these claims are based on preconceived ideas? Why? Why not?
3. What preconceived ideas are embedded in these arguments?

Think about it: These claims are not outcomes of reflective critical reasoning. Rather, they are assumptions based on preconceived ideas about socioeconomic class and personal identity and values.

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3.2.3: Labeling



Labels are a useful way of focusing on a particular feature of a group of people or things when that feature is relevant to the context. For example, when we are discussing which venue to use for a meeting, we may label someone as a person with a “disability”. Here the label would be relevant to the considerate treatment of someone who is confined to a wheelchair, for example. But labeling people may sometimes hide other important and relevant features and cause us to prejudice someone’s interests. Labeling someone “doctor” may encourage us to accept her opinions on matters outside her area of expertise. Labeling a political party “democratic” may encourage us to accept its policies blindly just because we support the ideals of democracy.

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3.2.4: Stereotypes

Stereotypes are generalizations, or assumptions, that people make about the characteristics of all members of a group, based on an image (often wrong) about what people in that group are like.



We need labels to make quick judgments, but relying on labels leads to stereotyping and prejudice. We ignore individual differences. Soon we see only the label. We usually stereotype groups to which we do not belong. The poor stereotype the rich and the rich stereotype the poor. Kids stereotype “old folks”, who in turn stereotype “today’s kids”. We have trouble identifying individual members of groups we stereotype. To us, “they all look alike”. Police notice this when witnesses try to pick the guilty person out of a line-up consisting entirely of one ethnic group. Many of us hold a stereotype that “bad guys” should look bad; learned probably from watching movies and television. But the most evil criminals can look very ordinary. Believers in the “criminal stereotype” sometimes protect themselves against the label only to fall victim to the reality.

Nations at war create stereotypes to label the enemy. Soldiers find killing humans like themselves difficult. So, propaganda departments create labels for the enemy so that they appear less than human, and therefore more “killable”. This process is called dehumanization. When those stereotyped believe the label applied to them it becomes a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. The label encourages behavior that makes the label come true.

Many, and possibly most, judgments of people based on membership in a group are likely to be based on stereotyping. Statements that begin with “people like you”, or “you people” are likely stereotypes even if you believe they are factual. We think the best way to overcome a stereotype is by personal contact. The more individuals in a group you know personally, the more difficult it is to believe a stereotype. In this regard, we would like to encourage you to make contact with fellow students who belong to cultural groups other than yours, because exposure to individual differences is part of a true education. Travel can have the same effect. As simple a stereotype as “Scandinavians are blue-eyed blondes” is challenged by a trip to Sweden, Finland, or Denmark where simple observation proves it false.

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3.2.5: Fallacies



A fallacy is a deceptive argument that tries to persuade us to accept the claim that is being advanced, but the reasons in support of the claim are irrelevant or inappropriate. Put differently, a fallacy is an error in reasoning. This differs from a factual error, which is simply being wrong about the facts.

As you will see, some basic background information on fallacies is provided in the suggested online references. In this reading, we shed some more light on the topic. Please remember that while it is important to consult multiple sources, the outcome of the learning process should be that you will be able to recognize inadequacies in arguments. In the section below, we will introduce you to some of the most common fallacies. There are many more types of fallacies that are not covered in this reading, such as the argument from ignorance, appeal to force (or coercion), appeal to the masses, appeal to pity, appeal to spite, shifting the burden of proof, post hoc reasoning, red herring fallacy, affirming the consequent, denying the antecedent, et cetera.

Slippery slope argument

A slippery slope argument leads one from seemingly unimportant and obviously true first premises to calamitous and exaggerated consequences in the conclusion. The “slippery slope” argument format is essentially that if you make any exceptions to a rule, or if you make rules that depend on fine distinctions, pretty soon people will be ignoring the rule or rules entirely because they won’t accept the difference between the exception and everything else. This kind of fallacy is also known as the “give an inch”, or the “crack in the foundation” argument. As the names suggest, the point of departure in this kind of “argument” is that if you allow exceptions to a rule, it creates a slope away from the absoluteness of the rule, down which people will slide further and further until they will not obey the rule at all. In other words, “if you give people an inch, they will take a mile”.

This sort of “reasoning” is fallacious because there is no reason to believe that one event must inevitably follow from another without an argument for such a claim. This is especially clear in cases in which there are a significant number of steps or gradations between one event and another.

Examples of slippery slope arguments:

1. “We have to stop the rise in tuition fees! The next thing you know, they’ll be charging $50,000 a semester!”
2. “You can never give anyone a break. If you do, they’ll walk all over you.”

Straw man argument

A straw man is someone without substance, who can be easily defeated. Sometimes an opponent will respond to an arguer’s claim by interpreting it in a way that makes it easy for him to knock down the argument. He deliberately ignores the strong points of the argument and attacks a straw man.

For example:

Suppose an arguer claims that nonhuman animals should be accorded rights to protect them from unnecessary suffering because of their sensitivity to pain. A respondent says that this is unacceptable because animals are stupid and therefore would not be able to claim their rights anyway.

Note: This is not what was claimed in the original argument. The opponent attacks a straw man, rather than the real issue.

To identify a straw man argument, you must be familiar enough with the topic in question to recognize when someone is setting up a caricature. Understanding when someone is using this deceptive tactic is the best way to call attention to the weakness of the straw man position.

Begging the question

As you will see in the online references, the fallacy of begging the question occurs when what is supposedly proved by the conclusion of an argument is already assumed to be true in the premises. In other words, the very thing you are trying to prove (your conclusion) is presupposed in the supporting argument (your premises). This is sometimes called “circular reasoning”. Carefully look at the following example:

Deliberately ending the life of a fetus is murder. So it should be clear that abortion is nothing but the illegal killing of the fetus.

The premise of this argument and its conclusion make exactly the same claims, because “abortion” means the “deliberate ending of the life of a fetus” and “murder” means “illegal killing”. The premise gives no support to the conclusion and the argument begs the question.

The fallacies discussed above make it clear why it is important to know how to take apart an argument and examine its constituent parts. By moving beyond the wordiness, it is possible to look at each piece individually and see that we just have the same ideas being presented more than once.

Ad hominem argument

An ad hominem argument attacks the character or circumstances of the person who is making a claim rather than challenging the claim itself.

Example:

John Teller’s argument is exactly what one can expect from an atheist like him. In this example, the person is attacked rather than the soundness of her argument.

Note that there are three forms of an ad hominem argument:

- a personal attack on a person’s character
- an attack on the circumstances of the person advancing a claim, and
- an attack on a person’s interests.

False appeal to authority

The fallacy of false appeal to authority takes place when an authority or famous person is quoted in order to get the conclusion the speaker wants rather than providing solid evidence to confirm or refute the claim. The fallacy of false appeal to authority occurs when the “authority” cited is not an expert in the field under discussion.

For example, there is nothing wrong with human cloning. I know this because my medical doctor said that human cloning is morally justified.

The authority cited in this example is an expert in the field of medicine, but he or she is not an expert in the field of ethics. To get his claim accepted, the arguer is committing the fallacy of false appeal to authority because he is quoting an authority who is not, in fact, an authority in the field being discussed.

False dilemma

The fallacy of false dilemma occurs when an “either-or” choice is presented when, in fact, there are more than two alternatives. Here is an example:

Let’s face it, John. Either you are going to be aggressive and show her who’s the boss or you are going to let her walk all over you. I don’t need to tell you what you should do. A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.

Here the fallacy of false dilemma is committed because the arguer presents only two alternatives when, in fact, there are more options available for dealing with the situation at hand. This kind of either-or argument ignores the complexity of the issue.

Hasty generalization

This fallacy occurs when a generalization is made on the basis of insufficient evidence. For example:

Mr. Williams claims: “All good engineers are men because I have not come across any good female engineers”.

Here, Mr Williams commits the fallacy of hasty generalization because he has not looked into all cases of engineers, male or female. The reason Mr. Williams offers for his claim or generalization is insufficient or ill-considered.

Summary

We have noted several common fallacies in reasoning. But an argument can fail in many other ways. The point is not to look out for particular fallacies only, but to develop a sense of when an argument is going astray. We can only develop this sense with practice. In subsequent Modules, you will be introduced to the techniques of argument analysis and argument evaluation in detail. But, in the end, successful critical and philosophical reasoning relies on acquiring a knack for recognizing bad arguments.

For additional information on fallacies check out:

- Fallacy Files
- Thou Shalt Not Commit Logical Fallacies

Exercises – Identify the Fallacy

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://minnstate.pressbooks.pub/ctar/?p=375#h5p-3

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Artificial Intelligence and College Writing

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4.2: Template Phrases for Critiquing AI Outputs
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4.4: AI Copies Patterns; It Doesn’t Think
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4.1: Template Phrases for Reflecting on AI Feedback

AI writing feedback can sound confident, authoritative, and academic and still be bad. Large language models like ChatGPT and the apps built on them are designed to predict likely next words, not to be right.

The downside of this is that we might be distracted or misled by AI. Jane Rosensweig, director of the Harvard Writing Center, explores this risk in her piece "What Happens When a Novice Writer Asks ChatGPT for Editing Advice?"

The upside is that being skeptical of AI feedback just might be empowering. We might clarify our own purpose in writing as we reflect on whether the feedback aligns with what we really want to say. Even if the feedback does resonate, it's still valuable to articulate why we like it. And more practice critiquing plausible-sounding AI suggestions never hurts in an era when AI will likely have an increasing presence in our personal and professional lives.

Below are some phrases that reflect possible ways we might respond to AI feedback. There will be countless others; these are offered as a beginning to give a sense of the possibilities. Please feel free to suggest additional phrases by commenting on this page.

Note: the quoted phrases followed by asterisks were generated by a large language model as detailed in the acknowledgments.

Reflect on what isn't clear to us about the AI feedback

- I'm not sure what the AI feedback could refer to when it says _____.
- The AI feedback advises that I _____, but I'm not clear whether that's necessary because the assignment says _____.
- I'm puzzled by the AI's suggestion to _____. How does that fit in a _____ essay where the instructor is asking for _____?
- I'm not sure what the AI advice to _____ means in practice. Does it mean _____?

Reflect on ways the feedback doesn't fit our meaning or purpose

- The AI feedback suggests _____, but I'm not sure this is what I want to do because _____.
- The AI feedback seems to assume that I am claiming _____ when in fact I meant to say _____.
- "The AI feedback suggests a misunderstanding of the section of my essay about _____. I was aiming to convey _____."*
- The AI feedback steers me toward _____, but that's not my priority because I think it's more important to _____.
- The idea of working on _____ in my essay seems reasonable, but it's more important to me to _____ because I want to make sure that readers understand _____.
- If I follow the AI suggestion to _____, I'm concerned that _____.
- "I'm not sure if the AI feedback fits the tone I was going for. It suggests _____, but I was aiming for a more _____ feel."*

Reflect on what we do like about the AI feedback and why it fits our purpose

- The AI feedback says "_____," and that helped me see that _____ needs work in my essay. I think the feedback is right about this because _____.
- I was already thinking _____ about my essay, so the AI feedback that _____ resonates.
- I've been concerned that _____, and the suggestion that _____ could help resolve that.
- The AI feedback suggests I clarify _____, so I am considering explaining that _____.
- "The AI highlighted _____, which I had overlooked. I think this could be important to include because _____."*
- I hadn't thought about _____ in the essay, but the feedback makes a good point that _____.

Reflect on new ideas we get as we read the AI feedback

- The AI feedback on _____ makes sense, but it made me realize I don't really want to keep the part where I say _____ after all. I really want to focus on _____.

- "Reading the AI feedback about _____ made me think of a new approach: I can talk about _____ in terms of _____."*
- "The AI comments on _____ reminded me of a related point I might want to add: _____."*

Next steps

Once we've decided what we think about the AI feedback, we can brainstorm what to do about it. We may want to write a revision plan or a list of writing tasks like brainstorming on a particular topic, rereading to clarify a point, researching to add evidence, or reorganizing a section. For more on revision strategies, see Section 11.6: Revision.

AI feedback should complement, not replace, human feedback. After all, writing is a way to relate to others; it has meaning when we use it to communicate with humans. Writers often have breakthroughs when we talk through our drafts, our reactions to the AI feedback, and any uncertainties with our instructor, a tutor, or a peer.

Acknowledgments

The above template phrases followed by asterisks (*) were adapted from ChatGPT output responding to a "Template phrases for reflecting on AI feedback prompt," *ChatGPT*, 25 Sep. version, *OpenAI*, 8 Oct. 2023, https://chat.openai.com/share/9c526e9b-b654-4c24-abb3-01a173026a63. The remaining original phrases and the organizational structure are by Anna Mills and are shared under a CC BY 4.0 license.

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4.2: Template Phrases for Critiquing AI Outputs

Teaching critical AI literacy is now an essential aspect of digital literacy whether the purpose is to encourage critical perspectives on AI or to train students for future workplaces where they need to correct AI performance. The output of AI text generators like ChatGPT (also known as large language models, or LLMs) often sounds highly plausible and authoritative even when it is wrong, biased, or empty. The phrases below may help students practice identifying flaws in this polished text. Consider sharing a sample chat session as a web page and then inviting students to use these or similar phrases to annotate the outputs, perhaps using Hypothesis or Perusall.

Note: the quoted phrases followed by asterisks were generated by a large language model as detailed in the acknowledgments.

Clarity

- This sounds plausible because _____, but it doesn't really make sense because _____.
- This sounds good, but it doesn't fit the purpose. What we are really looking for is _____.
- This doesn't clarify _____.
- "The AI is providing a surface-level answer without diving into the nuances of _____."*

Bias

- This is biased in favor of _____ because _____.
- This is biased against _____ since _____.
- This leaves out the perspective of _____.
- "This might be valid for _____, but not for the case we're discussing, where _____."*
- "It appears the AI has taken a literal approach, missing the cultural context of _____."*

Accuracy

- This is inaccurate because _____.
- This is outdated because _____.
- "The AI seems to have misinterpreted _____."*
- "While this might be true in some contexts, in the scenario of _____, it's misleading because _____."*
- The assertion that _____ has no basis in fact. _____ is a trustworthy source, and it says _____.
- _____ appears to be made up. When I searched for _____, I found _____.

Relevance and Focus

- "While the information seems relevant, it misses the point on _____."*
- This might be technically correct, but it doesn't consider _____."*
- "The AI appears to have focused on _____, but it's overlooking the importance of _____."*
- "This is a general statement that doesn't address the specifics of _____."*
- This seems to be a repetition of known facts rather than an insight into _____.
- "This is an over-simplification of the complex issue of _____. It overlooks _____."*
- "On the surface, this looks right, but it doesn't explain _____."*
- This is so vague that it is not useful in helping us think through _____.

Acknowledgments

The above template phrases followed by asterisks (*) were adapted from ChatGPT output responding to a "Template phrases for AI output critique prompt," *ChatGPT*, 25 Sep. version, *OpenAI*, 3 Oct. 2023, https://chat.openai.com/c/a8b15d03-3...f-2014ced05511. The remaining original phrases and the organizational structure are by Anna Mills and are shared under a CC BY 4.0 license.

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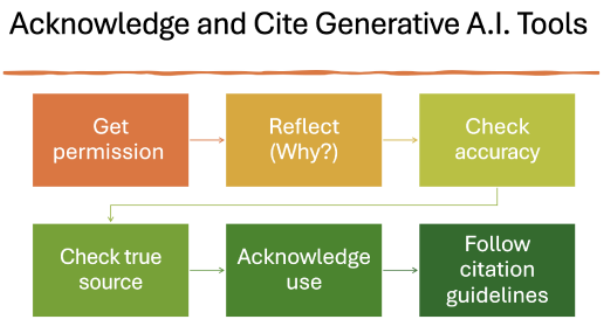
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4.3: Acknowledging and Citing Generative AI in Academic Work

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This is an adaptation by Anna Mills of an article by Liza Long, originally part of the Writing and Artificial Intelligence section of the textbook Write What Matters.

You've probably heard about the importance of citing your sources in academic work. But in cases where you are asked or allowed to use an AI chatbot such as ChatGPT for some purpose in the writing process, how do you acknowledge and cite it? These six steps can be helpful if you are considering whether or not to use and cite generative artificial intelligence in your academic work:



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1. Check with your instructor to make sure you have **permission** to use these tools and to find out what the limits are on these uses.
2. **Reflect** on how and why you want to use generative artificial intelligence in your work. What skills are you supposed to practice through this assignment? Will a particular use of generative artificial intelligence help you build those skills, or will it get in way of practice that you need?
3. **Check the accuracy** of any information provided by a generative artificial intelligence tool against a trusted source. Can you verify it? Is anything made up? Would it suit your purpose to cite the trusted source instead of the AI system?
4. **Check if the AI output is based on a source that should be cited**. Chatbots sometimes give answers that reflect a particular source's text or ideas without citing that source. So humans need to do searches on the topic to see not just whether the output is accurate but whether it should be attributed. See AI doesn't (reliably) cite its sources for more on this.
5. If you decide to use generative artificial intelligence, **acknowledge** your use, either in an end note, an appendix, or a cover letter (see below for examples).
6. **Cite** any ideas or word sequences that come from generative artificial intelligence both by mentioning the source in the body of the essay and by citing it on a References/Works Cited page according to the style format your teacher specifies, such as MLA or APA.

Whew. Let's just admit that's a long list of steps to take before incorporating generative AI in your essay. It's worth pausing to ask if it's worth it. As teachers and students alike are discovering, generative AI is not always a time saver especially if we're trying to use it in an intelligent, strategic, and ethical way.

It's not always easy to check the accuracy of outputs, and it can be even harder to figure out whether the text or ideas that a chatbot spits out really come from a specific source that needs to be cited.

If these steps seem too difficult, don't be shy about turning away from generative AI if another kind of source will suit your purpose. If you do need to use AI, consider asking your teacher, a tutor, or a librarian for help checking, acknowledging, and citing.

Acknowledging Use of AI Chatbots

An ***acknowledgment statement*** is meant to give detail about how AI was used so that readers can understand how it may have influenced the text and the author's thinking.

Monash University provides helpful recommendations for how to acknowledge when and how you've used generated material as part of an assignment or project. They suggest that acknowledgment statements include the following:

- Specify which technology was used.
- Include explicit descriptions of how the information was generated.
- Identify the prompts used.
- Explain how the output was used in your work.

The format Monash University provides is also helpful. Students may include this information either in a cover letter or in an appendix to the submitted work. Academic style guides such as APA already include guidelines for including appendices after essays and reports. Review the Purdue OWL's entry on Footnotes and Appendices for help.

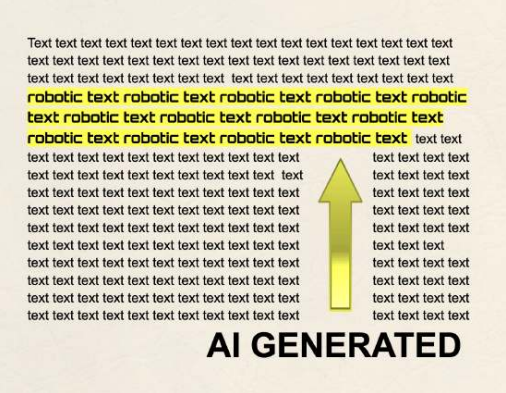
Sample Acknowledgment Template

I acknowledge the use of [insert AI system(s) and link] to [specific use of generative artificial intelligence]. The prompts used include [list of prompts]. The output from these prompts was used to [explain use].

Using chat session transcripts to document AI use

It's a great help to have a full transcript of our interaction with a chatbot when we're trying to acknowledge what we did. ChatGPT and Gemini allow users to share links to specific chats (see the directions for sharing ChatGPT chats and directions for sharing Gemini chats). Here's an example of a shared chat link in ChatGPT. When you click on the link, you'll be able to see both the author's prompts and the chatbot's responses. This give you automatic documentation and details to include in your acknowledgment.

Claude does not currently have this built-in functionality, though AIArchives.org offers a browser extension that will create links to chat transcripts of sessions with Claude. For other tools like the Google Docs Writing Assistant, links are not yet available. One option in that case is to take screenshots of the chat session and share those in an appendix.



Any text generated by AI should be labeled as such. Image by Ari Mireles, licensed CC BY NC 4.0.

Citing AI Chatbots

Academic essays require us to tell readers where we got ideas and quotes, both in the body of the essay and in a list at the end. That way readers understand where the ideas and words came from and can look up the sources and judge for themselves.

Now let's be clear: the chatbot output is not a "source" in the usual sense. Sources for academic essays are generally expected to have some person or group of people who wrote them and who stand behind them. Chatbots can't stand behind their output. If you put the same prompt into the chatbot a second time, you will most likely get a different result. So one could argue that we can't

really "cite" a chatbot in the usual sense of academic citation, which assumes that the words were put together with intention and understanding.

Yet even if chatbots aren't traditional sources, it's still important to cite them if we reference text or ideas from them. Readers still need information about where the text and ideas are coming from. The American Psychological Association (APA) and the Modern Language Association (MLA), two of the most frequently used style guides for college writing, have both provided guidelines for how to do this.

Note

Even though APA and MLA do not require it, many consider it a best practice to include links to chat session transcripts in your citation as described above.

APA Style

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) as of February 23, 2024, AI chatbots should be cited like this:

Sample APA Citation

In the body of the essay:

When prompted for a list of "public-service jobs for men," ChatGPT listed two stereotypically masculine jobs first: "Firefighter" and "Police Officer." (OpenAI, 2024).

In the reference list:

OpenAI. (2024). *ChatGPT* (Mar 14 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chat

The APA blog post by Timothy McAdoo acknowledges that this format may evolve, and indeed the comments on the post include many suggestions and requests. Readers note that the version history date is no longer listed at the bottom of ChatGPT sessions as of Spring 2024. Some are concerned that mentioning the company in the parenthetical citation suggests that the company is the source of the idea or text when in fact the chatbot's output is shaped by all the text from the Internet that it was trained on. Others have suggested that the link to the chat session transcript should be included instead of the general link to the chatbot. You may want to check with your teacher for more guidance.

Here is one possible alternative format that follows APA style with adjustments to provide more information.

Alternate-Style Reference List Citation

OpenAI. (Prompted July 3, 2024). *ChatGPT 4o* [Large language model]. https://chatgpt.com/share/78c36969-aba3-4803-8bdb-0085332182e8

MLA Style

The Modern Language Association (MLA) provides the following guidelines:

- Cite a generative AI tool whenever you paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into your own work any content (whether text, image, data, or other) that was created by it.
- Acknowledge all functional uses of the tool (like editing your prose or translating words) in a note, your text, or another suitable location.
- Take care to vet the secondary sources it cites. (MLA)

Below are some examples of how to use and cite generative AI with MLA style. For more details, see How do I cite generative AI in MLA style?, MLA In-Text Citations, and MLA Works Cited Pages.

The MLA invites comments about its guidance and even says "the MLA template of core elements is meant to provide flexibility in citation. So if you find a rationale to modify these recommendations in your own citations, we encourage you to do so." I have

modified the Works Cited entry by listing the link to the chat session transcript rather than the general link to the tool and by adding a reference to the specific model used within ChatGPT (in this case, GPT-4o) to provide more detail.

Sample MLA Citation

In-text citation of quoted text where the prompt is described in the sentence:

When prompted to list public-service jobs for men, ChatGPT listed two stereotypically masculine jobs first: "Firefighter" and "Police Officer." (2024).

In-text citation of paraphrased text where the prompt is referenced in parentheses:

ChatGPT has been known to output stereotypical answers when asked to list jobs for a certain gender. ("Public-service jobs for men" 2024).

In the Works Cited list:

"Give me a list of ten public-service jobs for men" prompt. *ChatGPT 4o*, version unknown, OpenAI, 3 Jul. 2024, https://chatgpt.com/share/78c36969-a...b-0085332182e8.

Further Resources

The Research Process chapter in *How Arguments Work: A Guide to Writing and Analyzing Texts in College*

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4.4: AI Copies Patterns; It Doesn't Think

Before we use AI-generated text, it's pretty important to get a basic intuitive sense of where it's coming from. AI text generation copies patterns from the text it's trained on. Its training involves such dense mathematical analysis of patterns in such huge quantities of text, that in replicating these patterns, it can sound pretty smart, as you're probably aware. (Hence all the fuss). But how does it get to sound that way?

The *New York Times* article Let Us Show You How GPT Works – Using Jane Austen by Aatish Bhatia shows us it what it looks like when you gradually train small AI text generation systems, called large language models, in the style of Harry Potter, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Shakespeare, Moby Dick, or Jane Austen.

Let's take the Harry Potter version. Before training, the user types in "Hermione raised her wand," and the language model continues ".Pfn"tkf^2JXR454tn7T23ZgE——yEIé\mmf'jHgz/yW;>>QQi0/PXH;ab:XV>"?y1D^^n—RU0SVGRW?c>HqddZZj:"

That's its random guess as to what comes next.

Then it goes through several rounds of training, ingesting text from Harry Potter and adjusting its internal prediction numbers to match patterns in that text.

Eventually, when the user writes "Hermione raised her wand," the model continues in a recognizably Harry Potterish way:

"Professor Dumbledore never mimmed Harry. He looked back at the room, but they didn't seem pretend to blame Umbridge in the Ministry. He had taken a human homework, who was glad he had not been in a nightmare bad cloak."

Yep, it's echoing the books and movies with main characters' names, a reference to the Ministry (of Magic), and "nightmare bad" cloaks that suggest magic and evil. But, um, there's no such word as "mimmed." And why does homework care if some person is wearing a cloak? This is where I start to chuckle.

If you kept training a system like this, it will eventually give you a sentence that might be hard to tell apart from Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling's sentences. But the system would still be matching patterns and predicting next words.

So next time you see AI produce a smooth, polished sentence that sounds just like sophisticated academic writing, remember the Harry Potterish gobbledygook. The lights might be on, but nobody's home. Check whether the text is empty or wrong. If it does make sense and matches reality, remember, that's partly luck. The system makes up true sentences the same way it makes up nonsense. So should we trust it? No.

More Silly Examples

- My 12-year-old son's question was "Why does pepperoni pizza dominate literature?" ChatGPT went with it, declaring "Pepperoni pizza's dominance in literature can be attributed to several factors."
- I asked it to write about the connection between snails and cheese. It said, "Ecologically, snails and cheese exhibit a symbiotic relationship mediated through their respective environments and the intricate ecosystems they inhabit." Snails and cheese somehow help each other out? Not so much.
- How about the essential connection between hip hop and potato mashers? ChatGPT says "The act of mashing, much like the act of mixing and sampling in hip hop, requires skill, precision, and an understanding of how to integrate diverse components into a cohesive whole." Really?
- One more: I asked ChatGPT about the "essential connection" between kiwi fruit and Call of Duty. It said "their essential connection lies in their shared narrative of globalization, cultural commodification, and the modern challenge of balancing digital and physical well-being." Hey, that's an elegantly formed sentence. The rhythm sounds nice. But there's nobody home who really had something to say something about that particular fruit and that particular video game.

Try an Experiment

You might find that you get a better intuitive sense of this through your own experiments.

1. Think of two random things that you're pretty sure have no essential connection.

2. Bring up a chat system, any of the more sophisticated chat systems. If you'd like to use one without logging in, try Perplexity (click on "focus" and choose "Writing") or ChatGPT. Other options include Gemini, Claude, and Copilot).
3. You can copy the following prompt, edit it, or write your own. Substitute your picks for X and Y, like an unusual fruit and a video game or a musical style and a particular kitchen tool.

Prompt: "In a sophisticated, authoritative academic style, explain the essential connection between X and Y."

4. Read the chatbot's output. How does it sound? Does it make any sense? Do you have an emotional reaction to see fancy text seeming to argue for something so arbitrary that isn't really your opinion or any human's opinion? Is it annoying, exciting, impressive, eye-rolling, weird, or…? What does this experiment suggest to you about how we should approach AI text? What's your takeaway?

Further Readings and Videos

- Let Us Show You How GPT Works – Using Jane Austen by Aatish Bhatia, *The New York Times*
- TikTok video on ChatGPT as predictive text (3 minutes, by @mor10webn)
- Computers are getting better at writing (7 minutes, from Joss Fong at *Vox.com)*
- Shaped like Information or Let Our Algorithm Choose Your Halloween Costume by Janelle Shane, author of the AI Weirdness blog and the book *You Look Like a Thing and I Love You: How Artificial Intelligence Works and Why It's Making the World a Weirder Place*.
- Talking about Large Language Models by Murray Shanahan

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4.5: Don't Trust AI to Cite Its Sources

By Anna Mills and Maha Bali

Teachers will usually ask you to cite sources, right? They will explain that you should cite not just when you are quoting but also when you are referencing an idea you got from someone else. The hope here is that in academic practice we give some sense of where an idea is coming from. We think of academic work as a big ongoing conversation between people agreeing and disagreeing and building on each other's points as they try to figure things out. It helps to keep track of who is saying what. It seems only fair to give credit to the person who developed each main point.

For some concepts in the humanities and social sciences, it is also important to know the positionality of the person or people who developed them. For example, if we are studying nonviolent resistance, we need to understand the people and context in which ideas about it were developed. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior, and Henry David Thoreau wrote extensively about it, and their ideas were shaped by very different experiences, times, and places.

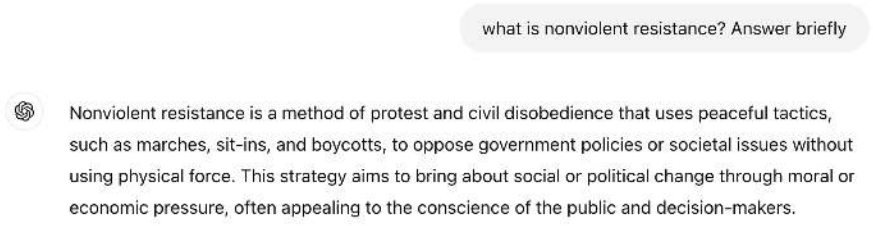


Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in shaping current understandings of nonviolent resistance in 1931, public domain image courtesy of Wikimedia



Martin Luther King Junior was also instrumental in shaping current understandings of nonviolent resistance. Image by WikiImages from Pixabay

Knowing something about how these leaders were positioned in terms of race, gender, class, education, and politics can help us understand their ideas and think about how we want to respond from our own positionality. However, if you ask a chatbot about "nonviolent resistance," it may give you an answer without reference to any person or context at all (chatbot responses are variable). Here is an example with ChatGPT:



Screenshot from a ChatGPT4o temporary session, July 2024

In general, chatbots don't make it easy to figure out what sources have influenced their answers. As Iris Van Rooij puts it, "LLMs, by design, produce texts based on ideas generated by others without the user knowing what the exact sources were."

The systems don't "know" what influenced their answer. Dominik Lukeš refers to this limitation as a lack of "introspection." Once a system is trained, it consists of a very complicated formula, a big set of numbers that its supposed to multiply by other numbers.

The chatbot puts our question or request into the formula and gets a result. It has no way to look backward to see which human writings made its formula have certain numbers.

Chatbots often don't cite when they should

Why does it matter if chatbots can't tell us where an idea came from? In June 2023, Maha Bali pointed this out to Anna Mills in a conversation on X. She wrote, "One of the things I'm stuck on right now is that a lot of the AI-generated text paraphrases work of scholars we would *normally* cite as paraphrased. This stuff now goes unacknowledged and it's not OK…E.g. I asked it about characteristics of White Supremacy Culture. It gave me the list that Tema Okun and others use, but did not cite her."

A year later, I (Anna) tested and saw the same pattern. I asked three chatbots–ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini–about "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality," a concept developed by Maha Bali and other co-directors of the grassroots group Virtually Connecting.

- ChatGPT generated long, inaccurate descriptions of the concept with no reference to either the organization or the people who developed it. This was true of all ten times I tested (see this sample ChatGPT transcript).
- Google's Gemini described the concept vaguely, making up principles that are not in any published writings about this exact phrase, "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality." I tested it ten times and not once did t mention an organization or person. (See this sample Gemini transcript). Gemini did feature a Google "G" logo which offered to check the results when I hovered over. The check led it to highlight several passages of Gemini's output and link them to websites, including Maha Bali's blog.
- Claude 3.5's ten responses all referred to the hospitality industry, a clear error since the exact phrase "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality" was developed to refer to education (See this sample Claude transcript). They also failed to mention any organizations or people involved in developing the concept.

Citing chatbots according to the rules gives them credit for human authors' work

Labeling chatbot output as such is important. And the major academic organizations are working hard to come up with guidelines for this. But it's tricky. If we follow the current guidelines, we'll make no mention of the humans who developed the idea the chatbot is summarizing.

Take any of the examples above where we asked a chatbot about Intentionally Equitable Hospitality. Let's say a person does that and then wants to quote the output and follow the rules to cite ChatGPT in APA, MLA, or Chicago style. All of these would make it look like ChatGPT is the source of the IEH concept. For more on this, see If I use AI, how should I acknowledge or cite it?

Don't ask a chatbot what its sources are

There is a lot of confusion about this among teachers and the general public because if you ask a chatbot what its source is, it will often give an answer that sounds plausible. It still doesn't "know." It is using its word prediction abilities to "guess" which source influenced its output. It doesn't really have access to its own internal workings. The source it mentions may not exist or it may not be the one that really shaped the response. For example, in one case, ChatGPT said it got information about Intentionally Equitable Hospitality from Kimberly Crenshaw, who is known for the concept of Intersectionality and has not written about IEH.

Chatbots also respond unreliably when you ask which person developed a concept.

- When I asked ChatGPT the follow up question about IEH: "Is this a particular person's concept?" it gave credit to Dr. Tia Brown McNair, a prominent expert on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion who is not in fact associated with the phrase "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality."
- When I asked the same follow-up question of Claude 3.5, it gave credit to Ashtin Berry, a hospitality industry leader whose name is not associated with the phrase "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality."
- Google's Gemini did better. It responded to the question once by correctly referring to Virtually Connecting and its co-directors, including Maha Bali and Autumm Caines. On another trial, it referred only to Maha Bali. On another, it referred to Maha Bali, Mia Zamora, and the organization Equity Unbound, which is correct because both authors and the organization have developed this concept further beyond the original by Virtually Connecting. None of the trials trace the idea from its original formulation to its current formulation.

Even chatbots that can search often don't mention their sources

As we will see in The pros and cons of AI for research assistance (coming soon), many current chatbot/search hybrid systems can search the internet in real time to inform their response to a question. They link to documents, making it seem like they are allowing us to trace the source of their information. But we the users don't know if those links are really the sources they used or not. And it isn't always clear which of the links informed which part of their response. Besides, many people will not click on the links; they will focus on the AI response itself.

In May 2024, Google rolled out "AI overviews" at the top of many search results pages. When I try the same query about Intentionally Equitable Hospitality (IEH) in Google search, I get an answer that doesn't mention a source, though links to sources are right below it.



Screenshot of a Google search AI Overview in response to the query "What is Intentionally Equitable Hospitality?" on July 19, 2024. Four repetitions produced similar results.

The Google result above plagiarizes most of a sentence from the first source linked to, Bali and Zamora's "Intentionally Equitable Hospitality as Critical Instructional Design." Google explains "IEH is iterative and involves planning, design, and facilitation in the moment" without quoting. Bali and Zamora had written, "IEH is iterative design, planning, and facilitation in the moment."

Now let's try with the popular chat-search hybrid and Google alternative Perplexity.ai. In one instance, Perplexity mentions Virtually Connecting as a source for IEH and linked to an article by Maha Bali and Mia Zamora without mentioning their names. (How many will follow the link?) On the second, third, fourth, and fifth trials with the free version of Perplexity, it gave links but mentioned no source at all in its overviews. I repeated this five more times using my quota of free "Pro" searches. Only once did it mention Maha Bali and Mia Zamora by name in its autogenerated answer. So even though this chatbot was referencing a real source by the scholars who defined the concept, in five out of ten trials it included no equivalent at all to an in-text citation (see all of Perplexity's responses).

So how do we respect sources when using AI?

All this means that when a chatbot "says" something, we should wonder not just whether it is accurate but also whom the chatbot is parroting. Of course, many concepts have been shaped by so many contributors and have become so widespread that they do not need to be cited. For example, if we state, "Many Mexicans have both indigenous and European ancestry," we do not need to cite it.

But if the point is less well known or more controversial, it is left to us to do due diligence and see if there is a particular person or group of persons who came up with the ideas AI serves us. Internet and scholarly database searches on key concepts may lead us to the human thinkers responsible.

Should it really be on users to try to reconstruct where a chatbot may have gotten its information? Is there any way the software itself could help us? If so, how could we encourage the companies or the government to make that happen? See "Does using AI do harm? If so, should we stop using it?* for more on intellectual property and how we might participate in shaping AI in this regard.

Further reading

- Acknowledging and Citing Generative AI in Academic Work
- Find the Conversation That Interests You from the chapter on research in How Arguments Work

- ChatGPT is bad at following copyright law, researchers say by Britney Nguyen, *Quartz*
- The Times Sues OpenAI and Microsoft Over A.I. Use of Copyrighted Work, By Michael M. Grynbaum and Ryan Mac, *The New York Times*, December 23, 2023
- A new bill wants to reveal what's really inside AI training data, *The Verge*, April 10, 2024

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- Against Automated Plagiarism by Iris Van Rooij
- Intentionally Equitable Hospitality as Critical Instructional Design by Maha Bali and Mia Zamora in *Designing for Care*
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4.6: Student Essay Critiquing a New York Times Article on the Dangers of AI

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Lily Raabe

Professor Mills

College of Marin

ENGL 150

15 April 2024

How Dangerous Is AI?

Is there a safe way to use and develop AI, or will it inevitably be our downfall? The article "You Can Have the Blue Pill or the Red Pill, and We're Out of Blue Pills" by Yuval Harari argues that AI, specifically large language models, could use its mastery of human language to destroy democracy, culture, and possibly humanity. Although the argument is compelling, it lacks evidence to support his claims and does not provide a strong rebuttal to the counterargument that AI potentially has limitless benefits.

In the article, Yuval Harari discusses the rapid development of AI and its potential negative impact on our future. The article begins with a shocking and somewhat unsettling statistic presented by Harari. He cites a 2022 study where 700 leading experts and researchers in artificial intelligence were asked about the possible future risks of a powerful AI currently in development. Half of the participants said they believe there is a 10% or greater risk of human extinction, and if not extinction, then a similarly permanent and severe disempowerment caused by AI. This is a startling fact- companies are putting significant amounts of money into something experts believe has a 10% chance of permanently hindering us or wiping us out completely. Harari argues that tech companies are neglecting to protect consumers from this potentially dangerous product and urges that we slow down the rate of development so society can prepare for the future of AI.

Harari follows this with another issue concerning him: AI's proficiency with language. Harari claims that language is the basis of humanity and that without it, we would not have laws, money, art, or science. So, he asks, what does it mean for humans if artificial intelligence has a better grasp on language than we do? How does AI's ability to generate language influence stories, images, laws, and policies? Harari also argues that AI can exploit human weakness, bias, and addiction and form intimate relationships with people. Humans could easily be taken advantage of if their weaknesses or personal feelings are being preyed upon. He worries that an advanced knowledge of language combined with the ability to manipulate could be detrimental to humanity. He writes, "In games like chess, no human can hope to beat a computer. What happens when the same thing occurs in art, politics or religion?".

Harari believes that AI's ability to master language will impact human culture. He points out that what started with AI writing essays for students could quickly turn into "political speeches, ideological manifestos, holy books for new cults." This, Harari argues, could rewrite human culture. He continues by saying that humans are in a cultural prism, or cocoon, and how we see reality is affected by our cultural lens. He worries that if AI shapes culture, the way we interpret our reality will negatively change. He provides an example of using AI algorithms in social media to support this claim. Harari explains that companies use AI to create algorithms to keep people more engaged with the content that they view on social media. He argues that AI can create illusions that do not align with reality because the algorithm will curate content based on biases people have. The illusion he alludes to is that Donald Trump did not lose the 2020 election, and he believes people think this because of content fed to them by the algorithm. Harari claims that our current societal divide and the possible unraveling of democracy are due to social media and AI algorithms that help push propaganda.

After this, Harari provides a counterargument in his essay: "A.I. indeed has the potential to help us defeat cancer, discover lifesaving drugs and invent solutions for our climate and energy crises. There are innumerable other benefits we cannot begin to imagine. " But he immediately rebuts it, saying, "But it doesn't matter how high the skyscraper benefits A.I. assembles if the foundation collapses." Harari argues that AI development is moving too quickly and that if we don't create regulations and enforce the safe use of AI, we cannot safely take advantage of the benefits.

Harari follows this with a call to action. He demands control of AI development before there are extreme consequences and claims democracy is at stake if we continue down this path. He calls for world leaders to address the potential issues with AI and for

regulation around large language models. Finally, Harari suggests we prepare institutions for a world with AI and "to learn to master A.I. before it masters us."

This was a compelling essay. Harari highlights potential issues that the rapid development of AI could cause. He emphasizes the importance of language to drive home the point that large language models hold more influence over us than we thought and that this influence could have far-reaching consequences for democracy and culture. He also brings attention to how urgently we need to place preventative measures so AI does not become uncontrollable. One weakness in the argument is Harari's response to the counterargument. Harari acknowledges the counterargument but does not offer a convincing response. He does not explain why it is not worth the risk to find the benefits of AI or expand on his rebuttal. If AI has the potential to cure cancer or create lifesaving drugs, as he says, isn't that worth exploring? If AI is being developed anyway, we may as well take advantage of it and use it to develop cures and solutions for worldwide problems. If we use AI in professional settings or in government funded programs to solve problems, it might also spur politicians to create regulations, which Harari wants.

The other weakness is that there is little evidence to support the claims. Harari cites a survey of experts at the beginning of the argument, but the rest is purely his opinion and does not provide evidence based on actual data. He offers no real justification for the idea that AI will use manipulative language and tactics that will lead to the fall of democracy; to convince us, he just repeats that idea with different phrasing.

Harari's argument forces the reader to consider an uncomfortable prospect: AI could potentially eradicate humans. But is this really the case? AI has problems. It can be racist, show extreme bias, and make up sources or information, but could it lead to the fall of democracy, as Harari claims? We need more information about how exactly AI could use language to manipulate, exploit, or harm humans.

Harari uses borderline fearmongering tactics, writing, "However, simply by gaining mastery of language, A.I. would have all it needs to contain us in a Matrix-like world of illusions, without shooting anyone or implanting any chips in our brains. If any shooting is necessary, A.I. could make humans pull the trigger, just by telling us the right story." But how would this be possible? Harari is correct that language is the basis of humanity and its culture, and I understand why a robot having mastery of language would be worrying. Still, his argument would be much more convincing if he showed how AI could wield language as a weapon against humanity. The claims seem exaggerated and unsubstantiated. Claiming that AI could manipulate humans into behaving in a way that kills us seems far-fetched. AI is not a free-thinking entity; it has no agenda. Why would it try to manipulate us? What would it gain from that? I wish he would provide evidence or explain his reasoning. I do not believe that the language Harari is using is purposefully manipulative but rather a tactic to force readers to recognize unregulated AI as a serious issue. However, his writing comes across as dramatic and hard to believe.

Despite this, Harari does a fantastic job of convincing readers to reflect on the possibilities of unregulated AI and the importance of language, culture, and human connection. His essay empowers readers to challenge corporations and world leaders and to think critically about the benefits they are promising from AI use.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Applying Style in Academic Writing

5.1: What Defines Good Style in Academic Writing?

5.2: Style in Academic Writing

5.3: Keeping It Concise

5.4: Making Sentences Clear

5.5: Understanding Convoluted Sentences

5.6: Sentence Variety

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5.1: What Defines Good Style in Academic Writing?

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 26 sec):

0:00 / 4:26

Prioritize clarity

"Style" refers to the way in which a writer expresses something. Much as clothing style can shape how we see a person, writing style can shape how we feel about the writer and their ideas. A writing style can give pleasure through elegant, graceful, and pleasing word combinations.

However, most writers and teachers of writing agree that clarity should be our first goal. Any stylistic choices we make should also help our readers understand our points. In turn, writing clearly will generally make for good style. British poet Matthew Arnold advised "Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style."[1]



Photo by Justin Katigbak of Disabled And Here, licensed CC BY 4.0.

Avoid academese

Professors and students alike can be tempted to write in a wordy, complex, self-consciously scholarly style. This is an understandable mistake. We want to make our words sound formal and authoritative in part because, in the past, academic culture has favored such an ornamented style. Some call it "**academese**." Compare the following two versions of a sentence:

> **Academese style**: "To satisfy her hunger for nutrition, she consumed the bread."
>
> **Straightforward style**: "She was hungry, so she ate the bread."[1]

Clearly, the academese style runs the risk of becoming tedious and alienating readers. Unnecessary jargon, fancy vocabulary, and convoluted sentences can make anything harder to understand.

The academese style also signals elitism. It shows off a high level of education. As Joseph Williams puts it, "it is a language of exclusion that a diverse and democratic society cannot tolerate."[2] The culture is shifting among scholars to favor plainer language and insist on clarity. Readers, including professors, are much more likely to find a self-consciously highbrow writing style annoying rather than impressive. As the saying goes[3], any fool can make simple things complicated; it takes a genius to make complicated things simple.

Of course, as writers we look for ways to develop confidence in our voices, to take ourselves seriously and make sure we are taken seriously. We can develop this sense of confidence, however, without fancy vocabulary or a hyper-formal, fussy style. Removing

the pressure to sound academic can be a relief. Sometimes we can just say something very bluntly and simply and leave it at that. Confidence will come as we clarify our thinking, and writing in a straightforward style can help us to do that. Unclear and bloated prose gets in the way, both for the writer and the reader. Focusing on saying plainly what we mean can free us up to make intellectual progress.



Confidence, directness, and simplicity in writing inspire trust, as they do in in-person interactions.
Photo by Paula Bronstein for the Hewlett Foundation's Images of Empowerment, licensed CC BY NC 4.0.

Don't worry about style until the end

The best way to achieve clarity and concision in writing is to separate the drafting process from the revision process. Experienced writers routinely produce vague, tortuous, and bloated drafts, and are happy to do so. It usually means that we're onto an interesting idea. We may express the same idea in three or four different ways as we're getting thoughts down on paper. That's fine. In fact, each repetition helps us develop key ideas and alternative approaches to conveying them. A snarly first draft is often a great achievement. We just need to allow ourselves the time at the end of the writing process to revise for clarity and concision (See Chapter 11: The Writing Process).

Once we have our ideas clear, it will be easier to write effective sentences. Editing for style can then be a satisfying and not overly burdensome part of the process. One common metaphor notes that a good edit is like the last twist of a camera lens that brings the whole picture into focus. In the following sections we will look at ways to edit sentences for clarity, concision, balance, and variety.

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[1]Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 3.

[2]Joseph Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace.* (New York, NY: Longman, 2003), 4.

[3] Variously attributed to Albert Einstein, E.F. Schumacher, and Woody Guthrie.

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5.2: Style in Academic Writing

Style in Academic Writing

Nora Bacon

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There can be little doubt that a central goal of first-year composition is to teach academic writing; this commitment is visible in our professional literature and in the mission statements of countless first-year writing programs. We promise to help students make the transition to college writing and succeed in their other classes because that is the purpose for which first-year composition courses were created, and it's the reason our courses continue to be required in almost every American college and university.

But teachers who embrace this mission find that it sits awkwardly with our commitment to teaching style. First, we recognize that many academic genres allow limited room for stylistic play. Is style an important enough feature of academic writing to deserve a place in our overcrowded curriculum? Second, we know that style varies across the curriculum: the styles preferred by mathematicians may be quite different from those preferred by historians or social workers or chemists. If we integrate style instruction into a general education course designed for students who are headed toward dozens of different majors, which style do we teach? Even if we could know the whole range of academic styles, we could hardly teach all of them in fifteen weeks. Is there a generic, teachable "academic writing style"? Is it the plain style?

In the paragraphs that follow, I challenge two widespread assumptions about academic writing that have obscured our view of its style(s): the notion that academic writing is impersonal and formulaic (essentially style-free) and the notion that the only characteristics of academic style worth teaching are clarity and conciseness. I suggest that a central insight of Writing Across the Curriculum—that academic discourse practices vary—provides a guiding principle for style pedagogy: at the heart of the enterprise is analysis of stylistic variation, with attention to the rhetorical choice-making that accounts for it and with opportunities for imitation, experimentation, and play.

The Dichotomy: Writing with Style vs. Writing for the Academy

Perhaps because it addresses an audience of students, Kate Ronald's 1995 essay, "Style: The Hidden Agenda in Composition Classes or One Reader's Confession," describes style's uncertain place in composition instruction in particularly clear and accessible language with a focus on the practical consequences for students. Ronald explains that

different eras have emphasized different parts of composition. Plato and Aristotle were upset by what they saw as an enchantment with style; they worried that writers could dazzle audiences without caring much about telling them the truth. And so they focused on invention, on figuring out issues by thinking and writing. (Ronald, 1999, p. 170)

In the 1980s and 1990s, she says, composition teachers informed by the writing process movement similarly focused on content rather than form and thus on invention rather than arrangement or style.

But there's a problem:

Your teacher, and I, and all the others who were part of this latest revolution in rhetoric, haven't been exactly honest with you about the matter of style. We say we aren't overly interested in style … but we are still influenced by your writing style more than we admit, or perhaps know… . I'm still rewarding and punishing my students for their writing styles. And here's the worst part of my confession: I'm not sure that I'm teaching them style. (Ronald, 1999, pp. 170-71)

When teachers don't address style in their classes, students are judged by a standard that's hidden from view, and they are expected to demonstrate stylistic skills that they are never taught. One student will write vivid, lively sentences and another won't; the first student's success and the second's relative failure will be reflected in their grades, but the matter of how one achieves an effective style will remain mysterious.

If Ronald is correct—and I believe she is—then composition teachers have, in our neglect of style, done our students a disservice. But for all her honesty and wisdom, Ronald takes her argument down an unfortunate path. She accepts the dichotomy that has plagued our thinking about style pedagogy for too long, suggesting that writing with an effective style is one thing, writing for the academy quite another.

Ronald defines style in terms of the presence of the author; the writing she admires is "writing where somebody's home." She speculates that students sometimes write as if "nobody's home" because they're playing it safe, writing to avoid mistakes or distancing themselves from their prose in order to protect themselves from criticism, and sometimes they write dry, lifeless prose because they think they have to in order to sound "collegiate." And, she implies, collegiate writing does indeed require that the writer leave home. While English teachers may like writing with style—"we have a real bent for the literary element, the metaphor, the clever turn of phrase, the rhythm of prose that comes close to the rhythm of poetry" (Ronald, 1999, p. 174)—teachers in other disciplines are likely to prefer author-evacuated prose:

Many professors believe that you should be learning to write one certain kind of style in college, one that's objective, impersonal, formal, explicit, and organized around assertions, claims, and reasons that illustrate or defend those claims. You know this kind of writing. You produce it in response to questions like "Discuss the causes of the Civil War," or "Do you think that 'nature' or 'nurture' plays the most important role in a child's development?" (Ronald, 1999, p. 175)

The example that follows is stiff and verbose, easily recognizable to any composition teacher as the work of a young writer trying on an overly formal, alien "academic" voice. Observing that the passage has "no authentic voice," Ronald observes, "I don't like this kind of writing very much myself… . I prefer discourse that 'renders experience,' as Peter Elbow (1991) puts it, rather than discourse that tries to explain it" (Ronald, 1999, p. 175).

The assumptions behind this analysis warrant scrutiny because they are so very widespread in our profession. Like many others who have written about academic discourse, Ronald writes as if the qualities we see in the most unappealing academic writing—awkwardness, wordiness, excessive formality, impersonality, a naïve aspiration to objectivity—were what defines academic writing. If the writing performs an academic function, such as explaining experience, the writer must be away from home; the writing will be stale, and while reasonable people may write such stuff because they have to (on an exam, for example, or in a publication required for tenure) and other people may read it because they have to, they can hardly expect to like it. Only if the writing performs a different function, "rendering experience" as literary works do, can a text convey the writer's voice and give pleasure. The academy harbors a few people who write, appreciate, and reward clever, well-crafted prose—Ronald suggests that all English teachers fall into this category while others limit the group to "creative" writers—but for the most part, the academy insists on thesis-driven essays written in plain, utilitarian prose by uncreative writers. You can have academic writing or you can have style, but you can't have both. You can teach academic writing or you can teach style, but you can't teach both.

This dichotomy is easy to see in "Style: The Hidden Agenda in Composition Classes" because Ronald, writing for an audience unfamiliar with debates in composition pedagogy, necessarily simplifies the issues. Others who criticize academic writing acknowledge that academic styles vary widely (in "Reflections on Academic Discourse," Peter Elbow is particularly specific and persuasive on this point; see pages 138-140). Nevertheless, the essential terms of the dichotomy inform most of our thinking about style in composition studies, so that teachers feel compelled to choose between teaching academic discourse and teaching the delights of style. The choice is imposed on us not only because we have so little time that we have to make difficult choices about where style might fit but because style has so little relevance to academic writing as it is usually conceived.

The Plain Style

With her reference to Plato and Aristotle, Ronald points to ancient articulations of the tension between style and substance, between language that "dazzles" and language designed primarily to express truth. In seventeenth century England, Thomas Sprat addressed the same tension, writing a forceful condemnation of eloquence. In The History of the Royal Society, Sprat urges a spare, unadorned style as necessary to scientific inquiry. Volubility, copia, eloquence—these are the enemies of the plain style, and Sprat reports that in the interest of science, members of the Royal Society sought to avoid them:

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution, the only Remedy, that can be found for this extravagance: and that has been, a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.(Tillotson, Fussell, & Waingrow, 1969, p. 27)

The ideal of matching the number of things to the number of words is telling, for the theory of language underlying the plain style is a correspondence theory. The goal of writing is to reflect external reality. The best writing is transparent, permitting a clear view

of the phenomenon being described or analyzed without excess, without distortion, without distraction.

The influence of the plain style on writing pedagogy can hardly be overstated. Among Sprat's descendents are the authors of the two most widely adopted books on style, Strunk and White's The Elements of Style and Joseph M. Williams's Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace.

As many readers have observed, The Elements of Style is as idiosyncratic and inconsistent as it is charming. In the final chapter, "An Approach to Style," White seems to be having a wonderful time fooling around with language, creating a string of aphorisms and extended metaphors even as he recommends "turning resolutely away from all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style—all mannerisms, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity" (1959, p. 55).

His own indulgences notwithstanding, White cautions against calling attention to oneself or one's craft: Place yourself in the background; write in a way that comes naturally; do not overwrite; do not overstate; avoid fancy words; avoid foreign languages; use figures of speech sparingly; prefer the standard to the offbeat. Throughout the book, Strunk and White highlight the importance of clarity and conciseness. Among the "Elementary Principles of Composition" is the admonition to omit needless words:

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. (1959, p. 17)

To illustrate Strunk's most famous injunction—use definite, specific, concrete language—White turns to that other well-known advocate of the plain style, George Orwell, quoting his translation of Ecclesiastes ("I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift …") into gobbledegook ("Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity …") (1959, p. 17).

In Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, Joseph Williams offers dozens of similar translations, and his exercises invite students to transform wordy, awkward, or indirect sentences into lean, clear prose. The stylistic virtue that he stresses from beginning to end is clarity; his specific suggestions—to use the subject and verb positions to identify actors and actions, to avoid nominalization, to prune out redundancy—are offered to this end. And like Orwell, he weighs the ethical and political consequences of clarity on the one hand, obfuscation on the other. We have an ethical duty, Williams argues, to write prose as clear as the prose we wish to read. And we have a right to insist on clarity from people in positions of power: "We must simply insist that, in principle, those who manage our affairs have a duty to tell us the truth as clearly as they can. They probably won't, but that just shifts the burden to us to call them on it" (2005, p. 186). To Orwell and to Williams, clarity matters because the workings of democracy depend upon clear thinking and honest communication.

The plain style seems perfectly congruent with the goals of scientific discourse. The knowledge-making mission of the academy would seem to be well served by the effort to describe, explain, analyze, and evaluate the world with as much clarity as we can muster. For this practical reason, as well as the ethical and political reasons suggested by Orwell and Williams, the plain style endures. To the extent that style has any presence in composition theory and pedagogy, it consists mostly of lessons encouraging clarity and conciseness.

This approach to style pedagogy is problematic, however, for at least two reasons. First, there's the epistemological problem. While some scholars may proceed from a positivist view of language, seeking words that map onto a pre-existing, describable reality, others question such a project. In Style: An Anti-Textbook, Richard Lanham raises this point as an objection to privileging clarity above all. Characterizing style textbooks and handbooks together as "The Books," he identifies a "fundamental error":

In Western philosophy's long-standing quarrel between idealism and realism, The Books remain realists. Reality is "out there" and words must remain loyal to it.

A complete theory of prose style need not settle this endless dispute [between idealism and realism]. But it should chart the whole dispute. It should account for a prose loyal to a preexistent reality and it should account for a prose loyal to words themselves as a final reference point… . The Books omit half the process… . They thus ground themselves on both a false theory of knowledge and a false theory of perception. They assume both a neutral observer whom psychology has long ago disproved and a neutral language that even science has now discarded. (1974, p. 39)

In the forty years since Lanham wrote those words, the "realist" view has continued to lose ground in the academy.

The second problem with reducing style pedagogy to instruction in the plain style is an aesthetic one. It's easy enough to grant that clarity and conciseness are generally desirable qualities in writing. When I read Orwell, Strunk and White, or Williams, I nod in agreement; when these writers offer "before" and "after" examples of revision, with a profusion of nominalizations or a string of prepositional phrases in the first sentence and taut, lean syntax in the second, I always prefer the sentence as revised. And yet. While clarity and conciseness may be necessary to an effective style, surely they are not sufficient.

Pedagogy that privileges the plain style cannot teach style as Kate Ronald has defined it for us. To Ronald, writing has an effective style if it is infused with the personality of the writer, making use of those literary devices English teachers love ("the metaphor, the clever turn of phrase, the rhythm of prose that comes close to the rhythm of poetry") (1999, p. 174). To write with style is to arrange words artfully, striving for euphony, wit, eloquence. Twentieth-century advocates of the plain style may not reject artful language with the vehemence of Thomas Sprat, but they don't encourage it, and they don't offer much help to the young writer who hopes to achieve it.

What this discussion has, I hope, demonstrated is that conceptions of "academic writing" and "style" that prevail in composition studies make it difficult for us to see where style fits into a course in academic discourse. The academic/creative dichotomy creates one kind of difficulty: when we accept the view of academic writing as inevitably dry, stiff, and impersonal, academic writing and style must live in different homes, presumably the dutiful, dogged first-year writing program and the happily sybaritic creative writing program. Privileging the plain style creates another difficulty: while the plain style seems generally well suited to the purposes of academic writing, the goals of clarity and conciseness constitute a disappointingly anemic conception of style.

Variation in Academic Writing

Let us return to the rather obvious observation that academic writing is not all the same. It varies, in structure and in style, in many respects: the shape taken by a text, or by particular paragraphs and sentences within a text, will depend upon factors associated with the writer—his or her personality, mood, knowledge, experience, professional status, ethnicity, gender, proficiency with language, and so on—and other factors associated with the context—the practices of the discipline, the conventions of the genre, with these in turn shaped by the culture in which the discipline is situated and the history in which generic conventions have evolved.

Given the breadth of this variation, and given the complex personal, social, and political dynamics that account for it, what sort of instruction in style might be useful to a writer at the point of entry into the academic discourse community?

This question is nested in two larger issues that composition theorists have wrestled with at least since the early 1980s. First is the issue of what it means to become part of a discourse community. Ever since Patricia Bizzell's 1982 article introducing the term, composition teachers have taken seriously the responsibility to initiate students into the academic discourse community. The issue that never really goes away, and that seems particularly pressing when we think about style, is that "initiation" slides so easily into "assimilation": we worry that as students learn to sound like members of academic discourse communities, they will sound less like members of other communities they care about, less like themselves.

Second is the issue of transfer. To a surprising degree, knowledge seems to be context-bound; people who learn a skill in one setting do not easily operationalize it in other settings, and the more pronounced the differences between the two settings, the less likely that transfer will occur (Ellis, 1965; Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Smagorinsky & Smith, 1992). Some years back, an "abolitionist" argument gained some traction among composition scholars with the claim that since discourse practices vary within the academy, since academic writing is not one thing, first-year composition courses cannot teach a universally applicable set of "general writing skills" and therefore have no function (Petraglia, 1995). If this argument is extended to style instruction, it leads to the conclusion that since style varies within the academy, it is fruitless to try to teach academic style.

The abolitionist argument has largely disappeared from view, to be replaced by a commonsense approach informed by Writing Across the Curriculum theory. We aim to teach not only those skills that seem broadly useful in the academy but also rhetorical awareness, alerting students to the fact of discourse variation and teaching them to analyze the rhetorical demands of new disciplines and other new contexts. Specifically, we aim to teach a critical rhetorical awareness, inviting students not only to try their hands at academic writing but, at the same time, to stand at a distance from it, to see how it compares to other kinds of writing, to think about why it has the characteristics it has, what values it reflects and perpetuates, whose power it reflects and perpetuates, and where, in light of that analysis, they choose to stand in relation to academic discourse.

Directions for Style Pedagogy

What, then, does a first-year writer need to know about style? What might he or she expect to gain from style pedagogy in a composition course focused on academic writing? Guided analysis of style in academic texts can help students recognize the stylistic preferences of successful writers; appreciate variation across writers, disciplines, and occasions; and understand the factors that account for variation. Guided practice—deploying specific syntactic/stylistic options to achieve desired rhetorical effects—can help novice writers take the step from appreciating to producing effective style in academic texts. The three passages below are examples of academic texts that could function as objects of analysis and resources for practice with style.

The passages represent different genres and disciplines—Programming in Prolog is a textbook in computer science, The Freedom of the Streets a monograph in history, "On Beauty and Being Just" a lecture in philosophy—but each is the product of an academic writer doing academic work.

It is a dark and stormy night. As you drive down a lonely country road, your car breaks down, and you stop in front of a splendid palace. You go to the door, find it open, and begin looking for a telephone. How do you search the palace without getting lost, and know that you have searched every room? Also, what is the shortest path to the telephone? It is just for such emergencies that maze-searching methods have been devised.

In many computer programs, such as those for searching mazes, it is useful to keep lists of information, and search the list if some information is needed at a later time. For example, if we decide to search the palace for a telephone, we might need to keep a list of the room numbers visited so far, so we don't go round in circles visiting the same rooms over and over again. What we do is to write down the room numbers visited on a piece of paper. Before entering a room, we check to see if its number is on our piece of paper. If it is, we ignore the room, since we must have been to it previously. If the room number is not on the paper, we write down the number, and enter the room. And so on until we find the telephone. There are some refinements to be made to this method, and we will do so later when we discuss graph searching. But first, let's write down the steps in order, so we know what problems there are to solve. (Clocksin & Mellish, 1984, p. 142)

In 1888, twelve-year-old Ollie Kreps lived with her parents in a house on East Second Street in Davenport … . She was the oldest child in a crowded, poverty-stricken home. Her parents, married thirteen years, had nine children. Ollie and her father were the family's sole wage earners. Albert Kreps worked as a laborer at the Davenport Lumber Company. His work, though poorly paid, was probably steady in the warm months, when river men floated huge rafts of logs down the Mississippi from the timberlands of Wisconsin for processing at riverside lumber mills. But in the winter months, when the central events of this story took place, the river froze and traffic dwindled to a standstill. Lumber milling and virtually all other work depending on the river came to a halt, and Albert Kreps joined hundreds of other seasonally unemployed men in Davenport, waiting for the spring thaw, when the river opened, the mills turned, and plowing and planting began again. (Wood, 2005, p. 111)

Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people. Sometimes it gives rise to exact replication and other times to resemblances and still other times to things whose connection to the original site of inspiration is unrecognizable. A beautiful face drawn by Verrocchio suddenly glides into the perceptual field of a young boy named Leonardo. The boy copies the face, then copies the face again. Then again and again and again. He does the same thing when a beautiful living plant—a violet, a wild rose—glides into his field of vision, or a living face: he makes a first copy, a second copy, a third, a fourth, a fifth. He draws it over and over, just as Walter Pater (who tells us all this about Leonardo) replicates—now in sentences—Leonardo's acts, so that the essay reenacts its subject, becoming a sequence of faces: an angel, a Medusa, a woman and child, a Madonna, John the Baptist, St. Anne, La Gioconda. Before long the means are found to replicate, thousands of times over, both the sentences and the faces, so that traces of Pater's paragraphs and Leonardo's drawings inhabit all the pockets of the world (as pieces of them float in the paragraph now before you). (Scarry, 1998, p. 3)

The three passages serve as counterexamples to the idea that academic writing is dry, dull, objective, passionless, or merely utilitarian. These writers have made stylistic choices in the interest of giving pleasure, and for me as a reader, they succeed. Each passage is quite different, stylistically, from the others. Of the three, Scarry's lecture strikes me as being most self-consciously styled: the language itself commands our attention as images "glide" into an observer's field of vision, as traces of an image "float" in a paragraph, as the writer shatters the fourth wall in the final clause. The paragraph is typical of Scarry's long lecture; it is a virtuoso performance, both as an instance of philosophical reasoning and as cleverly crafted prose. In the other passages, the language does not call attention to itself. Nevertheless, all three texts demonstrate stylistic choices that would be fruitful to discuss in a course on academic writing.

Sample Stylistic Analysis: Choosing Subjects

Consider, first, the human presence in each of the passages. None of these writers uses “I”; none seeks to render the writer’s own experience. Nevertheless, the passages are decidedly populated, a point students could discover by analyzing the focus, or choice of subjects, in the clauses.

The Clocksin and Mellish passage is the easiest to analyze. In the first paragraph, there are ten subject-verb pairs; in five of them, the subject is “you.” Student writers are sometimes advised to avoid the second person in academic writing, so it’s worth asking why Clocksin and Mellish use it. What does the use of “you” accomplish? What tone does it set? (Other questions naturally follow: What else do these writers do to set an informal tone? Why would they want such a tone in a textbook? Would they be likely to make similar choices in other academic contexts?) In the second paragraph, there are twenty subject-verb pairs; in twelve, the subject is “we.” To whom does “we” refer? Presumably to the reader and writer. In the first few sentences, the search for the telephone continues, so Clocksin and Mellish could easily have continued to use the second person. But with “we,” they insert themselves into the paragraph, and so “we” search for the telephone together and, in the final sentences, “we” write down our steps in order so that “we” can see what problems there are to solve and what refinements might be made when “we” discuss graph searching. Having walked through the castle with me, Clocksin and Mellish are by my side as I learn to write code for maze-searching programs. When I return to my day job as a writing teacher, I might ask students to comment on the effect of the pronoun choice on the chapter’s tone or on the appropriateness of the stylistic choice to its rhetorical context.

Like the Clocksin and Mellish passage, Sharon Wood’s paragraph introducing Ollie Kreps’s family illustrates the general preference of published writers for human subjects. Writing students picking out the subject-verb pairs would find that seven clauses have human subjects: Ollie Kreps, she, parents, Ollie and her father, Albert Kreps, river men, Albert Kreps. The non-human subjects are concentrated in the last two sentences: events, river, traffic, milling, work, river, mills, plowing and planting. The list of subjects captures the movement of the paragraph, from Ollie to the social group that shaped her (her family), from her father to the social group of which he was a part (river men), from river men to the forces that governed their economic circumstances (the river traffic, milling, work, plowing and planting). Because Wood is a colleague of mine, I was able to ask her, in a discourse-based interview, about the reasons for her stylistic choices. She explained that, as a labor historian, it is important to her that Albert Kreps’s unemployment and Ollie Kreps’s prostitution be understood not only as the plight of individuals but as social phenomena. In crafting sentences, she responds quite intentionally to concerns about both content and style. In this passage, she chose concrete subjects and active verbs in the interest of keeping the prose clear and direct; human subjects in the interest of telling an engaging story; and subjects naming natural or economic forces in the interest of accurately representing the historical context in which her “characters” lived.

The stylistic principle of preferring concrete, preferably human, subjects is one that I like to teach: I want my students to know that using human subjects can help them achieve clarity in their sentences and cohesion within their paragraphs. But because academic writing often focuses on natural phenomena or abstract concepts, academic writers do not always have a cast of characters available to serve as subjects. The Scarry passage is an interesting example because not only is the writer discussing an abstract concept, but her purpose is to attribute agency to this abstraction. Not surprisingly, the passage has more non-human than human subjects, with beauty itself serving as a subject in the opening sentences: “Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it … Sometimes it gives rise to exact replication … .” In the fourth sentence, people begin to appear on stage as a face “glides into the perceptual field of a young boy named Leonardo.” Words referring to Leonardo (boy, he) become subjects in the next clauses, though Scarry still manages to present the artist as being acted upon: as images come before him, he reproduces them, over and over, repeatedly, almost robotically. Finally, it is a description of Leonardo’s practice that assumes agency—clause subjects include Walter Pater’s essay, traces of his paragraph, pieces of his text—as beauty replicates itself in the work of Leonardo, then Pater, then Scarry. This passage cannot illustrate a simple lesson like “prefer human subjects.” But it surely demonstrates the importance of the subject position in establishing agency. The presence of Leonardo and Pater (and, perhaps, the entrance of an angel, a Medusa, a woman and child, etc.) may reflect an accomplished stylist’s impulse to populate her prose.

Sample Stylistic Analysis: Sentence Variety

When advised to keep their sentence subjects consistent, students often worry that the sentences will sound too much the same, that the style will be boring. The three passages above, or others like them, could be used in lessons on sentence variety. Taken together, the texts have 33 sentences containing 643 words. The average sentence length is 19.5 words, a bit shorter than the norm for academic writing. But the range of sentence lengths is strikingly wide, and the sentence structure varies in other ways as well.

Of the three texts, the Clocksin and Mellish passage has the least variety in sentence length: the average length is 17.6 words, and nine of the fifteen sentences fall close to the mean. This passage also has the most consistency in its sentence subjects, relying heavily on “you” in the first paragraph and “we” in the second. But I think it’s a rare reader who would find the passage choppy or dull. The sentences vary in type—in addition to declarative sentences, there are two questions and an imperative—and the writers have varied their sentence openers. In the second paragraph, for example, although “we” is used as a subject of eleven clauses, it never begins a sentence. Instead, the writers begin sentences with transitional expressions, free modifiers, and subordinate clauses: For example, if we decide … What we do is to write down … Before entering a room, we check to see … If it is, we ignore the room … If the room number is not on the paper, we write down … And so on until we find the telephone.

In the Wood and Scarry texts, the sentences vary more dramatically in length. These sentences are, overall, longer than Clocksin and Mellish’s, with means of 19.8 words in the Wood passage and 22.0 words in the Scarry passage. But the ranges are wide (Wood’s sentences range from eight to 45 words, Scarry’s from six to 52 words) and in each passage, only two sentences fall near the mean. In other words, both writers create a mix of short, medium-sized, and long sentences. While all the sentences are declarative (excepting one fragment in the Scarry piece), their structure is varied: some are developed by means of pairs or series, others with subordinate clauses, others with free modifiers. In a composition class, these passages would work well to introduce medial modifiers, phrases that interrupt the sentences to provide detail or, in some cases, drama. Novice writers don’t often use medial modifiers, but when they give them a try, they find them easy and natural. So students would benefit from noting, and imitating, sentences like these:

Her parents, married thirteen years, had nine children.

His work, though poorly paid, was probably steady in the warm months …

He does the same thing when a beautiful living plant—a violet, a wild rose—glides into his field of vision …

Analysis of sentence variety in effective academic writing can give students motivation and specific strategies for developing their own sentences.

Sample Stylistic Analysis: Figures of Speech

A time-honored approach to teaching style is to identify figures of speech. The Clocksin and Mellish passage is an extended metaphor, using the story of hunting through a castle in search of a telephone to explain the logic of maze-searching. The story is entertaining, but Thomas Sprat’s worries can be laid to rest: the pleasure does not distract us from the point or short-circuit our ability to comprehend. On the contrary, the strategy of explaining a new concept by analogy to a familiar one is common in academic writing because it aids comprehension; in this case, the metaphor is so essential to the explanation that it is difficult to imagine how maze-searching could be explained without it.

The three passages offer a wealth of resources for teaching schemes of balance, particularly parallelism. Again, Clocksin and Mellish’s use of parallelism contributes to the clarity of their explanation:

Before entering a room, we check to see if its number is on our piece of paper. If it is, we ignore the room, since we must have been to it previously. If the room number is not on the paper, we write down the number, and enter the room.

The two sentences beginning with “if” describe alternative scenarios in grammatically similar constructions: If X, we ignore the room; if—X, we enter the room. It is important that the sentences be grammatically similar so that readers immediately recognize the two options as a pair, just as they would recognize two arrows on a flowchart.

Lessons in parallel structure, simply showing that items in a list should have the same grammatical structure, begin with series like these:

You go to the door, find it locked, and begin looking for a telephone.

It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people.

More complex series illustrate how effectively a parallel list can draw a picture, establish a rhythm, create a mood:

Lumber milling and virtually all other work depending on the river came to a halt, and Albert Kreps joined hundreds of other seasonally unemployed men in Davenport, waiting for the spring thaw, when the river opened, the mills turned, and plowing and planting began again.

Student writers can hear the beauty of a sentence like that one. They appreciate the sense of motion, of water flowing and wheels turning in response to the thaw, and they understand how the alliterative phrase “plowing and planting” calls to mind ancient, earth-bound cycles in which the men of Davenport participate.

Elaine Scarry relies heavily on parallelism and repetition, as well she might in a paragraph about replication. Almost every sentence contains an echo, whether she is setting out an array of possibilities in matched phrases (“sometimes it gives rise to exact replication and other times to resemblances and still other times to things whose connection to the original site of inspiration is unrecognizable”) or repeating exactly the same words (“The boy copies the face, then copies the face again. Then again and again and again.”) In her final sentence, Scarry, like Wood, plays with the sound of the words. Read the sentence aloud, listening for for the echo of faces in traces and pieces, or for repeated use of words beginning with p:

Before long the means are found to replicate, thousands of times over, both the sentences and the faces, so that traces of Pater’s paragraphs and Leonardo’s drawings inhabit all the pockets of the world (as pieces of them float in the paragraph now before you).

If Elaine Scarry can have this much fun with her academic writing, then so can the rest of us. More to the point, so can our students.

From Analysis to Practice

I come, in the end, to the recommendation that we teach style by relying on familiar methods: analyzing the work of excellent stylists; introducing principles like sentence focus, sentence variety, and balance; designing exercises that prompt students to imitate the stylistic moves they admire; encouraging students to experiment with style in their own writing. I believe this work can and should be done in the context of courses focused on academic writing. There is no shortage of exemplary academic writing: if you pause for a few minutes, you’ll think of academic texts that you would like to bring into the classroom, and if you spend an afternoon browsing through your bookshelves, you’ll find dozens more.

Such texts deserve analysis not only in our classrooms but in our scholarship. Are the stylistic features observed in the three sample passages above characteristic of their disciplines? My impression is that computer scientists are often playful in their writing and that historians are typically good storytellers, but I suspect Scarry’s writing is unusually lyrical for a philosopher. I wish I could give you more than impressions and suspicions; I wish I had studies to cite or findings to report. Stylistic variation in academic writing is a research area begging for further exploration. Close attention to style would be a useful extension of current scholarship in writing in the disciplines; ideally, the work would be performed with sophisticated analytical tools such as those afforded by systemic functional linguistics (see Lancaster, this volume). Students who are invited into the investigation will find a window into the values and mores of the academy.

Reflecting on the place of style in composition classes, we do not have to conceive of style and academic writing as competing topics vying for our limited time. Academic writing is writing. Its style is sometimes ugly, sometimes lovely, sometimes almost invisible—but if the writer is making choices about how to arrange words in sentences, the prose has style. It must be acknowledged that different kinds of discourse permit different degrees of stylistic experimentation and play. A dissertation has less room for eloquence than a poem or a memoir. But doesn’t a dissertation have some room for stylistic play? Couldn’t it have more? If we look for style in academic writing, we may find more pleasure and beauty than we expected, or we may find that we—or the next generation of writers, taught to appreciate and experiment with prose style—can create more room by pushing at the edges of academic genres. Whether they are “rendering” experience or “explaining” it, they should know that they can strive simultaneously for clarity and elegance, for truth and beauty.

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5.3: Keeping It Concise

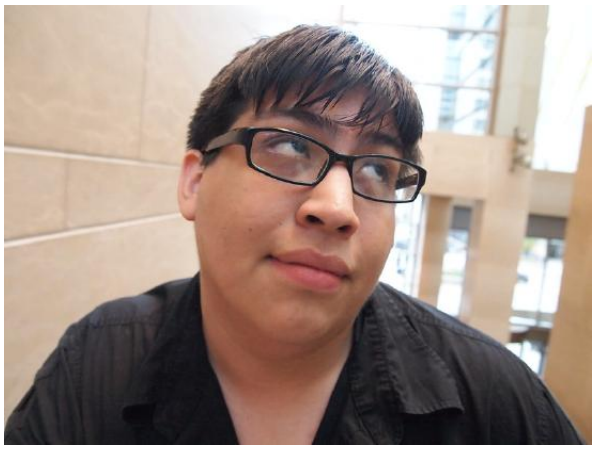
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Why is it important to be concise?

As we develop our ideas in a draft, we are likely to repeat the same point in different phrases and sentences. In drafting, we are still thinking our ideas out and searching for the best way to articulate it. However, readers often don't want to read all those versions of the same thing. If we can cut out repetition in the final version, we can create a more lively, interesting, and focused piece. Cutting out excess wordiness can help make space for new, related ideas and a stronger argument.



Readers may roll their eyes when writers go on and on.
"Eye Roll" by Jaysin Trevino on Flickr is licensed CC BY 2.0.

A general rule to go by is that every word and sentence should be doing some significant work for the paper as a whole. Sometimes that work is more to provide pleasure than meaning—we needn't ruthlessly eliminate every flourish—but each phrase in the final version should add something unique to the paper.

Of course, we may be tempted to add padding to our writing to meet the length criteria for an assignment. But such padding will be tedious for readers, including the instructor. Often, instructors require a certain word count because they can't imagine a shorter piece of writing meeting the goals of the assignment. If our writing isn't long enough yet, a good first move is to go back to the assignment description and see if there's anything we haven't fully addressed.

Michael Harvey[1] notes that sometimes we may be reluctant to write concisely because it makes us feel more vulnerable. Wordiness may seem to add to our academic credibility, and it can cover over areas of uncertainty. Harvey writes,

> [M]any of us are afraid of writing concisely because doing so can make us feel exposed. Concision leaves us fewer words to hide behind. Our insights and ideas might appear puny stripped of those inessential words, phrases, and sentences in which we rough them out. We might even wonder, were we to cut out the fat, would anything be left?

As writers, we may need encouragement from peers and teachers to gradually gain confidence and trust that our ideas, even in their barest, simplest forms, are worthwhile. Others will take our writing seriously when it is clear and substantive.

Strategies for eliminating wordiness

It's best to wait until the final stage of the revision process to look for wordiness. (For more on how to prioritize, see Chapter 11: The Writing Process.) Then, we can try the strategies below. The more we do this, the more it will become second nature.

1. Look for words and phrases that you can cut entirely. Some bits may be redundant or meaningless, as in the following phrases, where the italicized words can be cut:
   - each ~~*and every*~~
   - ~~*unexpected*~~ surprise
   - predictions ~~*about the future*~~
   - ~~*very*~~ unique
   - ~~*certain*~~ factors
   - ~~*slightly*~~ terrifying
2. Look for opportunities to replace longer phrases with shorter phrases or words. For example, “the way in which” can often be replaced by “how” and “despite the fact that” can usually be replaced by “although.” Strong, precise verbs can often replace bloated phrases. Consider this example: “The goal of Alexander the Great was to create a united empire across a vast distance.” And compare it to this: “Alexander the Great sought to unite a vast empire.”
3. Try to rearrange sentences or passages to make them shorter and livelier. Williams and Bizup[2] recommend changing negatives to affirmatives. Consider the negatives in this sentence: “School nurses often do not notice if a young schoolchild does not have adequate food at home.” You could more concisely and clearly write, “School nurses rarely notice if a young schoolchild lacks adequate food at home.” It says the same thing, but is much easier to read which makes for a happier and more engaged reader.
4. Good parallelism can also help us write shorter text that better conveys our thinking. For example, Stacy Schiff writes this in her best-selling biography of Cleopatra[3]:

   > A goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity soon thereafter, she was an object of speculation and veneration, gossip and legend, even in her own time.

   Imagine if, instead, Schiff wrote this:

   > Cleopatra was seen as divine when she was a child. She became the sovereign ruler at eighteen, and she became well known throughout the ancient world early in her reign. People speculated about her, worshipped her, gossiped about her, and told legends about her, even in her own time.
   >
   > The second version says the same thing, but the extra words tend to obscure Schiff’s point. The original (“*goddess* as a child, *queen* at eighteen, *celebrity* soon thereafter”) uses parallelism to vividly convey the dramatic shifts in Cleopatra’s roles and her prominence in the ancient world. See 13.10: Parallelism for more on how to create parallel structure.

Exercise 5.3.1

Edit these passages for concision, using the three moves described above. Be sure to preserve all of the meaning contained in the original.

1. Each and every student enrolled in our educational institutions deserves and is entitled to competent instruction in all of the key academic areas of study. No student should be without ample time and help in mastering such basic skills.
2. If you really have no choice in regards to avoiding a long and extended bureaucratic process in making your complaint, it is very important that you write down and document every aspect of the case for use by all of the parties involved in the process.

Attributions

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References

[1]Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 1.

[2]Williams and Bizup, *Style*, 130.

[3]Stacy Schiff, *Cleopatra: A Life* (Boston, MA: Back Bay Books, 2011), 1.

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5.4: Making Sentences Clear

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What makes a complex line of thinking easy to follow? Williams and Bizup offer another key point. They explain that readers experience writing as clear when the "character" of a sentence is also its grammatical subject and the key "action" a grammatical verb. They provide this fanciful example:[1]

> Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree caused her fright.

Grammatically, the subject of the first part is "a walk through the woods," and the verb is "taking place". The character, though, is obviously Little Red Riding Hood and the action is walking. A much more straightforward version—"As Little Red Riding Hood walked through the woods"—makes the character the subject and the action the key verb. That example goes out of its way to be silly, but consider this example from a website offering free college papers:[2]

> Another event that connects the colonist and the English together is the event of a hated King in England trying to take away freedom and go back to the old ways. The idea of how much power the King had struck Parliament. After that, the Parliament and the people made the King sign the Magna Carta, which limits the amount of power the King has. The Magna Carta also affected the rights of the American colonies. It practically took away all relationships between the King and the colonies. After the relationship was broken, America broke off from England.

Apparently, the author is claiming that the colonists (in the 1700s?) pushed back against the power of the English crown in a manner similar to the Parliamentarians in 1215 (after having apparently been "struck" by an "idea" of "how much power the King had"). Grammatically, the subjects are an "event" and an "idea" rather than the characters, colonists, the king, and Parliament. The third sentence is refreshingly straightforward in structure (though vague on details). The fifth and sixth sentences are fairly straightforward, but also incredibly vague: the Magna Carta predated the American colonies by at least 400 years[3]; how does that document relate to the American Revolution? The last sentence essentially says that after the relationship was broken, the relationship was broken. If the author were to rewrite the passage to make the grammatical subjects match the characters, he or she would be prompted to clarify what exactly the king, the Parliament, the English populace, and the American colonists did (and to who), something which the author of the above passage may not actually understand. This example illustrates how clarifying "who did what to whom" for the reader also makes writers clarify it for themselves. Writing clearly involves thinking clearly, and clear rigorous thinking is why your professors assign you writing in the first place.

While the Magna Carta example is comically bad, here's one that is more or less logical but would still benefit from greater clarity:

> IgE-dependent allergic hypersensitivity reactions such as allergic asthma and food allergy involve mast cells which are typically regarded as troublesome cells as a result. Further, the allergic sensitization-processes also involves a role for mast cells. Recent findings show that their functionality is not only pro-inflammatory, but can on the contrary have suppressive or immunomodulatory effects in allergic inflammation.

The above passage isn't a terrible slog, and it's fairly clear that the whole passage is about mast cells. But here's a version of the same passage—the real version as it were—which demonstrates that the passage *feels* a lot clearer when mast cells, the "characters" driving the narrative, are also the grammatical subject of the sentence and the referent for the key verbs:[6]

> Mast cells are typically regarded as troublesome cells due to their prominent role in IgE-dependent allergic hypersensitivity reactions such as allergic asthma and food allergy. Further, it seems that mast cells are also able to play an additional role in the allergic sensitization-processes. Recent findings show that mast cell functionality is not only pro-inflammatory, but can on the contrary have suppressive or immunomodulatory effects in allergic inflammation.

Both versions of the passage are consistently about mast cells, but the second version makes that consistency much more obvious to readers as mast cells are the main character of every sentence. That clear consistency allows us to devote more of our brain power to recalling technical terms (like immunomodulatory) and comprehending the key ideas. That makes it both easier and more interesting to read.

To further illustrate the principle, let's take a nicely straightforward passage and rewrite it so that the characters are objects (rather than subjects) and the actions are nouns[7] (rather than verbs). Here's the nicely clear original:[8]

> What most people really feel nostalgic about has little to do with the internal structure of 1950s families. It is the belief that the 1950s provided a more family-friendly economic and social environment, an easier climate in which to keep kids on the straight and narrow, and above all, a greater feeling of hope for a family's long-term future, especially for its young.

In these two sentences, the character is a belief rather than a person or thing. However, the passage is still clear to the reader because it keeps the character consistent and explains what that character does (creates nostalgia) to who (people at large). Imagine if the author wrote this instead:

> People feel nostalgic not about the internal structure of 1950s families. Rather, the beliefs about how the 1950s provided a more family-friendly economic and social environment, an easier climate in which to keep kids on the straight and narrow, and above all, a greater feeling of hope for a family's long-term future (especially for its young) are what lead to those nostalgic feelings.

This second version says substantially the same thing, but it's tedious to read because the character changes abruptly from "people" to "beliefs" (which works against cohesion) and one has to get to the end of the sentence to learn how these beliefs fit in. The key point is this: one of the best things you can do to revise for greater clarity is to recast a passage so that the characters are the grammatical subjects and the key actions are the verbs.

Practice Exercise 5.4.1

Rewrite these passages to make the "characters" the grammatical subjects and the key "actions" the verbs. That is, make them clearer.

1. The scarcity of research funds for nutritional scientists means that offers by food companies to fund such research may be especially attractive. The implicit pressure to shape the language of the findings to avoid alienation between scholars and companies is worrisome to consider.
2. While educational experiences are an obvious benefit of tribal colleges, the needs tribal communities have for economic development, cultural vitality, and social ties are also addressed by educational institutions.

References

[1]Williams and Bizup, *Style*, 171.

[2]http://www.termpaperwarehouse.com/essay-on/History-Of-Magna-Carta/82596. Let this example further demonstrate why you should never, ever even look at these websites.

[3]*Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. "Magna Carta."

[4]Aletta D. Kraneveld and others, "The two faces of mast cells in food allergy and allergic asthma: The possible concept of Yin Yang," *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, 1822 (2012): 96.

[5]When you turn a verb into a noun it's called a nominalization. For example, "write" becomes "writings," and "think" becomes "thought."

[6]Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 34.

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5.5: Understanding Convoluted Sentences

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There is less tolerance for academese than there used to be in scholarly communities; however, a lot of landmark texts were written in a time when there wasn't such a high value placed on clarity and concision. In your studies, then, you will probably have to engage with important texts that violate almost all the advice given here.



A complex sentence makes the reader work harder; is the complexity necessary?
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Consider the following example from Talcott Parsons, a sociological theorist noted for both his intellectual force and utterly impenetrable writing style. In reading this passage, [1] imagine "ego" and "alter" as two people interacting:

> Communication through a common system of symbols is the precondition of this reciprocity or complementarity of expectations. The alternatives which are open to alter must have some measure of stability in two respects: first, as realistic possibilities for alter, and second, in their meaning to ego. This stability presupposes generalization from the particularity of the given situations of ego and alter, both of which are continually changing and are never concretely identical over any two moments in time. When such generalization occurs, and actions, gestures, or symbols have more or less the same meaning for both ego and alter, we may speak of a common culture existing between them, through which their interaction is mediated.

Here's a version after I edited for concision using the three moves described above:

> Reciprocity, or complementary expectations, depends on a common system of symbols. The symbolic alternatives for alter must be stable, in that they are both realistic for alter and meaningful to ego. That is, actions, gestures, or symbols must have a shared and persistent meaning for ego and alter even though ego and alter are in different situations and are constantly changing. When meanings are shared and persistent, we may say that the interaction between alter and ego is mediated by a common culture.

The revised version is about 30 percent shorter, and it demonstrates how concision makes one's points come through more clearly. You will almost certainly have to read works of authors who did not prioritize clarity and concision (or even cohesion and coherence), and that's a drag. But knowing how wordiness interferes with clarity can help you distill essential meanings from challenging texts. In many ways, writing well and reading incisively are two facets of the same cognitive skill set.

Practice Exercise 5.5.1

Take these straightforward passages and make them less clear without changing the meaning. Turn verbs into nouns and make subjects into objects.

1. “Statisticians prepared to use spatial models need to keep the role of the models in perspective. When scientific interest centers on the large-scale effects, the idea is to use a few extra small-scale parameters so that the large-scale parameters are estimated more efficiently.”[2]
2. “Social scientists will be led astray if they accept the lies organizations tell about themselves. If, instead, they look for places where the stories told don’t hold up, for the events and activities those speaking for the organization ignore, cover up, or explain away, they will find a wealth of things to include in the body of material from which they construct their definitions.”[3]

References

[1]Talcott Parsons and Edward Shills eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 105.

[2]Noel A.C. Cressie, *Statistics for Spatial Data* (New York: Wiley, 1991), 435.

[3]Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How To Think About Your Research While You’re Doing It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 118.

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5.6: Sentence Variety

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Have you ever ordered a dish in a restaurant and been not happy with its taste, even though it contained most of your favorite ingredients? Just as a meal might lack the finishing touches needed to spice it up, so too might a paragraph contain all the basic components but still lack the stylistic finesse required to engage a reader. Sometimes writers have a tendency to reuse the same sentence pattern throughout their writing. Like any repetitive task, reading text that contains too many sentences with the same length and structure can become monotonous and boring. Experienced writers mix it up by using an assortment of sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths.

This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using a variety of techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.

Incorporating Sentence Variety

Experienced writers incorporate sentence variety into their writing by varying sentence style and structure. Using a mixture of different sentence structures reduces repetition and adds emphasis to important points in the text. Read the following example:

> During my time in office I have achieved several goals. I have helped increase funding for local schools. I have reduced crime rates in the neighborhood. I have encouraged young people to get involved in their community. My competitor argues that she is the better choice in the upcoming election. I argue that it is ridiculous to fix something that isn't broken. If you reelect me this year, I promise to continue to serve this community.

In this extract from an election campaign, the writer uses short, simple sentences of a similar length and style. Writers often mistakenly believe that this technique makes the text more clear for the reader, but the result is a choppy paragraph that does not grab the audience's attention. Now read the revised paragraph with sentence variety:

> During my time in office, I have helped increase funding for local schools, reduced crime rates in the neighborhood, and encouraged young people to get involved in their community. Why fix what isn't broken? If you reelect me this year, I will continue to achieve great things for this community. Don't take a chance on an unknown contender; vote for the proven success.

Notice how introducing a short rhetorical question among the longer sentences in the paragraph is an effective means of keeping the reader's attention. In the revised version, the writer combines the choppy sentences at the beginning into one longer sentence, which adds rhythm and interest to the paragraph.

Exercise 5.6.1

Combine each set of simple sentences into one sentence using a connecting word (see the techniques in Fixing Run-Ons for examples using a coordinating conjunction, a conjunctive adverb, or a dependent word).

1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.
2. Shakespeare's writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Gay marriage is now legal in six states. Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all permit same-sex marriage. Other states are likely to follow their example.

4. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
5. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch's two children attend the school.

Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentences

Read the following sentences and consider what they all have in common:

- John and Amanda will be analyzing this week's financial report.
- The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.
- Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

In each sentence, the subject is positioned at the beginning—*John and Amanda*, *the car*, *students*. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers tend to overuse this technique, which can result in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety. This section examines several ways to introduce sentence variety at the beginning of sentences.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

One technique you can use so as to avoid beginning a sentence with the subject is to use an adverb. An adverb is a word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in *–ly*. Examples of adverbs include *quickly*, *softly*, *quietly*, *angrily*, and *timidly*. Read the following sentences:

- She slowly turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.
- Slowly, she turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

In the second sentence, the adverb *slowly* is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If you read the two sentences aloud, you will notice that moving the adverb changes the rhythm of the sentence and slightly alters its meaning. The second sentence emphasizes how the subject moves—slowly—creating a buildup of tension. This technique is effective in fictional writing.

Note that an adverb used at the beginning of a sentence is usually followed by a comma. A comma indicates that the reader should pause briefly, which creates a useful rhetorical device. Read the following sentences aloud and consider the effect of pausing after the adverb:

- Cautiously, he unlocked the kennel and waited for the dog's reaction.
- Solemnly, the policeman approached the mayor and placed her under arrest.
- Suddenly, they slammed the door shut and sprinted across the street.

Exercise 5.6.2

Rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Common prepositions include works like "in," "at," "of," "after," "for," and "below." Prepositional phrases contain a preposition (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an object of the preposition (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition). See Section 13.16: Prepositions for more details.

Let's take the following sentence as an example:

> The terrified child hid **underneath the table**.

Here, the prepositional phrase is *underneath the table*. The preposition *underneath* relates to the object that follows the preposition—*the table*. Adjectives may be placed between the preposition and the object in a prepositional phrase.

> The terrified child hid **underneath the heavy wooden table**.

Some prepositional phrases can be moved to the beginning of a sentence in order to create variety in a piece of writing. Look at the following revised sentence:

> **Underneath the heavy wooden table**, the terrified child hid.

Notice that when the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject—the terrified child—to the location in which the child is hiding. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Take a look at the following examples. The prepositional phrase is underlined in each:

> The bandaged man waited **in the doctor's office**.
>
> **In the doctor's office**, the bandaged man waited.
>
> My train leaves the station **at 6:45 a.m**.
>
> **At 6:45 a.m.**, my train leaves the station.
>
> Teenagers exchange drugs and money **under the railway bridge**.
>
> **Under the railway bridge**, teenagers exchange drugs and money.

Make Sure the Prepositional Phrase Stays with What It Modifies

Note that not all prepositional phrases can be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Read the following sentence:

> I would like a chocolate sundae **without whipped cream**.

In this sentence, *without whipped cream* is the prepositional phrase. Because it describes the chocolate sundae, it cannot be moved to the beginning of the sentence. "Without whipped cream I would like a chocolate sundae" does not make as much (if any) sense. To determine whether a prepositional phrase can be moved, we must determine the meaning of the sentence.

Use Prepositional Phrases Judiciously

Experienced writers often include more than one prepositional phrase in a sentence; however, it is important not to overload your writing. Using too many modifiers in a paragraph may create an unintentionally comical effect as the following example shows:

> The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall, near the schoolyard, where children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

> The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall. In the nearby schoolyard, children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

Starting a Sentence by Inverting Subject and Verb

As we noted earlier, most writers follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure. In an inverted sentence, the order is reversed so that the subject follows the verb. Read the following sentence pairs:

1. A truck was parked in the driveway.
2. Parked in the driveway was a truck.

1. A copy of the file is attached.
2. Attached is a copy of the file.

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—*a truck* in the first example and *the file* in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus.

Exercise 5.6.3

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences as inverted sentences.

1. Teresa will never attempt to run another marathon.
2. A detailed job description is enclosed with this letter.
3. Bathroom facilities are across the hall to the left of the water cooler.
4. The well-dressed stranger stumbled through the doorway.
5. My colleagues remain unconvinced about the proposed merger.

Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

Reviewing and rewriting the beginning of sentences is a good way of introducing sentence variety into your writing. Another useful technique is to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause, or an appositive. This section examines how to connect ideas across several sentences in order to increase sentence variety and improve writing.

Joining Ideas Using an *–ing* Modifier

Sometimes it is possible to combine two sentences by converting one of them into a modifier using the *–ing* verb form—*singing*, *dancing*, *swimming*. A modifier is a word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in the sentence. Read the following example:

Original sentences: Steve checked the computer system. He discovered a virus.

Revised sentence: Checking the computer system, Steve discovered a virus.

To connect two sentences using an *–ing* modifier, add *–ing* to one of the verbs in the sentences (*checking*) and delete the subject (*Steve*). Use a comma to separate the modifier from the subject of the sentence. It is important to make sure that the main idea in your revised sentence is contained in the main clause, not in the modifier. In this example, the main idea is that Steve discovered a virus, not that he checked the computer system.

In the following example, an *–ing* modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time:

Noticing the police car, she shifted gears and slowed down.

This means that she slowed down at the same time she noticed the police car.

Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.

This means that the dog barked as it ran across the driveway.

You can add an *–ing* modifier to the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on which fits best.

Beginning: Conducting a survey among her friends, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.

End: Maria filed the final report, **meeting her deadline**.

Joining Ideas Using an *–ed* Modifier

Some sentences can be combined using an *–ed* verb form—*stopped*, *finished*, *played*. To use this method, one of the sentences must contain a form of *be* as a helping verb in addition to the *–ed* verb form. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.

Revised sentence: Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party started.

In the original version, *was* acts as a helping verb—it has no meaning by itself, but it serves a grammatical function by placing the main verb (*delayed*) in the perfect tense.

To connect two sentences using an *–ed* modifier, drop the helping verb (*was*) and the subject (*the Jones family*) from the sentence with an *–ed* verb form. This forms a modifying phrase (*delayed by a traffic jam*) that can be added to the beginning or end of the other sentence according to which fits best. As with the *–ing* modifier, be careful to place the word that the phrase modifies immediately after the phrase in order to avoid a dangling modifier.

Using *–ing* or *–ed* modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious connections between two sentences.

Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

Another technique that writers use to combine sentences is to join them using a relative clause. A relative clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. Relative clauses function as adjectives by answering questions such as *which one?* or *what kind?* Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun, such as *who*, *which*, *where*, *why*, or *when*. Read the following examples:

Original sentences: The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Seattle.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who lives in Seattle, is visiting the company next week.

To connect two sentences using a relative clause, substitute the subject of one of the sentences (*he*) for a relative pronoun (*who*). This gives you a relative clause (*who lives in Seattle*) that can be placed next to the noun it describes (*the managing director*). Make sure to keep the sentence you want to emphasize as the main clause. For example, reversing the main clause and subordinate clause in the preceding sentence emphasizes where the managing director lives, not the fact that he is visiting the company.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who is visiting the company next week, lives in Seattle.

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence.

Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

An appositive is a word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun. Incorporating appositives into your writing is a useful way of combining sentences that are too short and choppy. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: Harland Sanders began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930. He is Colonel Sanders or “the Colonel.”

Revised sentence: Harland Sanders, “the Colonel,” began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930.

In the revised sentence, *“the Colonel”* is an appositive because it renames Harland Sanders. To combine two sentences using an appositive, drop the subject and verb from the sentence that renames the noun and turn it into a phrase. Note that in the previous example, the appositive is positioned immediately after the noun it describes. An appositive may be placed anywhere in a sentence, but it must come directly before or after the noun to which it refers:

Appositive after noun: Scott, a poorly trained athlete, was not expected to win the race.

Appositive before noun: A poorly trained athlete, Scott was not expected to win the race.

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set commas.

Exercise 5.6.4

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using the techniques you have learned in this section.

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world’s largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.

3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.
4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Reading to Figure out the Argument

Learning Outcomes

- Identify the main claims of a text as well as the reasons that support those claims.
- Identify any limits, counterarguments, or rebuttals mentioned in an argument.
- Draw a visual map of the claims, reasons, limits, counterarguments, and rebuttals.

6.1: Overview- Reading to Write

6.2: Types of Claims to Look out for

6.3: Making Notes on the Writer's Claims

6.4: Deciding Which Is the Main Claim

6.5: Finding the Reasons

6.6: Finding the Counterarguments

6.7: Finding the Responses to the Counterarguments

6.8: Finding the Limits on the Argument

6.9: Common Argument Phrases



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6.1: Overview- Reading to Write

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In almost every college class, we are asked to read someone else's writing, explain what that person is arguing, and point out the strengths and weaknesses of their argument. This chapter offers tools for figuring out the structure of an argument and describing it. In later chapters, we will talk about responding to arguments and analyzing how arguments play on emotion and gain the audience's trust.

So when you are just trying to get the barebones ideas about something you have read straight, how do you go about it? An argument is a swarming cluster of words. How do you get to the heart of it?

In this chapter we look at how to take notes not just on the meaning of each part of the argument but also on its relation to the other parts. Then we use these notes to draw a visual map of an argument. In the map we see the argument's momentum as the reason points us toward the claim. We see how each element implies, supports, limits, or contradicts other elements. Thus, we begin to imagine where the argument is vulnerable and how it might be modified.

In Chapter 3, we'll discuss how to use this logical map to write a summary, and in Chapter 4, we'll see how to follow up the summary with our own opinions.



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6.2: Types of Claims to Look out for

Media Alternative

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As we make notes on what a writer is claiming at each point, it is worth distinguishing what kind of claim they are making.

Claims of Policy

The most familiar kind of argument demands action. It is easy to see when the writer is asking readers to do something. Here are a few phrases that signal a claim of policy, a claim that is pushing readers to do something:

- We should _____.
- We ought to _____.
- We must _____.
- Let's _____.
- The best course is _____.
- The solution is to _____.
- The next step should be _____.
- We should consider _____.
- Further research should be done to determine _____.

Here are a few sample claims of policy:

- Landlords should not be allowed to raise the rent more than 2% per year.
- The federal government should require a background check before allowing anyone to buy a gun.
- Social media accounts should not be censored in any way.

A claim of policy can also look like a direct command, such as "So if you are an American citizen, don't let anything stop you from voting."

Note that not all claims of policy give details or specifics about what should be done or how. Sometimes an author is only trying to build momentum and point us in a certain direction. For example, "Schools must find a way to make bathrooms more private for everyone, not just transgender people."

Claims of policy don't have to be about dramatic actions. Even discussion, research, and writing are kinds of action. For example, "Americans need to learn more about other wealthy nations' health care systems in order to see how much better things could be in America."



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Claims of Fact

Arguments do not always point toward action. Sometimes writers want us to share their vision of reality on a particular subject. They may want to paint a picture of how something happened, describe a trend, or convince us that something is bad or good.

In some cases, the writer may want to share a particular vision of what something is like, what effects something has, how something is changing, or of how something unfolded in the past. The argument might define a phenomenon, a trend, or a period of history.

Often these claims are simply presented as fact, and an uncritical reader may not see them as arguments at all. However, very often claims of fact are more controversial than they seem. For example, consider the claim, "Caffeine boosts performance." Does it really? How much? How do we know? Performance at what kind of task? For everyone? Doesn't it also have downsides? A writer could spend a book convincing us that caffeine really boosts performance and explaining exactly what they mean by those three words.

Some phrases writers might use to introduce a claim of fact include the following:

- Research suggests that _____.
- The data indicate that _____.
- _____is increasing or decreasing.
- There is a trend toward _____.
- _____causes _____
- _____leads to _____.

Often a claim of fact will be the basis for other claims about what we should do that look more like what we associate with the word "argument." However, many pieces of writing in websites, magazines, office settings, and academic settings don't try to move people toward action. They aim primarily at getting readers to agree with their view of what is fact. For example, it took many years of argument, research, and public messaging before most people accepted the claim that "Smoking causes cancer."

Here are a few arguable sample claims of fact:

- It is easier to grow up biracial in Hawaii than in any other part of the United States.
- Raising the minimum wage will force many small businesses to lay off workers.
- Fires in the western United States have gotten worse primarily because of climate change.
- Antidepressants provide the most benefit when combined with talk therapy.

Claims of Value

In other cases, the writer is not just trying to convince us that something is a certain way or causes something, but is trying to say how good or bad that thing is. They are rating it, trying to get us to share her assessment of its value. Think of a movie or book review or an Amazon or Yelp review. Even a "like" on Facebook or a thumbs up on a text message is a claim of value.

Claims of value are fairly easy to identify. Some phrases that indicate a claim of value include the following:

- _____is terrible/disappointing/underwhelming.
- _____is mediocre/average/decent/acceptable.
- We should celebrate _____.
- _____is great, wonderful, fantastic, impressive, makes a substantial contribution to _____.

A claim of value can also make a comparison. It might assert that something is better than, worse than, or equal to something else. Some phrases that signal a comparative claim of value include these:

- _____is the best _____.
- _____is the worst _____.
- _____is better than _____.
- _____is worse than _____.
- _____is just as good as _____.
- _____is just as bad as _____

The following are examples of claims of value:

- The Bay Area is the best place to start a biotech career.
- Forest fires are becoming the worst threat to public health in California.
- Human rights are more important than border security.
- Experimenting with drag is the best way I've found to explore my feelings about masculinity and femininity.
- It was so rude when that lady asked you what race you are.

Note that the above arguments all include claims of fact but go beyond observing to praise or criticize what they are observing.

Practice Exercise 6.2.1

Practice Exercise 6.2.2

On a social media site like Facebook or Twitter or on your favorite news site, find an example of one of each kind of claim.

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6.3: Making Notes on the Writer's Claims

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A first step toward summarizing and responding to an argument is to first make margin notes on the claims. Let's take the following argument as an example:

Sample Argument: "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?"

All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?

I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.

If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themself, "I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong"?

If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help.

We can often paraphrase the claims more readily on a second read when we are already familiar with the content. Some need the physicality of taking notes by hand in the margins of a book or a printout.



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Some take notes by creating comments in Word or Google Docs. Others use online annotation systems like Hypothes.is. Another way is to copy the text into a table in a word processing program and write notes in a second column, as we have done below:

Sample Margin Notes on an Argument's Claims

Section of the text	Notes on the claims
Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?	Implies a claim of fact: we would all cross the border (under what circumstances?)
All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?	Suggests a claim of value: It might not be wrong to cross illegally. But also suggests another claim of value: that "the rule of law" is right. Is this a contradiction?
I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.	Claim of policy about the border--we shouldn't criminalize people who have legitimate reasons to cross. Admits there are security risks in "open borders." Looking for some kind of middle ground that keeps us safe but doesn't criminalize migrants.
If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themself, "I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong"?	Claim of fact: the author would consider it right to cross illegally to benefit their children. That is, if their whole family didn't have enough money, a safe place to live, or access to a good education. They imply another claim of fact: that any parent would do the same and feel okay about it.
If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help.	Starts with the same claim of fact as in the title and the previous paragraph: most people would cross the border illegally. Adds the idea that we wouldn't feel it was wrong. The implication is that if all these people would feel it is right, then it really is "ethical and reasonable." "We must recognize" implies a claim of policy--that people should talk about illegal crossings publicly in a different way than we do now. Claim of policy: Border walls and detention centers are not right. Ends with three policy recommendations for how to treat migrants: empathy, respect, and help.

Notice that attempting to summarize each claim can actually take more space than the original text itself if we are summarizing in detail and trying to be very precise about what the text claims and implies. Of course, we won't want to or need to do this in such detail for every paragraph of every reading we are assigned to write about. We can resort to it when the argument gets harder to follow or when it's especially important to be precise.

Practice Exercise 6.3.1

Make notes in your own words on the claims of fact, value, and policy you find in an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. Make a table with two columns and paste the argument into the first column. In the second column,

summarize the points the author makes as in the example above. If you like, you can make a copy of this Google Docs notes template.

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6.4: Deciding Which Is the Main Claim

Media Alternative

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Now that we have this list of claims in the margin of the text, we know some of the things that the author wants us to believe. How do we sort them and put them in relation to each other? In this case, we found claims of policy, fact, and value, some of which were repeated in different parts of the argument. Which claim is the main point? How do other claims support this one?



Which direction is the author taking the argument?
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We can try asking ourselves the following questions to see if we already have a sense of what the argument's goal is.

- What does the writer want us to believe?
- What does the writer most want to convince us of?
- Where is the writer going with this?
- If the writer had to make their point in just one sentence, what would they say?

A good first place to look for the focus, of course, is the title. Often the title will declare the main claim outright. Here, the title question "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?" implies the answer “Yes.” We can look for the same idea in the text and check whether it seems to be the main one. The third paragraph describes why the author would cross the border and then generalizes to claim that others would do the same. At the start of the last paragraph, the writer declares that “ ...most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so.” Note that this is a claim of fact about what people would do and how they would feel about it.

But is this the main claim? When we review the other sections, we find several other claims of policy. Introductions set expectations, and here, the first paragraph alludes to public debates on immigration policy. It suggests that it may not be right to stop people from coming into America, and it may not be wrong to cross the border, even illegally. These early references to what is right suggest that the argument aims to do more than describe how people might feel under different circumstances. The argument is going to weigh in on what border policy should be. The second paragraph confirms this sense as it builds up to the still vague sentence, “ Surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.”

In the last paragraph, we learn what these ways might involve. Three different claims of policy emerge:

1. “... We must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act.”
2. "How can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice?" (The implication, of course, is that they cannot be.)
3. “ We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help.”

Which of these final claims is the overall focus? Arguments sometimes emphasize their main point in the very last sentence, in part to make it memorable. However, the end of the argument can also be a place for the author to go a little beyond their main point and suggest issues for further thought. The phrase "empathy, respect, and offers of help" sounds important, but we should note that the rest of the argument isn't about how to help migrants. However, the idea that we should respond more positively to migrants has recurred throughout. The idea that migrants are not in the wrong--that they are not criminals--is clearly key, and so is the idea that we should change border policy accordingly.

Here is one way, then, to combine those last two ideas into a summary of the overall claim of the argument:

Claim: Border policy should not criminalize undocumented immigrants.

Practice Exercise 6.4.1

Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings, read it closely, and then try to summarize the main claim in your own words. If you are unsure, return to making notes on the writer's claims and then reflect on the questions above.

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6.5: Finding the Reasons

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Once we know what the main point of the reading is, we can ask ourselves what reasons the author gives. We can go through our annotations to look at the other claims and see how some may be used as reasons for the main claim or as reasons for one of the reasons.

We can write the claims in a map and use the arrows to show which claim works as a reason supporting which other claim. Each claim moves our mind from one idea to the next in the direction the writer wants it to go. The claim farthest to the right, the one that the others point toward, is the main point. Such maps might take a few different forms, such as these:

Reason → Claim

Reason A → Reason B → Claim

Reason A → Claim
Reason B ↗

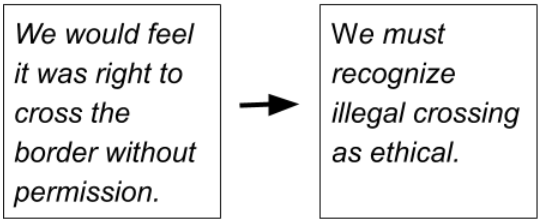
How can we tell where to put each claim on the map and where to point the arrows? It can help to remember that particular words and phrases in academic and professional writing basically act as arrows. They signal that one idea is supposed to lead to another. Here are some such phrases:

- Because_____, _____.
- Because of this, _____.
- If_____, then _____.
- Since_____, _____.
- For this reason,_____.
- We can conclude_____.
- Therefore, _____.
- So_____.
- Consequently, _____.
- As a result, _____.
- Hence_____.
- Thus_____.
- It follows that _____.

For example, in the above argument, "If_____, then _____." connects two claims in the following sentence:

"If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act."

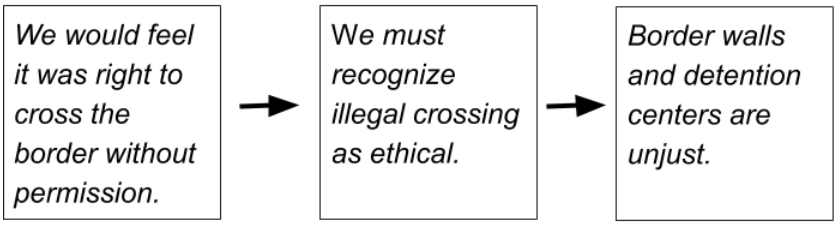
We could write a short version of the first half of the sentence, put it in a box, and point it toward a short version of the second half:



"Claim and Reason Argument Map" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of this one-reason map.

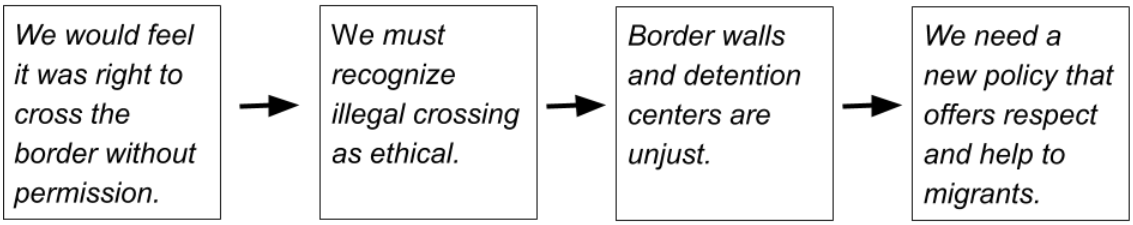
The following sentence sets up another If_____, then _____ statement: " If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice?"

We could add this on thus:



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See the accessible text description of this two-reason map.

If border walls and detention centers are unjust, there must be a need for an alternate approach. The next sentence claims, "We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help." We can offer a short version of this sentence as the final implication.



"Three Reasons Argument Map" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of this three-reason map.

Practice Exercise 6.5.1

1. Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
2. Read your text closely and identify any reasons given to support the main claim and any reasons for those reasons.
3. Then map out the author's reasons as in the examples above. Describe each reason in your own words. You can handwrite your map or copy this Google Drawings template and insert the reasons. Later, you will add other elements of the argument to the map.

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6.6: Finding the Counterarguments

Media Alternative

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Very often, as we read an argument we will find not just what the author thinks and believes, but the author's description of other people's opposing arguments as well. An argument is part of an ongoing broader conversation about the subject, and the writer can remind us of what they are responding to. So as we read we can look for and mark these counterarguments.

In a complex text it can be easy to miss that a particular point is actually not one that the writer agrees with--they may be bringing it up in order to shoot it down. We can look out for particular phrases that are often used in academic writing to signal that the writer is switching sides temporarily and describing an idea that goes against the argument.



In chess, it's easy to tell which piece is on which side, but in a text we need other clues.
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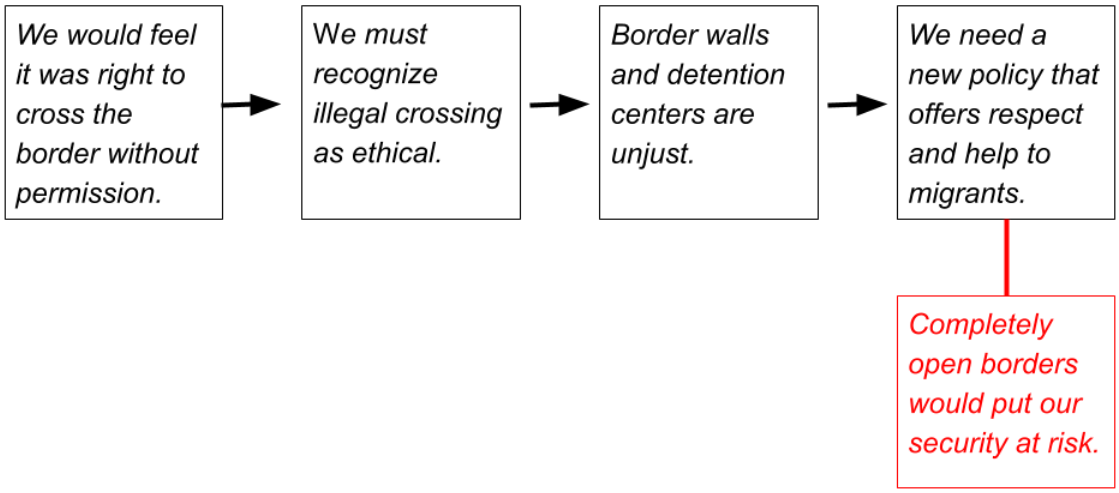
Very often the way the author will both signal to us that they are introducing the counterargument and signal their attitude toward it. They will convey the degree to which they disagree and the respect or contempt they feel for this opposing view.

Common Phrases That Introduce Counterarguments

Attitude to the Counterargument	Phrases
Negative The writer thinks the counterargument is completely wrong.	• It is a popular misconception that_____. • Some have fallen for the idea that_____. • Many people mistakenly believe that_____.
Neutral The writer is about to describe a counterargument without giving their opinion yet.	• Many people think _____. • Some, on the other hand, will argue that _____. • Some might disagree, claiming that _____. • Of course, many have claimed that _____. • Some will take issue with _____, arguing that _____. • Some will object that _____. • Some will dispute the idea that _____, claiming that _____. • One criticism of this way of thinking is that _____. Note that these neutral examples don't tell us whether the writer thinks the counterargument has any validity. Usually, the writer will want to follow them with a sentence that does reveal their opinion.
Positive The writer sees some merit in the counterargument. They agree with it even though it hurts their argument. This is called **concession**.	• It is true that _____. • I do concede_____. • We should grant that_____. • We must admit that_____. • I acknowledge that _____. • X has a point that _____. • Admittedly, _____. • Of course, _____. • To be sure, _____. • There may be something to the idea that _____.

In the border argument example, the writer never directly mentions other writers who disagree. Instead, they signal with the phrase "I admit" that they are going to summarize a valid point which goes against their own main argument: "I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk."

We could add this to our map as follows, with the counterargument in red to show it goes against the rest of the argument:



"Argument Map with Counterargument" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the argument map with counterargument.

Practice Exercise 6.6.1

1. Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
2. Read your text closely and identify any counterarguments it mentions. What is the writer's attitude to each counterargument?
3. Describe each counterargument in your own words and add it to your argument map. You can handwrite your map or copy this Google Drawings template.

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6.7: Finding the Responses to the Counterarguments

Media Alternative

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After a writer summarizes another perspective, they will signal that they are switching back to their own perspective. If they have not already given a hint about their attitude to the other side, they will have to make their response clear now. Do they see the counterargument as completely wrong-headed, or as having some merit?



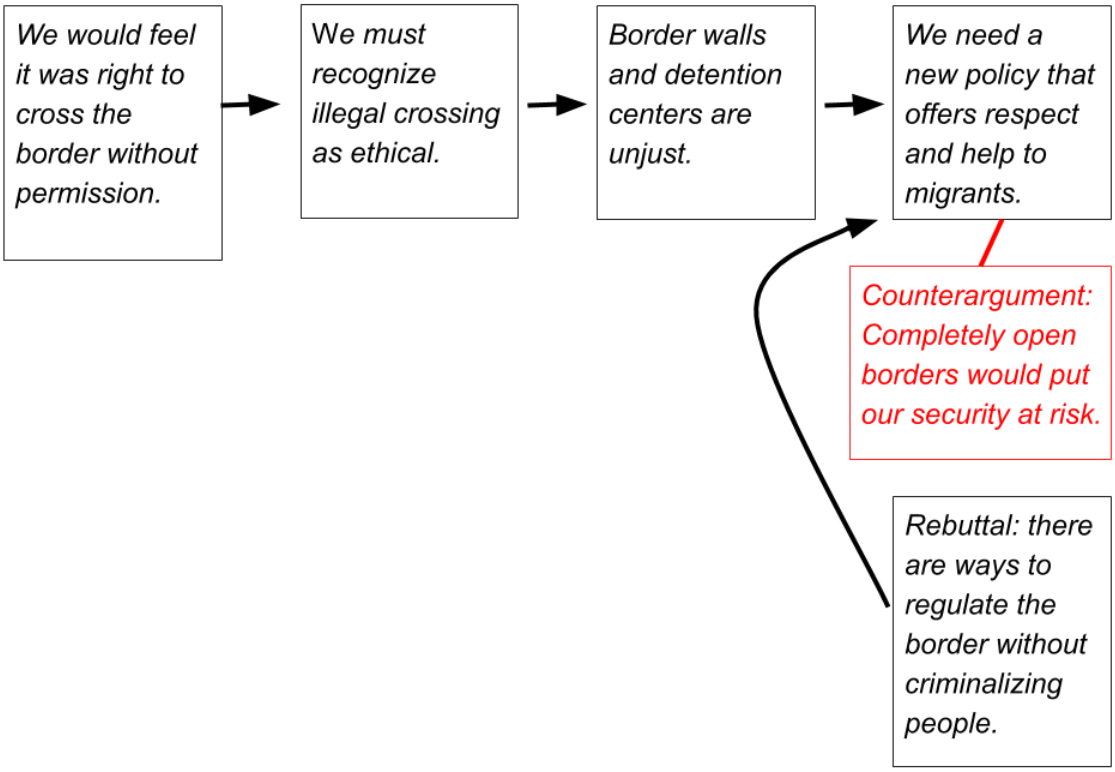
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If the writer completely disagrees with the counterargument, they will follow up their description of it by pointing out its flaws. This direct rebuttal will bring the readers back to the writer's side. If they have just conceded a point, they will now emphasize the reason why their own argument still holds. The more the writer has credited the counterargument, the more they will need to explain why readers shouldn't accept it, at least not completely. Below are some phrases which can point toward the problem or limitation of the counterargument.

Common Phrases for Responding to Counterarguments

Attitude to the Counterargument	Phrases
If the writer considers the counterargument totally wrong	• This idea misses the fact that _____. • I disagree because _____. • This depends on the assumption that _____ which is incorrect because _____. • This argument overlooks _____. • This argument contradicts itself _____. • This is mistaken because _____.
If the writer partly agrees with the counterargument	• It is true that _____, but_____. • I do concede_____, and yet_____. • We should grant that_____, but we must still acknowledge that _____. • We can admit that_____ and still believe that _____.. • I acknowledge that _____, and yet we should nevertheless recognize that _____. • Critics have a point that _____; however it is more important that we focus on _____. • Admittedly, _____. However, _____. • Of course, _____, but I still insist that_____.. • To be sure, _____; but _____. • There may be something to the idea that _____, and yet _____.

In the border argument example, the writer concedes that the counterargument does have merit: "I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk." Immediately, the writer responds, "But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions." The word “but” signals the transition from concession back to the writer's own side. In the map, we can put the rebuttal below the counterargument and use the arrow to show it supporting the main claim.



"Argument Map with Counterargument and Rebuttal" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the argument map with counterargument and rebuttal.

Practice Exercise 6.7.1

1. Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
2. Read your text closely and identify any counterarguments it mentions. What is the writer's attitude to each counterargument?
3. Decide what your attitude to this counterargument is. Choose a phrase from the above table to introduce the counterargument.

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6.8: Finding the Limits on the Argument

Media Alternative

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If we are getting ready to summarize and respond to an argument, we need to notice exactly how the writer has qualified or limited what they are saying.

Often if a counterargument has some merit, a writer may respond acknowledging that, taking a step back and limiting what they are claiming. They might make an exception for a particular case where they realize their initial claim wouldn't hold. Or they might clarify that their claim only applies to a particular group or situation.



Just as we might limit a tomato harvest to ripe tomatoes, we might want to limit an argument to certain cases and not others.
Photo by Roon Z on Pexels under the Pexels License.

Faced with a powerful counterargument, a writer might also admit a certain degree of uncertainty about their claim as a whole. They might consider the argument worth putting forward for consideration even if they are not sure it is right.

Common Phrases Used to Limit Arguments

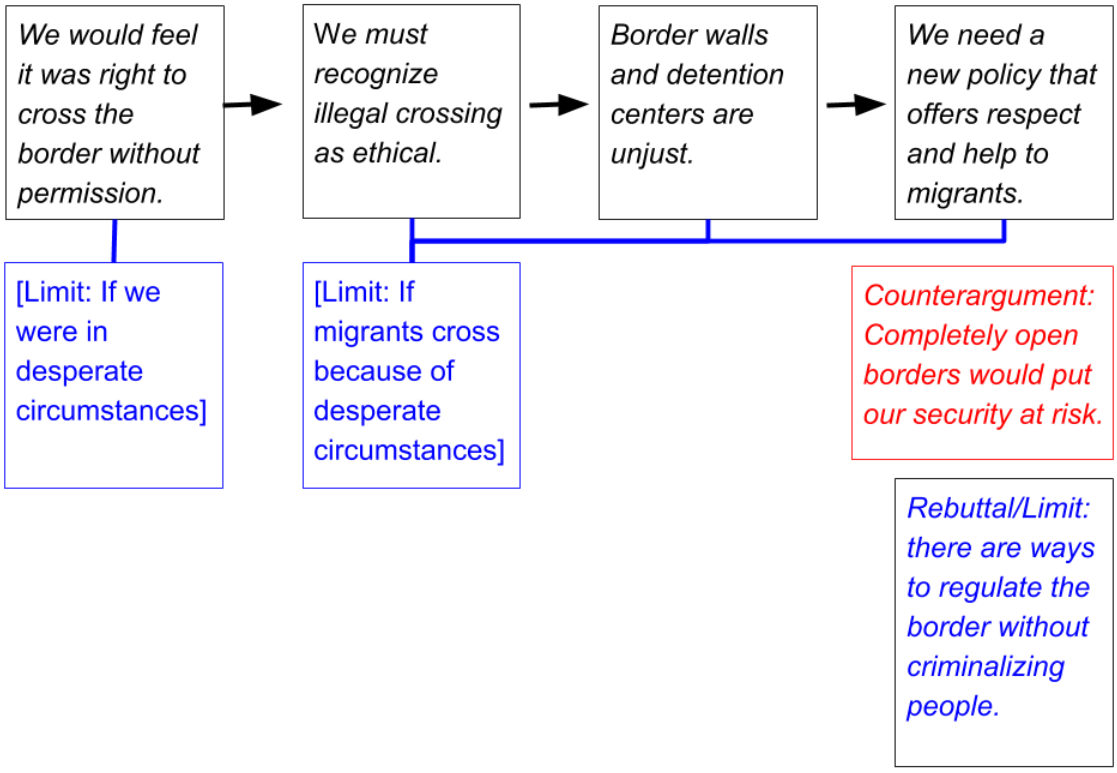
Kinds of limitations on arguments	Phrases
. **Expressing less than perfect certainty**	• Perhaps, _____. • It is worth considering the idea that _____. • _____ may_____. • _____might_____. • _____could possibly_____. • Probably, _____. • Very likely, _____. • Almost certainly,_____.
. **Limiting what the argument is claiming or restricting the scope of the argument**	• Few _____. • In a few cases, _____. • Some_____. • Many_____. • Most_____. • The vast majority of _____. • Almost all_____. • _____ unless_____. • If it is not the case that_____, then _____. • _____, except in the case that _____. • We can exclude cases where _____.

When we read arguments, we can watch for these limitations and add them to our argument map. In the case of the border argument, limitations are found throughout. We have highlighted them and commented on them below.

Sample Notes on an Argument's Limits

Argument	Notes
Title: Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?	Not limited at all--a universal "all"
All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?	Limits the group of immigrants we are talking about to those who are desperate. This is an argument about refugees of one kind or another, not about people who just feel they would be happier or more successful in the U.S. So maybe the author would still consider it fine to criminalize those who cross illegally because they prefer to live in the U.S. if they are not currently in dire straits.
I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.	Clarifies that some "regulation" of borders is okay. Their argument does not condemn all efforts to establish rules and consequences at the border. Again, this clarifies that this only applies to migrants with a compelling reason to cross.
If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themself, "I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong"?	Outlines a specific circumstance that would justify crossing illegally, implying that other circumstances might not justify it.
If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help.	Repeats the limitation to migrants who are desperate. Note: The final sentences don't mention any limitation on which migrants we are talking about.

The main limitation, then, can be entered into the argument map in blue and in brackets thus:



"Argument Map with Limits" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the argument map with limits.

Now that we have analyzed the parts of the argument and their relations to each other, we are ready for the next step demanded by most college writing assignments. Chapter 3 will discuss how to write a clear and precise summary of an argument.

Practice Exercise 6.8.2

1. Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
2. Read your text closely and identify any limits it puts on any of its claims.
3. Describe each limit in your own words and add it to your argument map. You can handwrite your map or copy this Google Drawings template.

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6.9: Common Argument Phrases

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Here are all of the common phrases discussed in Chapter 2 for introducing different elements of an argument. The section headings link to more information.

Claims

Claims of policy

- We should _____.
- We ought to _____.
- We must _____.
- Let's _____.
- The best course is _____.
- The solution is to _____.
- The next step should be _____.
- We should consider _____.
- Further research should be done to determine _____.

Claims of fact

- Research suggests that _____.
- The data indicate that _____.
- _____is increasing or decreasing.
- There is a trend toward _____.
- _____causes _____
- _____leads to _____.

Claims of value

- _____is terrible/disappointing/underwhelming.
- _____is mediocre/average/decent/acceptable.
- We should celebrate _____.
- _____is great/wonderful/fantastic/impressive.

Comparative claims of value

- _____is the best _____.
- _____is the worst _____.
- _____is better than _____.
- _____is worse than _____.
- _____is just as good as _____.
- _____is just as bad as _____

Reasons

- Because_____, _____.
- Because of this, _____.
- If_____, then _____.

- Since_____, _____.
- For this reason,_____.
- We can conclude_____.
- Therefore, _____.
- So_____.
- Consequently, _____.
- As a result, _____.
- Hence_____.
- Thus_____.
- It follows that _____.

Counterarguments

Mistaken counterarguments

- It is a popular misconception that_____.
- Some have fallen for the idea that_____.
- Many people mistakenly believe that_____.

Neutrally described counterarguments

- Many people think _____.
- Some, on the other hand, will argue that _____.
- Some might disagree, claiming that _____.
- Of course, many have claimed that _____.
- Some will take issue with _____, arguing that _____.
- Some will object that _____.
- Some will dispute the idea that _____, claiming that _____.
- One criticism of this way of thinking is that _____.

Counterarguments that have merit

- It is true that _____.
- I do concede_____.
- We should grant that_____.
- We must admit that_____.
- I acknowledge that _____.
- X has a point that _____.
- Admittedly, _____.
- Of course, _____.
- To be sure, _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____.

Rebuttal to a counterargument

- This idea misses the fact that _____.
- I disagree because _____.
- This depends on the assumption that _____ which is incorrect because _____.
- This argument overlooks _____.
- This argument contradicts itself _____.
- This is mistaken because _____.

Concession to a counterargument

- It is true that _____, but_____.
- I do concede_____, and yet_____.
- We should grant that_____, but we must still acknowledge that _____.

- We can admit that_____ and still believe that _____..
- I acknowledge that _____, and yet we should nevertheless recognize that _____.
- Critics have a point that _____; however it is more important that we focus on _____.
- Admittedly, _____. However, _____.
- Of course, _____, but I still insist that_____..
- To be sure, _____; but _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____, and yet _____.

Limits

Less than perfect certainty

- Perhaps, _____.
- It is worth considering the idea that _____.
- _____ may_____.
- _____might_____.
- _____could possibly_____.
- Probably, _____.
- Very likely, _____.
- Almost certainly,_____.

Narrowing the scope of the argument

- Few _____.
- Some_____.
- Many_____.
- Most_____.
- The vast majority of _____.
- Almost all_____.
- _____ unless_____.
- If it is not the case that_____, then _____.
- _____, except in the case that _____.
- We can exclude cases where _____.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Writing a Summary of Another Writer's Argument

Learning Outcomes

- Write a thorough summary of an author's text that includes that text's main claim, reasons, counterarguments, and limits.
- Choose phrases precisely to show the role of each point summarized within the larger argument.
- Identify key similarities and differences between two arguments.
- Write an essay summarizing and comparing two arguments that highlights what we can learn from their key similarities and differences.

7.1: What Is a Summary?

7.2: Introducing the Argument and the Main Claim

7.3: Describing the Reasoning

7.4: Describing How the Author Treats Counterarguments

7.5: Describing How the Author Limits the Claim

7.6: Putting the Summary Together

7.7: Writing a Short Summary of a Long Argument

7.8: Sample Summaries

7.8.1: Sample Summary- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

7.8.2: Sample Summary- "Typography and Identity"

7.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments

7.10: A Sample Compare-and-Contrast Essay

7.10.1: Annotated Compare-and-Contrast Essay

7.11: Common Summary Phrases



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7.1: What Is a Summary?

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In Chapter 2: Reading to Figure out the Argument, we discussed strategies for understanding the reading by identifying the claims presented and mapping how they work together. Chapter 3 will focus on how to use this understanding to describe the argument in our own words. Such a description is called a summary, and it forms part of most college writing assignments. In some cases, the summary will be the entire essay. We may be given a page or word count range, which might be as short as a paragraph or as long as several pages. More frequently, the summary will be the starting point; a summary in the introduction or in the first page or two will serve to launch a discussion of our own opinion. In either case, we can use the summary strategies in this chapter to create a coherent chunk of writing that will give the reader a clear picture of the text we are analyzing.

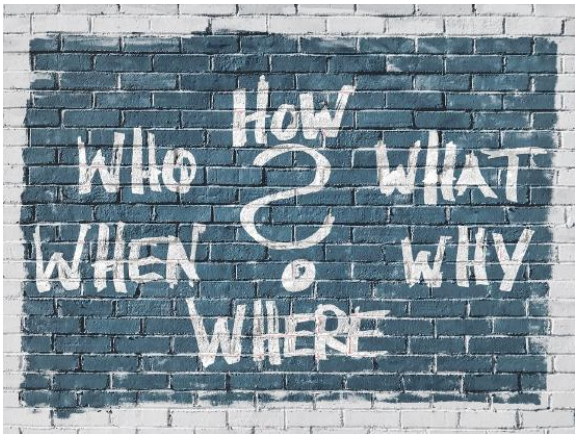


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If we have read a text and identified its claims and reasons along with any counterarguments and limits, we are in an excellent position to write a summary. If we have notes on the argument structure or an argument map, those can guide us as we write. Our notes or map will probably help us choose what to leave out and what to emphasize. They will point to the role each claim plays in the overall argument. In the summary, instead of annotations, colors, arrows, and labels like “claim” and “reason,” we will use strategic phrases to show how the parts fit together.

As we choose words to paraphrase a writer’s points, we will want to reread the text to see how strongly the writer suggests something or what attitude they take toward a counterargument. Thus the process of writing a summary helps us get even clearer about the writer’s intentions and implications than we would in making notes or mapping out the argument. Ultimately, summarizing will prepare us to comment, critique and respond more effectively, as we will see in Chapter 4, "Assessing the Strength of an Argument."

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7.2: Introducing the Argument and the Main Claim

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Introducing the Argument

Almost immediately, the reader of any summary will need some basic information about the argument summarized. We can name title and author in an introductory phrase. If the publication date and the publication name seem important, we can work those in too. For example, a summary could introduce the basic data on the sample border argument with the phrase "In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills..." and follow it with a description of the topic, purpose, or main claim. Some options for introductory phrases include the following:

- In an article for _____, writer _____...
- The account of _____ in the piece _____ by _____...
- Writing in the journal _____, the scholar _____ ...

Next, probably right after the introductory phrase, the reader will want to know the main point of that argument. To introduce the main claim, we’ll need a well-chosen verb to describe the author’s intention, her purpose in writing. The most general possible verb to describe a main claim would be “says,” as in “In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills says… ” But that would tell us so little about what Anna Mills is trying to do. Readers will be bored and will learn nothing from “says.” If we choose a more dramatic and precise verb like “calls for,” “criticizes,” “describes,” “argues,” or “questions,” then readers will feel the dynamism and momentum of both the argument and the summary. We can convey a lot about the structure of the argument, its degree of conviction or moderation, its tone and attitude by the word or phrase we choose to introduce each claim. As we choose those phrases, we will also be pushing ourselves to get an even clearer picture of the argument than we did by mapping it.



Just as a person might gesture toward a central feature of a landscape, a summary points readers toward the main claim of a text. Photo by Drew Saurus on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Describing Claims of Fact

If the argument’s main purpose is to describe reality in some way, we will want to let readers know if it is controversial or not. Is the writer defending their idea against obvious objections or counterarguments, or are they aiming to inform us about something we may not be aware of?

Phrases to introduce controversial claims of fact

- They argue that _____.
- She maintains that _____.
- He contends that _____.
- They assert that _____.
- She holds that _____.
- He insists that _____.
- She thinks_____.
- They believe that_____.

Phrases to introduce widely accepted claims of fact

- He informs us of _____.
- She describes_____.
- They note that _____.
- He observes that _____.
- She explains that _____.
- The writer points out the way in which_____.

Describing Claims of Value

If the argument's main purpose is to convince us that something is bad or good or of mixed value, we can signal that evaluation to the reader right off the bat. How dramatic is the claim about its praise or critique? We can ask ourselves how many stars the argument is giving the thing it evaluates. A five-star rating "celebrates" or "applauds" its subject while a four-star rating might be said to "endorse it with some reservations."

Phrases to describe a positive claim of value

- They praise_____.
- He celebrates_____.
- She applauds the notion that_____.
- They endorse_____.
- He admires_____.
- She finds value in_____.
- They rave about_____.

Phrases to describe a negative claim of value

- The author criticizes_____.
- She deplores_____.
- He finds fault in_____.
- They regret that_____.
- They complain that_____.
- The authors are disappointed in_____.

Phrases to describe a mixed claim of value

- The author gives a mixed review of_____.
- She sees strengths and weaknesses in_____.
- They endorse_____ with some reservations.
- He praises_____ while finding some fault in _____
- The authors have mixed feelings about_____. On the one hand, they are impressed by_____, but on the other hand, they find much to be desired in_____.

Describing Claims of Policy

If, as in the case of our sample argument, the author wants to push for some kind of action, then we can signal to the reader how sure the writer seems of the recommendation and how much urgency they feel. Since the border argument uses words like "must" and "justice" in its final paragraph, we will want to convey that sense of moral conviction if we can, with a verb like "urges." Here is one possible first sentence of a summary of that argument:

> *In her 2019 article "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?", Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps desperate migrants rather than criminalizing them.*

If we think there should be even more sense of urgency, we might choose the verb "demands." "Demands" would make Mills seem more insistent, possibly pushy. Is she that insistent? We will want to glance back at the original, probably many times, to double-check that our word choice fits.

If the border argument ended with a more restrained tone, as if to convey politeness and humility or even uncertainty, we might summarize it with a sentence like the following:

> *In her 2019 article 'Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?', Anna Mills asks us to consider how we can change border policy to help desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them.*

Phrases to describe a strongly felt claim of policy

- They advocate for_____.
- She recommends_____.
- They encourage_____to _____.
- The writers urge_____.
- The author is promoting_____.
- He calls for_____.
- She demands_____.

Phrases to describe a more tentative claim of policy

- He suggests_____.
- The researchers explore the possibility of_____.
- They hope that_____can take action to_____.
- She shows why we should give more thought to developing a plan to_____.
- The writer asks us to consider_____.

Elaborating on the Main Claim

Depending on the length of the summary we are writing, we may add in additional sentences to further clarify the argument's main claim. In the border argument example, the summary we have thus far focuses on the idea of helping migrants, but the argument itself has another, related dimension which focuses on the attitudes we should take toward migrants. If we are asked to write only a very short summary, we might leave the explanation of the main claim as it is. If we have a little more leeway, we might add to it to reflect this nuance thus:

> *In her 2019 article "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?", Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift away from blame toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong.*

Of course, the border argument is short, and we have given an even briefer summary of it. College courses will also ask us to summarize longer, multi-part arguments or even a whole book. In that case, we will need to summarize each sub-section of the argument as its own claim.

Practice Exercise 7.2.1

For each claim below, decide whether it is a claim of fact, value, or policy. Write a paraphrase of each claim and introduce it with a phrase that helps us see the writer's purpose.

- Students should embrace coffee to help them study.
- Coffee is the most powerful, safe substance available to jumpstart the mind.
- Coffee's effect is universal.
- For those of us who believe in the life of the mind, enhancing our brains' abilities is ultimately worth the occasional discomfort associated with coffee.

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7.3: Describing the Reasoning

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Once we have introduced the argument we will summarize and described its main claim, we will need to show how it supports this claim. How does the writer point us in the direction they want us to go? Whereas we used an arrow in the argument map to show momentum from reason to claim, we can use a phrase to signal which idea serves as a reason for which claim.

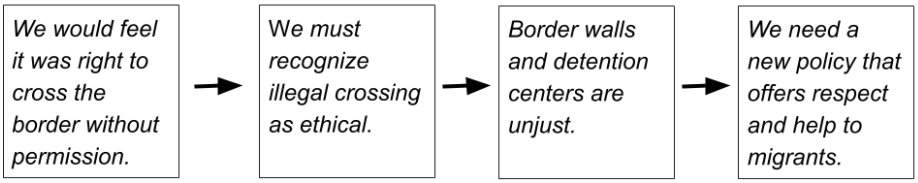


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Phrases for Introducing Reasons

- She reasons that _____.
- He explains this by_____.
- The author justifies this with_____.
- To support this perspective, the author points out that_____.
- The writer bases this claim on the idea that_____.
- They argue that_____ implies that _____ because_____.
- She argues that if _____, then _____.
- He claims that _____ necessarily means that_____ .
- She substantiates this idea by_____.
- He supports this idea by_____.
- The writer gives evidence in the form of_____.
- They back this up with_____.
- She demonstrates this by_____.
- He proves attempts to prove this by _____.
- They cite studies of _____.
- On the basis of _____, she concludes that _____.

Our border argument map shows a chain of three reasons leading to the main claim, so our summary can describe that chain.



Sample summary

In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong. She argues that any parent in a desperate position would consider it right to cross for their child’s sake; therefore, no person should condemn that action in another. Since we cannot justify our current walls and detention centers, we must get rid of them.

Practice Exercise 7.3.1

For each pair of claims and reasons below, write a paraphrase of the reason and introduce it with one of the phrases from the chapter or another phrase that serves a similar purpose.

Here's an example. Take the following claim and reason pair: “The right of free speech does not apply to speech that endangers public health. Therefore, Twitter should not allow tweets that promote medical claims that have been proven wrong.”

A description of the reason might read as follows: "The writer bases this recommendation on the idea that we do not have a free-speech right to spread ideas that harm other people’s health."

1. "Coffee jumpstarts the mind. Therefore, students should embrace coffee to help them study."
2. "Students should avoid coffee. Relying on willpower alone to study reinforces important values like responsibility and self-reliance."
3. "Students should drink black tea rather than coffee because tea has fewer side effects."

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7.4: Describing How the Author Treats Counterarguments

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If the argument we are summarizing mentions a counterargument, a summary will need to describe how the author handles it. A phrase introducing the author's treatment of the counterargument can signal whether the writer sees some merit in the counterargument or rejects it entirely. In either case, we will almost always want to follow up by describing the author's response. If the writer sees merit in the objection, we need to explain why they still maintain their position. On the other hand, if the author dismisses the counterargument, we need to show how they justify this dismissal.



If a writer rejects a counterargument entirely, we can point that out when we summarize. Photo by Anete Lusina on Pexels under the Pexels License.

Phrases to Introduce a Writer's Handling of a Counterargument

If the Author Sees Some Merit in the Counterargument

- The writer acknowledges that _____, but still insists that _____.
- They concede that _____; however they consider that _____.
- He grants the idea that _____, yet still maintains that _____.
- She admits that _____, but she points out that_____.
- The author sees merit in the idea that _____, but cannot accept_____.
- Even though he sympathizes with those who believe _____, the author emphasizes that _____.

If the Author Rejects the Counterargument Entirely

- She refutes this claim by arguing that _____.
- However, he questions the very idea that _____, observing that _____.
- She disagrees with the claim that _____ because _____.
- They challenge the idea that _____ by arguing that _____.
- He rejects the argument that_____, claiming that _____.
- She defends her position against those who claim _____ by explaining that _____.

In the case of the sample border argument, we might summarize the treatment of the counterargument thus:

> Mills acknowledges that opening the borders completely would compromise security, but she believes that we can "regulate" our borders without blocking or imprisoning migrants.

Note the choice here to quote the one word “regulate” instead of paraphrasing or using the word without quotation marks. The quotation marks draw attention to the author's original word choice and suggest there may be a problem or question about this word choice. In this case, the summary might observe that the writer does not specify what kind of regulation she means.

Practice Exercise 7.4.1

Below are two sample paragraphs in which an author describes a counterargument. For each description, decide whether the author sees some merit in the counterargument or not (see 2.6). Choose a phrase from the suggestions above to help you summarize the author’s handling of the counterargument.

1. Not everyone agrees with my celebration of coffee. Some object that ingesting substances to help us study leads to addiction. They worry that even a boost to mental functioning will ultimately hurt us because it encourages us to try to fix our mind with substances any time we feel out of sorts. This argument, however, is nothing short of paranoid. It would result in some ridiculous conclusions. By its logic, we should not drink water when we’re thirsty because we will become addicted.
2. Many feel that black tea is a better choice than coffee, arguing that it can improve performance just as well with fewer side effects. This depends on the individual, though. While black tea is worth considering, remember that it can also have side effects, and for many, it simply will not give enough of a boost to the brain.

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7.5: Describing How the Author Limits the Claim

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In the course of describing the author's claims, reasons, and counterarguments, chances are we will already have mentioned some limits or clarified which kinds of cases an author is referring to. It is worth checking, however, to make sure we haven't left out any key limitations the author has identified.



An argument may focus on particular cases and exclude others, as a frame can direct our attention to one part of a view.
Photo by pine watt on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Phrases to Describe the Way a Writer Limits an Argument

- He qualifies his position by_____.
- She limits her claim by_____.
- They clarify that this only holds if _____.
- The author restricts their claim to cases where_____.
- He makes an exception for_____.

In the case of the border argument, the writer responds to the counterargument about security by clarifying that she does not advocate completely open borders. The sample summary already refers to this when it describes her desire to "regulate" those borders. In addition, when the summary paraphrases her claims and reasons, it uses the phrases "desperate" and "in a desperate position" to show how she limits the focus to migrants who are fleeing an awful situation.

Practice Exercise 7.5.1

Below are some sample claims that mention limits. Choose one of the phrases above or create another one with a similar purpose to help you summarize each claim and limit.

1. Students should embrace coffee to enhance mental functioning unless they are in the minority of people who experience severe side effects of coffee like anxiety, insomnia, tremors, acid reflux, or a compulsion to drink more and more.
2. Students shouldn't hesitate to enjoy coffee as long as they keep exercising and sleeping well enough to maintain their mental and physical health.
3. In moderation, coffee can be part of a healthy lifestyle.

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7.6: Putting the Summary Together

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How can we turn the descriptions of the claims, reasons, counterarguments, and limitations into a cohesive paragraph, page, or essay that we can turn in as our summary? The good news is that by introducing each part of the argument to show how it relates to the others, we have already provided many of the transitions we need. We can generate a first draft of the summary by simply putting them all together in order.

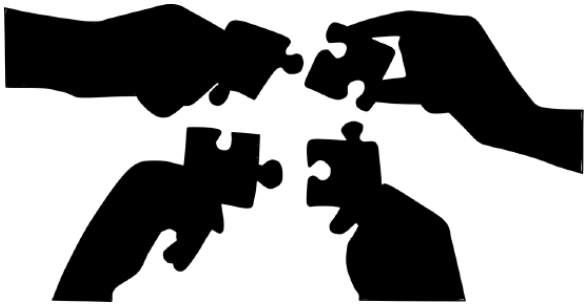


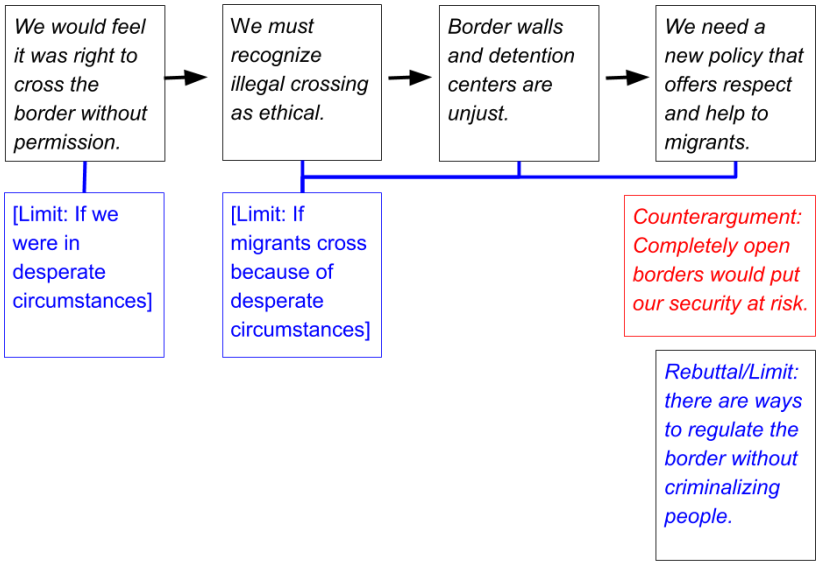
Image by Mohamed Hassan on Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Here is an example of a summary draft that describes the border argument:

Sample Summary

In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills urges readers to seek a new border policy that helps desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong. Mills argues that any parent in a desperate position would consider it right to cross for their child’s sake; therefore, no person should condemn that action in another. Since we cannot justify our current walls and detention centers, we must get rid of them. She acknowledges that opening the borders completely would compromise security, but believes that we can still “regulate” our borders without blocking or imprisoning migrants.

Next, we can review our border argument map to make sure that we have covered the main parts of the argument.



"Argument Map with Limits" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the argument map with limits.

If we are writing a longer summary of an extended argument, our map and our knowledge of the role of each part of the text will help us organize the essay into paragraphs and transition between them. For example, in a three-page summary of a twenty-five-page essay, we might spend a full paragraph on the author's description of a counterargument and yet another paragraph on the author's rebuttal to this counterargument. To open this paragraph, we could refer to our earlier list of templates for describing a response to a counterargument.

Practice Exercise 7.6.1

Summarize the argument below in a few sentences that introduce each element of the argument and its role. If you completed the exercises for the earlier sections in this chapter, you may use some of those answers to those to help you put together this paragraph.

Coffee is a blessing to students. What better way is there to jumpstart the mind and help us engage with our studies? The benefits of coffee are well known, and yet some hold back from it unnecessarily. Some feel that black tea is a better choice, arguing that it can still boost mental performance with fewer side effects. This depends on the individual. While black tea is worth considering, remember that it still comes with side effects, and for many, it simply will not give enough of a boost to the brain. For those of us who believe in the life of the mind, enhancing our brains' abilities is ultimately of more value than avoiding the occasional minor discomfort. Of course, a few people who experience severe side effects like anxiety, insomnia, or tremors should avoid coffee. For most, though, we can drink coffee in moderation and still feel healthy, as long as we exercise and sleep well. Some object to coffee because they believe that ingesting any substance to help us study leads to addiction. They worry that even a boost to mental functioning will ultimately hurt us because it encourages us to try to fix our mind with substances any time we feel out of sorts. This argument, however, is nothing short of paranoid. It would result in some ridiculous conclusions. By its logic, if we drink water when we're thirsty, we will end up addicted. If you haven't given coffee a fair try under the right circumstances, don't deprive yourself out of fear. Chances are you can do better work and enjoy it more with a moderate coffee habit. Why let life's "Aha" moments pass you by?

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7.7: Writing a Short Summary of a Long Argument

Media Alternative

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Thus far we have given examples of summaries that are close in length to the original argument. Very often in college and professional life, though, we will need to summarize a multi-page argument in just a sentence, a paragraph, or a page. How do we cover the most important ideas of the argument in just a few words? How do we decide what to leave out of the summary?



Writing a short summary of a long argument could be likened to choosing only the most important groceries to fit into a minature shopping cart.
Image by HOerwin56 from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

If we have already sorted out which ideas are the supporting examples and statistics and which are the main claim and reasons, that knowledge can guide us. The summary can allude to the supporting evidence rather than describing its details. It can leave out the specifics of any anecdotes, testimonials, or statistics.

For example, let's imagine we want to summarize an article that encourages people to buy the digital cryptocurrency BitCoin. The article might describe a number of different kinds of products people can buy with BitCoin and tell stories of individuals who used BitCoin for different purposes or invested in BitCoin and made a profit. Depending on how long our summary is supposed to be, we can represent those parts of the argument in more or less detail. If we need to summarize the article in a sentence, we might simply refer to all of this supporting evidence with a couple of words like "variety" and "profit."

Example 7.7.1

Sample one-sentence summary: "Go BitCoin" by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made."

If we have a bit more space, we might keep the same single-sentence overview but also throw in a few examples of the kinds of specifics mentioned in the article.

Example 7.7.2

Sample slightly longer summary: "Go BitCoin" by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made. First, Kim describes how we would go about paying for a range of products, from a Tesla to a sofa. Second, she gives statistics on BitCoin's rate of return and tells the stories of three young people who invested modest amounts in BitCoin and saw their money as much as triple within a year.

Notice how, in the above example, the summary alludes to three stories that have something in common but gives a detail that only applies to one of them. The summary writer chose the most memorable example of profit to include. If we have space to write a full paragraph, we could include more detail on the process of buying with bitcoin, on the investment statistics alluded to, and on the stories of investors.

Example 7.7.3

Sample paragraph-long summary: "Go BitCoin" by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy the cryptocurrency BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made. First, Kim describes how we would go about paying for a range of products, from a Tesla to a sofa. She shows how more and more vendors are accepting BitCoin directly, but for the moment some of the largest ones, like Amazon, require buyers to use a third-party app to convert their BitCoin. Second, she gives statistics on BitCoin's rate of return. BitCoin has gone through boom and bust cycles, but most recently its value increased 252% between July 2020 and July 2021. Finally, she tells the stories of three young people who invested modest amounts in BitCoin and saw their money as much as triple within a year. Kim shows how ordinary people can see more options open up in their lives through these investments. One teenager, Vijay Mather, was able to cover four years of college tuition by investing his earnings from working at Trader Joe's.

The original argument would include many more details, including how Vijay Mather got interested in BitCoin and exactly how much he made on his investment. It probably also includes the names of the other two young people it profiles and more about their experiences. However, the summary writer has picked out what those experiences have in common--the fact that the profits allowed them to consider new options in their lives. The writer has focused on Tracy Kim's purpose in presenting those examples: to raise readers' awareness of the possibilities.

Exercise 7.7.1

Read the two paragraphs below.

1. Summarize them in just one sentence.
2. Summarize them in two to three sentences, including a few more specifics.

The Black/white binary is the predominant racial binary system at play in the American context. We can see that this Black/white binary exists and is socially constructed if we consider the case of the 19th Century Irish immigrant. When they first arrived, Irish immigrants were “blackened” in the popular press and the white, Anglo-Saxon imagination (Roediger 1991). Cartoon depictions of Irish immigrants gave them dark skin and exaggerated facial features like big lips and pronounced brows. They were depicted and thought to be lazy, ignorant, and alcoholic nonwhite “others” for decades.

Over time, Irish immigrants and their children and grandchildren assimilated into the category of “white” by strategically distancing themselves from Black Americans and other non-whites in labor disputes and participating in white supremacist racial practices and ideologies. In this way, the Irish in America became white. A similar process took place for Italian-Americans, and, later, Jewish American immigrants from multiple European countries after the Second World War. Similar to Irish Americans, both groups became white after first being seen as non-white. These cases show how socially constructed race is and how this labeling process still operates today. For instance, are Asian-Americans, considered the “model minority,” the next group to be integrated into the white category, or will they continue to be regarded as foreign threats? Only time will tell.

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7.8: Sample Summaries

Media Alternative

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1. In "Spread Feminism, Not Germs," student Gizem Gur summarizes the *Atlantic Magazine* article "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism." Annotations point out the structure of the summary and the strategies Gur uses.
   - Sample summary "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" in PDF with margin notes
   - Sample summary "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" accessible version with notes in parentheses

2. In "Typography and Identity," Saramanda Swigart summarizes the *New York Times* article “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black’?” Annotations point out the structure of the summary and the strategies Swigart uses.
   - Sample summary "Typography and Identity" in PDF with margin notes
   - Sample summary "Typography and Identity" accessible version with notes in parentheses

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7.8.1: Sample Summary- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (5 min, 34 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

Eng 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. While the pandemic has affected everyone's lives in every aspect, its impacts on women are even more severe. (Note: The followup statement introduces the essay's particular focus: the impact of the pandemic on women.) Helen Lewis, the author of the *Atlantic Magazine* article "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism," explains why the pandemic threatens feminism. (Note: Early on, the summary names the author, title, and magazine that published the argument summarized.) Lewis starts her article with a complaint by saying "enough already" because, in terms of housework especially for child care, there has been an 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. Lewis argues that the crisis affects women more than men because women are more likely to assume housework and childcare responsibilities while men are expected to work and "bring home the bacon." (Note: The author provides a thesis at the end of the introduction with a clear overview of the main claim of the argument summarized.)

Lewis supports her claim by pointing out that during the pandemic, the gender pay gap pushes women to take on caregiving while men continue to work outside the home. (Note: The phrase "supports her claim" shows us that this paragraph will describe one of Lewis' reasons.) She writes, "all this looking after—this unpaid caring labor—will fall more heavily on women" because households depend more on men's pay. To support this idea, she includes provocative questions from Clare Wenham, an assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of Economics: "Who is paid less? Who has the flexibility?" (Note: The author supports the summary with short quotes from the argument where the wording is important.) The questions express Wenham's frustration. Lewis implies that this existing structure is based upon the gender pay gap, the reality that women make less money. She believes that couples do not have many options: it is a kind of survival rule that whoever earns less should stay at home.

Lewis blames the influence of old-fashioned ideas about gender roles for compounding the effects of the pay gap during the pandemic. Dual-earner parents must find a way to meet children's needs during the shelter-in-place. Lewis observes that women often are the ones who take on the role of stay-at-home parent. (Note: This paragraph shows how another reason, gender role expectations, combines with the economic reason to support the main claim.) She humorously notes, "Dual-income couples might suddenly be living like their grandparents, one homemaker, and one breadwinner." Lewis sees this as a kind of embarrassing regression. The gender dynamic has slid back two generations, showing that cultural beliefs about the role of the mother haven't changed as much as we might think. (Note: The use of the word "embarrassing" suggests that Lewis is not just observing but making a claim of value. The summary reflects Lewis' attitude as well as her ideas.) Lewis acknowledges that some families do try to split childcare equally, but she emphasizes that these are in the minority.

Lewis sees implications for her claim beyond the current pandemic. (Note: The end of the summary notes how Lewis extends her argument by claiming that other pandemics will have similar gendered effects.) She draws a parallel to the effect on women of the Ebola health crisis which occurred in West Africa in the time period of 2014-2016. According to Lewis, during this outbreak, many African girls lost their chance at an education; moreover, many women died during childbirth because of a lack of medical care. (Note: Lewis supports this with a historical example of another pandemic that disproportionately hurt women.) Mentioning this proves that not only coronavirus but also other outbreaks can be a disaster for feminism. Pandemics, in other words, pile yet another problem on women who always face an uphill battle against patriarchal structures. (Note: The concluding sentence reinforces the extended version of Lewis' main point in a memorable, dramatic way.)

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7.8.2: Sample Summary- "Typography and Identity"

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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.

Works Cited

(Note: The 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/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage

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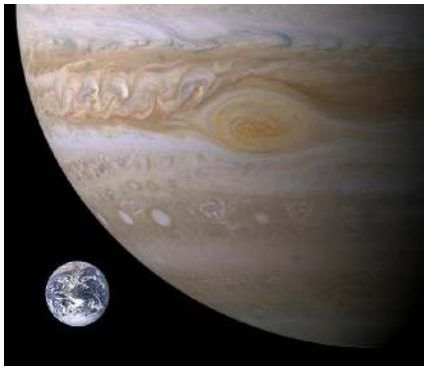
7.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments

Media Alternative

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So far we've learned how to summarize a single argument, but there are, of course, many arguments on any given topic, and in college and beyond we are often asked to compare and contrast more than one source. In this case we need to provide summaries of two (or more) related but distinct arguments; let's call them A and B here. We might find common ground between two unlike authors, tease out the subtle differences between two seemingly similar authors, or point out the opposing assumptions underlying competing claims. Ultimately, we'll be asked to go beyond summarizing the two to explore the implications of their similarity and/or difference. What can the comparison teach us? What insight do we gain by juxtaposing A and B?



Comparing Jupiter to Earth might give perspective on Earth's size and atmosphere.
Image by WikiImages from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Establishing a topic in common

To frame the compare-and-contrast essay, it helps to describe a common context, something happening in the world, that both texts respond to. What unites these arguments: A theme, a current or historical event, a theoretical lens? Let's say we want to compare and contrast the essay we have already discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Anna Mills' "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?" with a new argument about borders, "The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart:

"The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart

While illegal immigrants crossing the border to the United States may come from desperate circumstances, it is unjust, impractical, and unrealistic for one nation to solve the problems of so many non-citizens.

Illegal immigration challenges the rule of law. If laws can be broken simply because lawbreakers had good intentions, this suggests that obeying the law is merely optional—that the law is something to be obeyed only when it is convenient to do so. It is understandable that plenty of people who break the law do so with good intentions, but enforcement of the law cannot be reduced to investigations of intentions—it must ultimately spring from concrete actions.

The truth is that illegal immigration presents a security risk. Because illegal immigrants are not tracked by any immigration agency and thus remain largely anonymous, it is impossible to verify which immigrants come in search of a new life and plan to abide by the laws of their host country and which do not. A porous border may allow for waves of well-meaning immigrants and their families to seek new lives in a new country, but no country should be blamed for wanting to secure its borders or its territory.

An influx of immigration also strains a nation's resources. Understandably, in many cases, immigrants seeking shelter in the United States have left desperate circumstances and arrive seeking support. In a perfect world, this would not be a problem;

however, because a nation's resources are finite, this means that the financial and material burden of taking care of incoming immigrants falls on their host county. In small, manageable numbers this isn't a problem (this is what legal immigration is for) but one can see how a nation tasked with taking care of immigrants from around the world would be burdened beyond its resources if it must solve the whole world's humanitarian problems.

Ultimately, we shouldn't increase our tolerance of illegal border crossings. In order to address the plight of immigrants, maintain national security, and manage internal resources, all policy changes should involve balancing the needs of non-citizens with the needs of citizens before carefully and thoughtfully expanding legal immigration.

In a paper comparing Mills' and Swigart's theses, we need to frame the problem central to both arguments; the implications of illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, a controversial issue of some urgency today. Consider the following sentences, which place both articles in the cultural context within which they are written:

"In recent years illegal immigration into the United States at the U.S.-Mexico border has become a divisive political topic, resulting in a widening partisan divide as to whose priorities we should privilege: the immigrants' or the nation's. Are we global citizens or American citizens first?"

Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement

Now, what points do the two articles make? Are there any overlapping claims? Are these two authors in complete disagreement or do you see areas in which they share values and/or concede points to one another? We can start by brainstorming the ways A is similar to B and the ways they differ. As you'll recall, Mills' essay appeals to empathy, suggesting that we would become border-crossers ourselves in the right circumstances. She argues for a reevaluation of immigration policies and practices with an increased emphasis on compassion for immigrant families. Swigart's essay, on the other hand, asks us to make pragmatic assessments about national security and resource allocation, placing national interests before concern for immigrants' wellbeing. Swigart emphasizes the necessity for a nation to secure its borders and enforce its laws.



Photo by George Milton on Pexels under the Pexels License.

How to organize a compare-and-contrast essay

In the introduction, we will want to identify what topic the two arguments have in common and offer a thesis statement that explains the relationship between A and B. The strategies below may help. In the next section, we will look at a complete sample essay that compares Mills' and Swigart's arguments.

Forming the thesis

In the case of compare-and-contrast essays, the thesis can summarize the essential differences or surprising similarities between the texts.

Example 7.9.1

Thesis: Though Mills and Swigart agree on the urgency as well as the root causes of our border crisis, they disagree on whether the solution should prioritize American citizens' or refugees' needs.

Text-by-text organization

Then we'll need to select a way to organize the compare and contrast essay. Here are two basic ways to organize the body of a compare and contrast essay: text by text and point by point. If we think that B extends A, or if A is a lens through which to see B, we might decide to use a text-by-text scheme. That means we'll summarize the claims, reasons, and warrants of A followed by the claims, reasons, warrants of B. For instance, if Mills' essay were outlining the need for immigration reform, and essay B were outlining policy to create such immigration reform, we could quickly summarize Mills' ideas in a body paragraph before moving on to B's proposals in their own body paragraph.

Point-by-point organization

If A and B approach a series of similar issues from different standpoints, a point-by-point scheme can highlight their different approaches. That means we'll break the argument into the different topics that both essays address. In the immigration example, we might include a paragraph about the two "sides" of the debate; a paragraph devoted to whether it is ethical to break the law in desperate circumstances; a paragraph devoted to issues of national security; and a paragraph that compares the proposed solutions.

Topic sentences

In all essays, each new point needs to refer back to some part of the thesis. Each topic sentence should refer to one of the points of comparison that was already mentioned in the thesis. The sample phrases below may be useful as we emphasize particular similarities or differences.

Phrases for compare and contrast essays

Common phrases that indicate similarity and difference can help to clarify how each point about A relates to another point about B. See Section 12.3: Showing How a New Idea Fits in for more on this.

Phrases that highlight a similarity

- Just as A does, B believes that_____.
- Both A and B see _____ as an important issue.
- We have seen how A maintains that _____. Similarly, B _____.
- A argues that_____. Likewise, B _____.
- A and B agree on the idea that _____.

Phrases that highlight a difference

- A focuses on_____; however B is more interested in_____.
- A's claim is that_____. Conversely, B maintains that _____.
- Whereas A argues that_____, B_____.
- While A emphasizes_____, B_____.
- Unlike A, B believes that_____.
- Rather than _____ like A, B_____,
- Whereas A argues that _____, B maintains _____.

Juxtaposing a similarity with a difference

We can also describe a similarity and a difference in close proximity. Here are some sample sentences that do that:

- Both A and B assert that _____, but they differ in their approach to _____.
- While A condemns the weaknesses of _____, B praises its strengths.
- A outlines the problem of _____ in the abstract while B proposes solutions to the problem.
- Though A and B agree on the root cause of _____, they differ on its solution.

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7.10: A Sample Compare-and-Contrast Essay

Media Alternative

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The essay "Contested Territory" compares and contrasts two arguments on immigration: "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border" by Anna Mills and "The Weight of the World" by Saramanda Swigart. Annotations point out how the author structures the comparison.

- Sample compare-and-contrast essay "Contested Territory" in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample compare-and-contrast essay "Contested Territory" accessible version with notes in parentheses

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7.10.1: Annotated Compare-and-Contrast Essay

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Sample Essay X

English 1C

Prof. Saramanda Swigart

Contested Territory

In recent years, illegal immigration into the United States at the U.S.-Mexico border has become a divisive political topic, resulting in a widening partisan divide as to whose priorities we should privilege: the immigrants' or the nation's. (Note: The author establishes a frame of reference in the first sentence, referencing the cultural context surrounding illegal immigration.) Are we global citizens or American citizens first? Anna Mills' "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?" and Saramanda Swigart's "The Weight of the World" offer opposing views on this controversial issue. (Note: Here are our grounds for comparison, wherein the author briefly summarizes the two stances on immigration.)While Mills considers us global citizens, arguing for compassion toward suffering in our reevaluation of immigration policies and practices, Swigart believes we must be American citizens first, pointing out the necessity for a nation to secure its borders and enforce its laws. (Note: Essay thesis)

As an advocate of compassion, Mills questions the ethics of enforcing immigration laws and argues for empathy with illegal immigrants because, given the same circumstances, many or most of us would make the same choice to cross a border illegally if it meant a chance for a better life for ourselves or our families. (Note: Topic sentence resupplies language from the thesis and signals what will be discussed first.) The author puts herself, and by extension the reader, in an illegal immigrant's position: "If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it" (Mills). (Note: Essay supports the summary with quotations selected from the text.) This argument for empathy relies on pathos, appealing to readers' own emotional desires for their families' well-being. However, Mills' argument links pathos to pragmatism as Mills draws the logical conclusion that, if, given the same circumstances, "many or most of us would make the same choice, we cannot condemn those who choose to immigrate illegally" (Mills). Her argument evokes the Golden Rule; to turn our backs on obvious suffering is to turn our backs on ourselves, and is thus immoral by definition.

While the essay argues for empathy, it limits the scope of its argument from offering a comprehensive vision of what a new or improved immigration policy would consist of, as Mills acknowledges "I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk." (Note: Discussion of the acknowledged limits on Mills' argument sets the stage for Swigart's counterargument.)She anticipates the potential counterargument and shares her own concerns for the law and national security, and concludes that any immigration policy must be based on humanitarian values and priorities: "We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help" (Mills). Thus she is not advocating open borders without regulation. Rather, she asks that policy take the plight of the immigrants into account, calling on us to treat everyone as though they are citizens of the world, having inherently the same rights to dignity and safety as U.S. citizens do. (Note: This essay is organized text-by-text, though it could easily have been organized point-by-point.)

In contrast, Swigart emphasizes not compassion, but the rule of law and the primacy of national security. (Note: "In contrast" is a transitional phrase that signals a divergent point of view.)Instead of invoking pathos by emphasizing the personal, Swigart emphasizes impersonal and abstract concerns like respect for the law, the priority of secure borders, and the need to consider finite

resources. The first point, concerning the rule of law, argues that “If laws can be broken simply because lawbreakers had good intentions, this suggests that obeying the law is merely optional” (Swigart) and concludes that routine circumvention of law without penalty would undermine rule of law more broadly. The second point is similar but applied to concerns for national security. Although the author acknowledges the sympathetic situation of immigrant families, she argues that “no country should be blamed for wanting to secure its borders or its territory” (Swigart). These first two arguments are presented as self-evident arguments or truisms—essentially, violation of the law undermines the law, and a porous border undermines national security.

Swigart's third argument is perhaps more complicated, as she argues that one nation should not be obligated to shoulder the burden of solving other nations' humanitarian or economic crises. (Note: The writer examines one of Swigart's points in more detail, just as they examined Mills' points.)“Because a nation's resources are finite,” Swigart argues, “the financial and material burden of taking care of incoming immigrants falls on their host county.” She goes on to cast doubt upon the notion that a single nation can and should solve the whole world's humanitarian problems. Here Swigart highlights the extreme implications of the argument she disagrees with in order to convince readers of its absurdity.

While both authors make compelling points, there are many assumptions they both make that are left unexamined. For instance, Mills’ essay assumes that there are no alternatives to allowing immigrants with good intentions into the country. For instance, the United States could invest or intervene in countries whose populations are suffering, improving their material conditions and thereby eliminating the need to immigrate. Likewise, Swigart fails to acknowledge that the United States is in fact the *cause* of some of the world’s problems and thus has a responsibility toward the lives it has disrupted; or that studies show the admittance of immigrants, rather than over-taxing the nation’s resources actually improves the nation’s economy. Both points of view might benefit from a deeper examination of their assumptions. (Note: Here the writer moves beyond summarizing and comparing the arguments to assessing their validity. This analysis might be the basis of a response essay.)

More importantly, the two approaches to immigration might not be in such dramatic conflict as the authors would have us believe. A policy that expands legal immigration to families in desperate need, for instance, while still cracking down on illegal immigration could potentially satisfy both sides of the argument. This is the problem with many partisan issues today. While we spill ink proving the other wrong, we miss opportunities to find common ground on which to build. (Note: In the conclusion, the comparison between the two essays leads to a proposal for a way to satisfy the demands of both.)

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7.11: Common Summary Phrases

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Here are all of the common phrases discussed in Chapter 3 for summarizing different elements of an argument and comparing two arguments. The section headings link to more information.

Introducing the argument

- In an article for _____, writer _____ discusses _____.
- The recent account of _____ by _____ focuses on _____.
- Writing in the journal _____, the scholar _____ argues that _____.

Claims

Controversial claims of fact

- They argue that _____.
- She maintains that _____.
- He contends that _____.
- They assert that _____.
- She holds that _____.
- He insists that _____.
- She thinks_____.
- They believe that_____.

Widely accepted claims of fact

- He informs us of _____.
- She describes_____.
- They note that _____.
- He observes that _____.
- She explains that _____.
- The writer points out the way in which_____.

Positive claims of value

- They praise_____.
- He celebrates_____.
- She applauds the notion that_____.
- They endorse_____.
- He admires_____.
- She finds value in_____.
- They rave about_____.

Negative claims of value

- The author criticizes_____.
- She deplores_____.
- He finds fault in_____.
- They regret that_____.

- They complain that_____.
- The authors are disappointed in_____.

Mixed claims of value

- The author gives a mixed review of_____.
- She sees strengths and weaknesses in_____.
- They endorse_____ with some reservations.
- He praises_____ while finding some fault in _____
- The authors have mixed feelings about_____. On the one hand, they are impressed by_____, but on the other hand, they find much to be desired in_____.

Strongly felt claims of policy

- They advocate for_____.
- She recommends_____.
- They encourage_____to _____.
- The writers urge_____.
- The author is promoting_____.
- He calls for_____.
- She demands_____.

Tentative claims of policy

- He suggests_____.
- The researchers explore the possibility of_____.
- They hope that_____can take action to_____.
- She shows why we should give more thought to developing a plan to_____.
- The writer asks us to consider_____.

Reasons

- She reasons that _____.
- He explains this by_____.
- The author justifies this with_____.
- To support this perspective, the author points out that_____.
- The writer bases this claim on the idea that_____.
- They argue that_____ implies that _____ because_____.
- She argues that if _____, then _____.
- He claims that _____ necessarily means that_____ .
- She substantiates this idea by_____.
- He supports this idea by_____.
- The writer gives evidence in the form of_____.
- They back this up with_____.
- She demonstrates this by_____.
- He proves attempts to prove this by _____.
- They cite studies of _____.
- On the basis of _____, she concludes that _____.

Counterarguments

Concession to a counterargument

- The writer acknowledges that _____, but still insists that _____.
- They concede that _____; however they consider that _____.
- He grants the idea that _____, yet still maintains that _____.

- She admits that _____, but she points out that_____.
- The author sees merit in the idea that _____, but cannot accept_____.
- Even though he sympathizes with those who believe _____, the author emphasizes that _____.

Rejection of a counterargument

- She refutes this claim by arguing that _____.
- However, he questions the very idea that _____, observing that _____.
- She disagrees with the claim that _____ because _____.
- They challenge the idea that _____ by arguing that _____.
- He rejects the argument that_____, claiming that _____.
- She defends her position against those who claim _____ by explaining that _____.

Limits

- He qualifies his position by_____.
- She limits her claim by_____.
- They clarify that this only holds if _____.
- The author restricts their claim to cases where_____.
- He makes an exception for_____.

Comparing two arguments

Similarities

- Just as A does, B believes that_____.
- Both A and B see _____ as an important issue.
- We have seen how A maintains that _____. Similarly, B _____.
- A argues that_____. Likewise, B _____.
- A and B agree on the idea that _____.

Differences

- A focuses on_____; however, B is more interested in_____.
- A's claim is that_____. Conversely, B maintains that _____.
- Whereas A argues that_____, B_____.
- While A emphasizes_____, B_____.
- Unlike A, B believes that_____.
- Rather than _____ like A, B_____,
- Whereas A argues that _____, B maintains _____.

Similarities and differences together

- While A condemns the weaknesses of _____, B praises its strengths.
- A outlines the problem of _____ in the abstract while B proposes solutions to the problem.
- Though A and B agree on the root cause of _____, they differ on its solution.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: The Writing Process

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the stages of the writing process
- Identify strategies for annotation, brainstorming, outlining, and drafting
- Choose what to focus on in revision
- Give constructive feedback on a peer's draft
- Evaluate and incorporate peer feedback.

8.1: An Overview of the Writing Process

8.2: Annotation

8.3: Brainstorming

8.4: Outlining

8.5: Drafting

8.6: Revision

8.7: Giving and Receiving Feedback



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8.1: An Overview of the Writing Process

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Writing can be daunting. So many of us, whether we are beginning or experienced writers, feel anxious or even paralyzed as we face a new assignment. We may feel discouraged and question our skill because we can't envision a fully-formed essay on the spot.

But it's not actually a bad sign if we can't. As Anne Lamott says in her book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, "Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere." Writing itself will help us form our ideas if we take it step by step. In Section 1.1: Why Study Argument? we suggested that writing helps us think clearly and deeply about a topic. We may start with little to no idea of where we are going, or we may have a working idea. Either way, if we engage in the process, we almost always get to greater insight and clarity for ourselves and our readers.

Below are the common steps most writers follow to move through the early stages of murky thoughts. In general, the order of these steps makes sense, but we are not bound to it. We can customize the process to fit our own style and the particular assignment. The key is to notice what is challenging at each point and find the strategy that will help the most. Often, a question or problem will arise as we work, and returning to an earlier strategy in the writing process can help us resolve the difficulty.

- **Studying the prompt:** The instructor's guidance can help us focus our efforts from the start so we don't spend time writing something that doesn't fit the assignment.
- **Reading and annotating:** Reading, rereading, and making notes on other texts is often the first step toward coming up with our own contribution to the larger conversation. As we have seen, most college writing comments on or responds to the arguments of others.
- **Generating ideas:** Various prewriting strategies can help us decide what to write about and gather specifics to support or explain what we want to say.
- **Planning how to organize the ideas:** Outlines, formal or informal, can help us structure the essay.
- **Drafting:** Writing the first version of the essay, often called the rough draft. Most writers go through many drafts.
- **Revising:** Reconsidering the ideas and content of the essay as well as refining the style and structure of the paper.
- **Editing:** Correcting grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics. We can also call this **proofreading**.
- **Publishing:** Sharing the final draft with others.

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Why annotate?

Writing notes can make reading more enjoyable. Reading doesn't have to be passive; we can find our own voices as we begin a conversation with the text. As a step in the writing process, annotation can be invaluable. As we have seen in this book, most college writing assignments ask us to respond to other arguments. We don't have to pull our ideas out of thin air. Early in the writing process, we can get ideas by rereading and making notes on any text we are going to write about. These notes will help us come up with specific points to make in our essay. We may even be able to copy and paste whole sentences of annotation into an essay's first draft.



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Annotate to engage

Annotating can help us stay focused on, and emotionally and intellectually connected to, what we are reading. It suggests that we feel empowered to speak back to the text.

Strategies for Engaging with a Text through Annotation

What we might do or think	What we 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?"
Agree or disagree with the author	"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 Wu describes"

Annotate to understand

As we saw in Section 2.3: Making Notes on the Writer's Claims, paraphrasing the points next to the text can help us understand fully. It can also help us prepare to write a summary, as we saw in Chapter 3. Noting any difficulties we have with understanding can remind us to ask or research the question later, and it can also get our minds working on solving the problem.

Strategies for Understanding a Text through Annotation

What we might do or think	What we might write
We don’t understand a word or term, so we go back and reread the sentence and figure it out – or look it up.	Circle the word, and, after we figure out its meaning, write the meaning next to the word.
We don’t understand a word, but realize we can keep reading and still understand.	Circle the word and look it up later.
We don't understand what the author is saying as it applies to a particular situation.	Write your question next to the text and bring it up in class or with a tutor.
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.
We notice that several points serve as examples for a claim.	Underline them and write “ex” and draw an arrow to the point that the example is supporting.

Annotate to assess, respond, and compare

If we are going to write an assessment of the text as we discussed in Chapter 4 or an original response as we discussed in Chapter 5, annotating can help us get started. We can note any possible strengths and weaknesses in the argument so we can later reflect more fully on the argument's validity. Often these notes about possible strengths and weaknesses will point us toward our own original responses, suggestions, or counterarguments.

Strategies for Assessing or Comparing a Text through Annotation

What we might do or think	What we might write
Question the evidence presented in the text.	"This seems like an isolated case. I don't think it's typical."
Think of a counterargument.	"What about the argument that Universal Basic Income encourages people to be entrepreneurs because they don't have to worry about just getting by?"
Think of additional evidence, examples, stories, or personal experiences that support the author’s argument.	"This rings true because I've seen it so often among my relatives."
Think of other texts that advance the same or similar arguments.	"Similar to Plato's idea that the truth is absolute but we can only glimpse it through shadows."

Annotate to find evidence

Once we have an essay assignment, a topic, or an outline, we may know more specifically what it is we need from the text. We can take notes specifically for the purpose of identifying points or quotations to incorporate in an essay.

Strategies for Finding Evidence through Annotation

What we might do or think	What we 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 raises wages"

Tools and formats for annotation

- Underline or highlight words, sentences, and passages that stand out.
- Write notes by hand on the margins of the text.
- Consider using differently colored pens or highlighters to make the notes stand out or to identify different kinds of notes.
- Attach post-it notes with comments to the text.
- Write a list of notes on a separate sheet of paper with the page numbers they refer to.
- If your source is electronic, use the highlighting and commenting functions available in many e-readers.
- If your source is a web page or PDF, use a digital annotation platform such as Hypothesis or Perusall or even Google Drive.
- Keep a reading journal where you reflect in full sentences or paragraphs.
- Keep a **double-entry journal** where you divide pages into two or more columns by the type of response. For example, in the first column you might include quotation or paraphrases and in the second, you might include your questions, opinions. Be sure to include the page number or link to the part of the reading you were referencing.

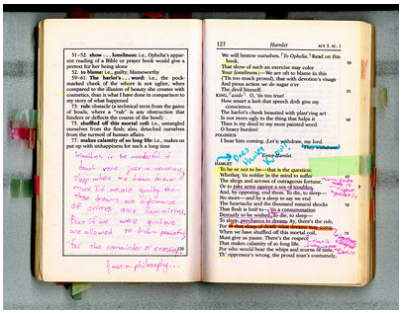


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8.3: Brainstorming

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We can choose from several methods when we want to generate ideas for a writing project. We can call these methods **brainstorming** techniques or **invention** techniques. They all have a few common rules:

- Write down everything that occurs to you; don't eliminate anything until you are done brainstorming.
- Don't bother with editing at this stage.
- Work as quickly as you can.

Listing

Brainstorm list: Simply make a list of all the ideas related to your topic. Do not censor your ideas; write everything down, knowing you can cross some off later. As you brainstorm, try not to focus your writing radar too narrowly, on a single aspect of your topic or a single question. The broader you cast your brainstorming net, the better because a large list of possibilities will give you a wealth of choices when time comes to compose your first draft.

What I know/don't know lists: If you know that your topic will require research, you can make two lists. The first will be a list of what you already know about your topic; the second will be a list of what you don't know and will have to research. For example, you might label one list "10 things I know to be true about…" and another "10 things I wonder about..."



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Mapping

A **mind map** or **cluster** is a method of brainstorming that allows you to draw connections between ideas.

1. To make a cluster, start with a big concept related to your assignment prompt. Write this in the center of a page or screen and circle it.
2. Think of ideas that connect to the big concept or branch out of it. Write these around the big concept and draw connecting lines to the big concept.
3. As you think of ideas that relate to any of the others, create more connections by writing those ideas around the one idea that connects them and draw connecting lines.

Notice that you can use color, larger type, etc., to create organization and emphasis.

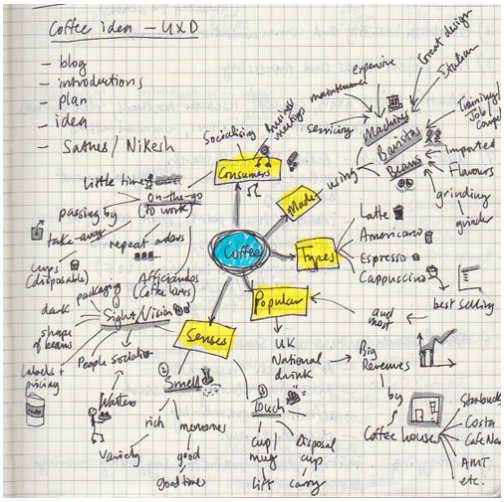


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Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely (jot, list, write paragraphs, write question, take off on tangents: whatever “free” means to you) about a topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes or until you run out of ideas or energy).

Try to write without checking, censoring, or editing yourself in any way. Don't put your pen or pencil down, or stop typing on the computer, no matter what. Let your mind go, go with the flow, and don’t worry about the end product. Don’t even worry about finishing your sentences or separating your paragraphs. You are not writing a draft of your paper. Instead, you are producing raw material. Later on, you just might find a gem of an idea in that raw material which you can develop into a complete draft.

- Write as much as you can, as quickly as you can.
- Don’t edit or cross anything out. (Note: if you must edit as you go, just write the correction and keep moving along. Don’t go for the perfect word, just get the idea on the page.)
- Keep your pen, pencil, or fingers on the keyboard moving.
- You don’t need to stay on topic or write in any order. Feel free to follow tangents.
- If you get stuck, write a repeating phrase until your brain gets tired and gives you something else to write. (For example, "I really hate having to do this, why isn’t it lunch-time already, please let me think of something, please let me think of something.")
- Choose a **prompt**, an idea or question that gets you started. An example of a writing prompt might be “What do I already know about this topic?” Or “What is the first idea I have about my topic?” If you started with a list or an outline, you can freewrite about each item.

Looping

Looping is a technique built on freewriting. It can help you move within a topic to get all related ideas into writing.

1. To begin, start with a freewrite on a topic. Set a timer and write for 5-15 minutes (whatever you think will be enough time to get going but not so much that you will want to stop).
2. When the time period ends, take a short break. Read over what you’ve written and circle anything that needs to be fleshed out or that branches into new ideas. Select one of these for your next loop.
3. Freewrite again for the same time period, using the idea you selected from the first freewrite.
4. Repeat as long as you see an interesting idea that could be expanded.

For more on using a timer and breaks to get going on tasks you tend to procrastinate on, you may want to read about the Pomodoro Technique.



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Asking Questions

To stimulate ideas, you can ask questions that help you generate content. Use some of the examples below or come up with your own.

Problem/Solution: What is the problem that your writing is trying to solve? Who or what is part of the problem? What solutions can you think of? How would each solution be accomplished?

Cause/Effect: What is the reason behind your topic? Why is it an issue? Conversely, what is the effect of your topic? Who will be affected by it?

The set of 5 journalist's questions, sometimes called the five W's, can help us generate basic information about a topic. Here are the questions:

- Who: Who is involved? Who is affected?
- What: What is happening? What will happen? What should happen?
- Where: Where is it happening?
- When: When is it happening?
- Why/how: Why is this happening? How is it happening?



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Talking

Some of us feel more comfortable expressing ourselves in conversation than on the page. We can generate ideas by speaking aloud as well; this may stimulate our brain in a different way. All of the above strategies can be adapted for speaking rather than typing or writing. These spoken brainstorms can be social or solitary. Here are a few approaches:

Conversations with peer or tutors

A conversation with a live person can help us come up with ideas that might not have occurred to us if we weren't energized by the other person and imagining what might interest them. It can work well to follow up more solitary kinds of brainstorming with a peer or group time to share what we came up with. Writing tutors are usually trained to question, encourage and draw out ideas.



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Talking to ourselves

If we can let go of feeling foolish, a private conversation with ourselves can be a great way to get past writer's block and tap into new energy. We could start a monologue with our questions and doubts. For example, "Hmm, well, I'm somewhat interested in electric cars, but I know so many people are doing that topic. What would my angle be? The battery problems in these cars are severe, so I don't want to endorse them, but I don't want to give up on them either..."

Voice typing

Most word processing programs now, including Google Docs, include voice typing features that allow us to speak and see the words transcribed on the page. We might have to edit the transcription later, of course, but if we can bring ourselves to talk but we can't bring ourselves to write, this is a great way to get something down.

Recording ourselves

We can use our phones to record voice memos of ideas at any time. If your voicemail transcribes your message automatically, you can leave yourself voice messages and glance at what you've said later for reference.



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8.4: Outlining

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Once we have plenty of ideas for an essay, writing an outline can help us organize them. Outlining makes sense when we know a topic well or at least know the areas we want to explore. Outlines range from formal to informal. Not all writers use outlines; many writers work best from a list of ideas or from freewriting, but in some cases, outlines can save us a lot of rewriting later on.



Like a sketch of an item we want to make, a written outline shows the basic structure of an essay.
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Traditional outlines

A traditional outline uses a numbering and indentation scheme to help organize your thoughts. Generally, you begin with your main point, perhaps stated as a thesis (see “Finding the Thesis” in the “Drafting Section”), and place the subtopics, usually the main supports for your thesis/main point, and finally flesh out the details underneath each subtopic. Each subtopic is numbered and has the same level of indentation. Details under each subtopic are given a different style of number or letter and are indented further to the right. It’s expected that each subtopic will merit at least two details.

How much should I write?

Phrase outlines

A phrase may be sufficient to describe each topic sentence or supporting detail. It is usually helpful to write a whole sentence to describe the thesis in order to specify not just the topic, but what you plan to say about it.

Sentence outlines

Writing a full sentence for each supporting idea and detail challenges us to clarify what we are going to say about each point and to think through how it relates to the other points and the thesis. Some instructors require a complete sentence for each item in a formal outline.

Sample traditional outline format

I. Major idea or thesis

a. Supporting idea

i. Detail

ii. Detail

iii. Detail

b. Supporting idea

i. Detail

ii. Detail

iii. Detail

Sample traditional outline

I. Thesis: The Sturgis motorcycle rally has become central to the identity of Sturgis and the surrounding area.

a. Bike Week has been going on for more than seventy years.

i. It is an automatic assumption by locals that Bike Week will be held each year.

ii. Most locals have never known life without Bike Week.

b. Bike Week is a key element of area finances.

i. Millions of dollars flow into the area economy.

ii. Sturgis and the surrounding cities have invested heavily in the function.

iii. Although the actual Bike Week is a central focus, bikers come here for months on either side of the week to ride the famous routes.

c. The area has grown and developed around Bike Week.

i. Every small town has a Harley-Davidson store.

ii. Merchants continually create new products to sell to bikers.

iii. The locals are very accepting and supportive of the bikers.

d. People around the world recognize Sturgis for Bike Week.

i. People attend Bike Week from all fifty states and many other countries.

ii. Although Sturgis has only a few thousand people, the town is known around the world.

Outline templates

- Google Docs outline template. Make a copy of this document and then replace the text with your own.
- Microsft Word outline template. Download this template and open it in Microsoft Word.

> **Note**
>
> Most word-processing applications include automatic outlining capabilities. Search the Help section for instructions.

Rough outlines

A rough outline is less formal than a traditional outline. Working from a list, a brainstorm, or a freewrite, organize the ideas into the order that makes sense to you. You might try color-coding like items and then grouping the items with the same color together. Another method is to print your prewriting, then cut it up into smaller pieces, and finally put the pieces into piles of related items. Tape the like items together, then put the pieces together into a whole list/outline

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8.5: Drafting

Media Alternative

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Drafting is the stage of the writing process in which we develop a complete first version of a piece of writing. If we have done some prewriting, we probably have sentences and ideas that can become part of the draft.



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Tips for getting going

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. The following approaches may help as you begin to write:

- **Begin writing with the part that is clearest in your mind.** There is no need to write in the order that the paragraphs will appear in the end. 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. Many people write your introduction and conclusion last, after they have fleshed out the body paragraphs.
- **Take short breaks to refresh your mind.** This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multipage report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. Don't beat yourself up. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write. As Anne Lamott says in her book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, "Try looking at your mind as a wayward puppy that you are trying to paper train. You don't drop-kick a puppy into the neighbor's yard every time it piddles on the floor. You just keep bringing it back to the newspaper."
- **Don't let your inner critic slow you down.** Anne Lamott says, "Perfectionism...is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft." Try to think of the bad first draft as the goal, not a sign of failure. A bad first draft is a step forward. Try to let go of your worries. There will be time to rethink, rephrase, and rework during the revision process.

- **Refer back to your prewriting.** If you are stuck, you may want to copy and paste something in from a brainstorm. If you have an outline, use it to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas. Each main idea becomes the topic of a new paragraph. Develop it with the supporting details and the subpoints of those details that you included in your outline.
- **Set small goals and time yourself.** Some call this "**fast drafting**." By experimenting, you can figure out how long you can usually concentrate given the right conditions: 30 minutes? 60 minutes? 75? Plan one longer session or several shorter ones. Decide on the goal: Write a paragraph in 10 minutes, 2 pages in 1 hour, or a complete essay in 1 hour and 15 minutes. Turn off phones and social media, close extra browser windows and tabs, let the dog outside. This needs to be quiet, concentrated time. You may want to tie a small reward to each goal like watching a video, eating a snack, or checking social media.
- **Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write.** Your purpose will guide your mind as you compose your sentences. Your sense of your audience will guide word choice. For most college assignments, the audience is assumed to be an intelligent general reader. It may help to imagine your classmates as your write. Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their background and experience, need to be told in order to understand. How can you best express your ideas so they are totally clear?



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8.6: Revision

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Why Revise?

In her book on writing called *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anne Lamott celebrates “shitty first drafts.” She says, “All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts” (21). Novelist Vladimir Nabokov once said, "I have rewritten–often several times–every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers."

For most writers, the process of writing and revision is the way we figure out exactly what we want to say. Writing helps us think. Revision can be one of the most important, instructive, and even pleasurable parts of the writing process. We respond to others’ critiques and questions and watch the work transform into something stronger, clearer, and more persuasive. It may seem like a paradox, but the better we get at writing, the more time we will probably spend revising.

Many people hear the words “critique” and “critical” and pick up only negative vibes. However, a critique can energize us and make us feel good about our writing. We can learn to be critical of ourselves in a constructive way and still feel good about ourselves as writers. Critiques don’t mean we’ve done something wrong. It’s better to see them as an opportunity to hear another perspective. Most well-regarded books include acknowledgments pages that thank all the people who gave feedback. The authors know that getting feedback and making changes is a normal part of producing the best possible work.

What Should We Prioritize in Revision?

By revision, we mean looking for ways to make ideas clearer and more convincing. When revising, we add, cut, move, or change whole sentences or paragraphs. Revising is far more than just editing; it is really a re-vision of an entire essay: ideas, organization, and development.



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It’s most efficient to revise from “big” to “small.” That is, we focus first on ideas and organization before turning our attention to sentence-level clarity. If we separate out these two stages, we won’t waste time editing the grammar of sentences that we might later have to change or cut.

Once we feel like we’ve finished the content of the essay, we can move on to sentence-level editing. Then we take a second look at *how* we expressed our ideas. We add or change words; fix problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure; and improve the writing style. The goal is to turn out a polished piece of writing we feel proud of.

Strategies for Getting Perspective

Often the intense process of writing a draft leaves us feeling unsure where to begin revising. We may be too immersed in what we have done to see what can be improved. Here are some revision strategies that writers use to get a fresh perspective on what they have written:

- Take a break. Set aside your writing for a few hours or even a day until you can look at it objectively.
- Print out a clean copy of the essay you plan to revise. Mark revision notes by hand and later use the printout to go back to the computer and make changes.
- Read your work aloud to yourself or a friend, or use a computer reader like NaturalReaders.com to listen to it. Often in listening, we notice more things that we skip over when reading.
- Ask a tutor or someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why? Think of yourself as a translator whose job it is to translate your writing into clearer, more dynamic English.
- Use the tutoring 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.

Four Ways to Approach Revision

1. Focus on the Connections between Ideas

One way to revise is to look at the structure of the essay and see if it is solid. We want to make sure all of our points are related to the main point—they unite to support the thesis. When a piece of writing has unity, all the ideas in each paragraph—and in the entire essay—clearly belong, and the reader can see how each idea relates to the one before it. We can achieve this through referring back, repeating key words and phrases, and using pointing and transition words. See 12.3: Showing How a New Idea Fits in and 12.4: Referring Back to Make the Connection.

Often when we are first trying to get something on paper, we may wander off topic, adding information that doesn't develop the main idea. That's fine, as long as we catch it and correct it in revision. We can check each paragraph to make sure it helps prove the thesis. Then we can make sure the sentences in the paragraph support the topic sentence. Have we addressed the important ideas and questions that will come to readers' minds?

Don't be afraid to delete material if you realize it is off topic. Alternately, you might see if you can reframe that material so it more clearly connects to the thesis and the idea that came before it.

2. Focus on Balancing "They Say" and "I Say"

As we have seen in Chapter 4: Assessing the Strength of an Argument (Logos) and Chapter 5: Responding to an Argument:, many college essays require both a summary of another text and a response to that text. In such essays, we aim for a balance of summary and response, or "they say" and "I say." If you have been told or suspect that you need more sources to back up your claims, or you need to give more of your own opinion, try this exercise:

Assess How Much "They Say" and "I Say" You Have:

1. Take two different-colored highlighters.
2. With your first highlighter color, highlight all the sentences in the body of the essay that summarize, paraphrase, or quote the ideas of your source text.
3. Now, take out highlighter color two. Go through and mark those passages containing your opinions, viewpoints, unique ideas, or thoughts. Many students will find this color a bit underused, but others will notice too much color here if their essays lack source material.
4. Take a moment to diagnose these disparate problems. Too much of one color means source overload—too much "they say" and not enough "I say." Too much of the other color means empty opinion and guesswork—too much "I say," not backed up by "they say." Check your essay assignment to see if the teacher has given any guidance about how much of the essay should be "they say" and how much should be "I say." Do you need to add more of one or the other?

Bring in More "I Say," If Needed:

1. Take one of your sources and read yourself a few paragraphs. After each major thought or idea, free-write a response in your own words: don't restate what the author says, respond honestly with your own opinionated, conversational response to what the source has just said. Pretend that you're talking face-to-face with the author, replying naturally.
2. Once you feel you've got sufficient conversation/dialogue generated on paper, read your replies quietly to yourself, creating an actual conversation. Can you bring some of this "dialogue" into your essay? Strong essays should read like all the sources, including your analysis, are talking to each other.
3. Repeat with any other source texts.

Bring in More "They Say," If Needed:

1. Next, try the same with the highlighted source sections of your drafts. After each assessment or opinion you give, check to make sure it is linked with corresponding ideas from your source texts.
2. Pretend the author of the texts are speaking back to you. What would they have to say about your claims? Comb through their work and try to find instances in which they agreed, disagreed, or complicated your read and consider weaving it into the text. If they offer a counter-argument then you might want to address it. If they reinforce your ideas, then you may have strengthened your ideas.
3. Repeat with any other source texts.

3. Focus on the Thesis

1. Find the essay's thesis statement, the one-sentence version of the whole essay. (Some teachers may allow for two-sentence theses, but most commonly the thesis can be expressed in one sentence). If you cannot find it, read the whole essay, and craft one.
2. Does your thesis consist of a clear claim? Will readers know what you mean after reading that sentence alone? Imagine reading it to a friend. Would you want to change anything so they could understand it better?
3. Does the thesis include or at least touch on all the ideas developed in the essay? If not, you may need to revise it so it covers more.
4. If the thesis is very general, consider ways to make it more specific. Whom does this apply to? When? Where? What are the claim's implications? Look for generalizations, and replace them with specifics.

4. Focus on Developing the Ideas

If your ideas don't feel fully developed or you're struggling to fill the page requirement, one approach is to go through each sentence of each paragraph to see what you need to add. For each paragraph, determine whether all the ideas included are sufficiently explained.

1. Are all terms defined for the reader?
2. Has each point been explained in enough detail?
3. Have you given an example, quotation, or other specific information to support each point that needs it?
4. Is there anything you mention that might well leave readers confused or asking questions?
5. Is it clear how the paragraph relates to the previous paragraph and the thesis?

Revise each under-developed paragraph to answer questions and provide a full picture for the reader. If a paragraph seems to be getting long, consider whether it includes more than one important point. Often a paragraph on one topic can be split into two paragraphs, each on a subtopic. The transition can show how they are related.

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Works Cited

Lamott, Anne. "Shitty First Drafts." *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Random House, 1994. Print.

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8.7: Giving and Receiving Feedback

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In many writing classes, students are expected to learn how to give feedback to their peers. This task is usually called peer review, a concept you will also learn about when you begin to use academic research. At first, this may seem intimidating. Writers may think, "I'm not a teacher–how can I give useful feedback to another writer?" What writers can do is give their peers an honest reaction as a reader and give advice based on their own experience. It is ultimately up to the writer to decide if they want to make use of the feedback given. If you feel unsure of your ability to give feedback, remember that you are learning from the process. In a class, the other students will also receive feedback from the instructor.

This understanding may also help students who don't feel that other students are qualified to give feedback. If you feel that the advice given to you by a peer isn't right, you can choose to ignore it or decide to check with your instructor first. Remember that your peers are learning how to give feedback, just as you are.

Giving feedback on writing is a powerful skill that you may use outside of school for work projects, for personal writing, or even to help your children with their homework.



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Giving peer feedback

When your role in peer review is to give feedback, your job is to help the writer by giving your reaction as a reader to the writing. Think about the kind of feedback you would like to get and also how you would like that feedback to be given. What follows here are some basic rules to follow for responding to someone else's writing.

- **First, listen to the writer**. What kind of feedback are they asking for? Do they want to know if their thesis is clear? Do they have questions about citing sources? Make a note about what kind of feedback the writer has requested and keep that in mind as you respond.
- **Be kind**. When you are receiving criticism, isn't it easier to hear if the person giving the criticism is kind and respectful to you? Do the same for your peer.
- **Comment on the higher-order concerns first**. That means asking questions about anything that confuses you, checking to see if the writing did what the assignment called for, and considering if the order of the paper makes sense. Sometimes your instructor will give you specific things they want you to comment on; if so, be sure you do so.
- **Use "I" statements** to help stay focused on your reaction to the writing. For example, instead of saying, "You aren't clear in this paragraph," try saying, "I'm confused in this paragraph. Did you mean X or Y?"
- **Be specific.** Never say "I liked it" or "It was good" unless you follow up with an explanation of exactly what you liked or thought was good. The same goes for criticism; say exactly what confused you or what was missing.
- **Ask questions**. Use questions to clarify what the writer means, what the resources given are saying, and what the writer is trying to do.

- **Offer advice** based on your own experience. For example, you could say “if this were my paper, the two things I would do next are A and B.” Provide options such as, “If you wanted to expand this, you could do A, B, or C.”
- **Don’t try to make the writer sound like you**. If a word is the wrong word, note that, but if you just think of a word you like better, that’s just a matter of style and voice.
- **Don’t edit your peer’s writing for them**. Only comment on editing when the writing is a final draft or when your instructor has included checking for errors in the instructions for peer review. Correcting errors is important at some point, but it makes no sense to spend time editing a paragraph if that paragraph may need to be deleted or changed. It’s okay to remind the writer to run spellcheck and grammar check if you notice minor errors. Otherwise, only ask about editing errors if you have trouble understanding the sentence because of the mistakes. If your instructor does want you to comment on errors, see Proofreading Strategies and be sure to follow the instructions.

Make the most of peer feedback

Now let’s consider your role in receiving feedback, not giving it. Are you eager to get feedback? Scared to share your work? If you are receiving feedback from your peers, remember that ultimately you get to decide what feedback to accept. If you don’t think the feedback is correct, ask your instructor what they think. And give your peers a break; they are also just learning how to give feedback.

One way to improve the feedback you get is to ask for the kind of feedback you want. Don’t be afraid to give your peer reviewer some direction.

Listen to or read the feedback with an open mind. Consider that the peer reviewer is your reader. It’s good to know what a real reader got out of your writing.

If you aren’t sure about the feedback or feel upset about it, reconsider the suggestions after a break. It’s okay to say, “I’ll think about that.” If you feel that the reviewer is trying to change your style so that the paper doesn’t sound like you anymore, consider whether the feedback helps you make the paper better. If not, feel free to set that feedback aside.

Why meet with a writing tutor?

Sometimes your instructor may ask you to visit the Writing Center, or it may even be a requirement for your class. Or you may just be curious about what a writing tutor has to offer. Many colleges have writing centers or subscribe to online services that provide tutoring in writing. What’s the benefit?

Writing tutors offer you another perspective on your writing. They serve as a real audience for your words and ideas. In addition to that, they have some additional expertise either because they are more experienced writers or they are writing instructors. Writing tutors also have experience with resources for writing that you may not be aware of.



Consider meeting with a tutor online if your college offers that option.
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Preparing to meet with a tutor

To prepare for a Writing Center session, print your paper out and consider printing a second copy to make it easier for both you and the tutor to read along at the same time. Be ready to take notes and listen carefully. It's helpful if you bring the assignment or have access to it online. Your tutor will spend a few minutes in the beginning of the session figuring out what you are writing, what the requirements are, and when your work is due. They may ask what you have already done to improve the writing, and they will almost always ask you what you would like help with.

Keep in mind that your tutor will want to focus on a few important things rather than try to catch every little thing in your paper. Tutors won't edit your paper for you, but they can help you learn how to edit your own work better. Don't be surprised if your tutor shows you how to use a writing resource such as a handbook or the Purdue OWL online; part of the tutor's job is to help you learn to navigate resources on your own, so that you eventually have the same tools as the tutor.

At the end of a session, the tutor will probably ask you what you plan to do next with your writing. That's how they check to see that you got what you needed from the session and that you understood the advice given. After you revise your writing, you may want to schedule another tutoring session to work on additional aspects of the assignment.

What about getting help from a friend or family member?

Getting feedback from a reader outside of your class can sometimes be a good idea. If you want to ask a friend or family member for feedback, set some ground rules. They should follow the same rules as a peer reviewer. At the very least, asking a friend or family member to read your paper aloud will help you hear how your paper sounds. You will probably catch more errors, too.

Preparing for a student/teacher conference

Getting in-person help from your instructor is one of the best ways to receive feedback. You can prepare for a conference with your instructor so that you get the most out of it. Usually, a conference happens with just you and your instructor. Friends aren't invited, and parents can only attend with your permission due to the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA). See this handy link to "FERPA General Guidance for Students" from the US Department of Education (found at studentprivacy.ed.gov).

Bring your best work to the conference. The more effort you have already made means that the instructor won't waste time telling you things you already know you need to fix. Re-read your work before the conference and prepare some questions. What do you think is working? What do you need help with? During the conference, take notes. If the instructor writes anything down, ask if you can take their notes with you. At the end of the conference, work with your instructor on an action plan to revise your work.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Essay Organization

Learning Outcomes

- Write a thesis that summarizes the main point of an essay
- Write a topic sentence that summarizes the main point of a paragraph
- Introduce relevant specific evidence to support a topic sentence
- Integrate quotations and paraphrases from other texts as support
- Connect a new idea to a previous point or to the thesis
- Introduce essays in ways that engage the reader in the specific topic
- Conclude essays in ways that sum up as needed and point toward further questions or implications.

9.1: Developing a Thesis Statement

9.2: Topic Sentences

9.3: Showing How a New Idea Fits in (Transitions)

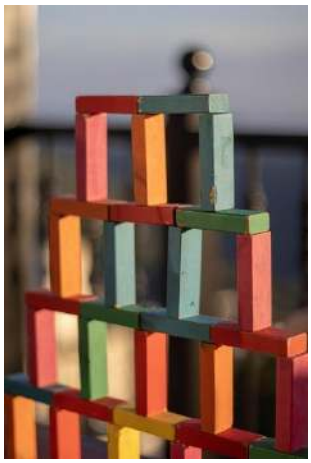
9.4: Referring Back to Make the Connection (Cohesion)

9.5: Developing Paragraphs

9.6: Quoting and Paraphrasing

9.7: Introductions

9.8: Conclusions



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9.1: Developing a Thesis Statement

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What is a thesis and why is it important?

We can think of a thesis statement as a very short version of the whole essay. If a friend asks us, "What are you trying to say in your essay?" the thesis should give the answer. It's like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. The essay itself explains, justifies, questions, and elaborates on that thesis.

As to why we need a thesis, have you ever listened to someone talk and asked yourself, "Where are they going with this? What's the point?" When we listen or when we read, we can take in multiple ideas if we know how they are related to an overall claim. Otherwise, we may be tempted to tune out.

In Chapter 2: Reading to Figure out the Argument, we practiced looking for main claims and supporting reasons as well as counterarguments and limits. When we write our own essays, we want to make clear to readers what our main claim is and how our other points fit in.

How do I come up with a good thesis?

A thesis is most commonly one sentence long and appears toward the end of the introduction. However, as our essays get longer and more complex, we may need two sentences to fully articulate the thesis. Check with your professor to see if they consider a two-sentence thesis legitimate and necessary in your case. In general, keeping the thesis short and stating it early will allow readers to easily grasp where the essay is going and how each paragraph relates. A strong thesis statement will have the following qualities:

- **Specific.** A thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and remain focused on the 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 the limited options for individuals without health care coverage.
- **Arguable.** A thesis statement needs to be something that not everyone would immediately accept right away. A point of view or judgment about a topic is arguable and worth exploring in an essay. An established fact is not arguable.
- **Supportable.** For any claim we make in our thesis, we must be able to provide reasons and examples. We can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or we can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what we assert is valid. A strong argument is backed by examples and details.

In essay assignments, teachers often provide a central question they want us to answer. That question can be our guide as we develop the thesis. The thesis can be our best answer to the question, an answer we can explain in more detail throughout the essay. If the teacher does not ask a question in the essay assignment, they may still describe a general topic. In that case, we can ask ourselves, "What do I want to say about this topic?" We will discuss coming up with a topic for more open-ended essay assignments in Section 6.*: Focused Research Topics (link).

Often as we write, we get a clearer idea of what it is we are ultimately trying to say, so we can revise the thesis as we go. Writing process strategies such as brainstorming, outlining, getting feedback, and revising will help us refine the thesis (Writing Process Chapter reference and link).

Examples of thesis statements

1. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
2. 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.
3. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.

4. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.
5. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxson in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.

How can I improve a thesis?

1. Check if it covers the ideas in the essay

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. Working thesis statements often become stronger as we gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps us strengthen our thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

2. Make it more specific

- #### Replace nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words.

  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 his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

- #### Add key information

  We can ask ourselves the following questions to anticipate what readers will want to know.

  Working thesis: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered "enough"? Why?
- How do the low salaries of teachers affect the overall functioning of a school?
- **Revised thesis:** The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers

3. Clarify an idea

What might readers be confused about after they read the thesis? What basic questions will they have about the meaning of the thesis? We can revise to make the answers clear.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

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*.

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.

Working thesis: Today's teenage girls are too sexualized.

It is true that some young women in today's society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
- What constitutes "too" sexualized?
- Are we talking about the girls' behavior or the way other people view them, or both?
- What is causing this?
- Why does it matter? What are the repercussions?

Revised thesis: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman's worth depends on her sexual attractiveness, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

Exercise 9.1.2

Read the following thesis statements. Choose three that need improvement and revise them. Explain why each revision is better.

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. There are many 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.

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9.2: Topic Sentences

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What is a topic sentence and why is it useful?

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. We are likely to lose interest in writing that is disorganized and spans many pages without breaks. Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. By exploring one idea at a time, the writer has a chance to explain and support that idea. The reader can then digest the idea before moving on to the next, related paragraph.

A **topic sentence** is a sentence that summarizes the main idea of a paragraph, just as a thesis summarizes a whole essay. As the unifying sentence for the paragraph, the topic sentence is the most general, whereas other, supporting sentences provide more specific information, such as facts, details, or examples.

Each topic sentence should clearly relate to the essay's thesis. We will talk more about how to make that connection in the next sections, 12.3: Showing How a New Idea Fits in (Transitions) and 12.4: Referring Back to Make the Connection (Cohesion).

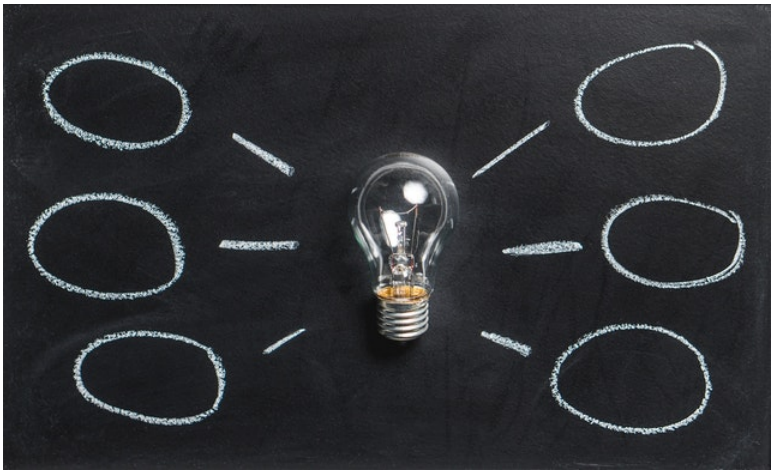


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What makes a good topic sentence?

The goal of a topic sentence is to help readers focus on and remember the main idea of the paragraph. So the trick is to write a sentence that covers all the points of the paragraph but does not cram in too many words or details. We want to give a sense of what the paragraph will contain without listing all the specifics.

Example 9.2.1

Vague topic sentence: "First, we need a better way to educate students."

Explanation: The claim is vague because it does not provide enough information about what will follow, and it is too broad to be covered effectively in one paragraph.

Revised version: "Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many states."

Explanation: The sentence replaces the vague phrase “a better way” and leads readers to expect supporting facts and examples as to why standardizing education in these subjects might improve student learning in many states.

In addition, we want to make sure that the topic sentence gets right to the point. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.

Example 9.2.2

Confusing topic sentence: "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."

Explanation: The convoluted sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary bury the main idea, making it difficult for the reader to follow the topic sentence.

Revised version: Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline.

Explanation: This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow. The writer can include examples of what kinds of writing can benefit from outlining in the supporting sentences.

Where should I put a topic sentence?

In academic writing, the *topic sentence* is usually the first sentence or second sentence of a paragraph and expresses its main idea, followed by supporting sentences that help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. In most college essays, placing an explicit topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph (the first or second sentence) makes it easier for readers to follow the essay and for writers to stay on topic.

However, ultimately what matters is whether the reader can easily pick up on the main idea of the paragraph. Sometimes, especially in narrative or creative writing, a writer may choose to build up to the topic sentence or even leave it implied. The following examples illustrate varying locations for the topic sentence. In each example, the topic sentence is underlined.

Topic Sentence Begins the Paragraph (General to Specific)

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject and then discuss specific examples. This is the common pattern for most academic essays.

> *After reading the new TV guide this week I wondered why we are still being bombarded with reality shows, a plague that 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 and hope that other viewers will express their criticism. These producers must stop the constant stream of meaningless shows without plotlines. We’ve had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!*

Here, the first sentence tells readers 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 and why the writer finds it unappealing. 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.

Topic Sentence Ends the Paragraph (Specific to General)

Sometimes, especially in persuasive writing, we might want to save the general statement for last, when we have given enough supporting details to convince the reader. If we build up to the topic sentence, then the reader might feel they are coming to the conclusion along with us. The risk is that the reader will want to know sooner where the paragraph is going.

In the paragraph below, the topic sentence comes last. Specific examples, a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures, prepare us for the general conclusion: animals' senses are better than humans'.

> *Last year, a cat traveled 130 miles to reach its family, who 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 master 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.*

Topic Sentence in the Middle of the Paragraph

Occasionally, a writer might choose to hook the reader or introduce a concept before giving the topic sentence in the middle of the paragraph. In the paragraph below, the underlined topic sentence expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to their main point by using a personal anecdote. The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The concluding sentence restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

> *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.*

Note

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.

Implied Topic Sentences

Some well-organized paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all, a technique often used in descriptive and narrative writing. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph, as in the following narrative paragraph:

> *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. All the details in the paragraph can work together to convey the dominant impression of Luella's age. In a paragraph such as this one, an explicit topic sentence such as "Luella was very old" would seem awkward and heavy-handed. 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. One risk is that an implied topic sentence may be too subtle for the reader to catch.

Exercise 9.2.1

In each of the following sentence pairs, **choose the more effective topic sentence** and explain what makes it better.

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 union workers are crippling the economy for three main reasons.
   b. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure.
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. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.
   b. This essay will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry.

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9.3: Showing How a New Idea Fits in (Transitions)

Media Alternative

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As we develop our own arguments in longer papers in college, we get more choices about what to put in and in what order. Adding length and complexity poses a risk. How do we make sure readers don't lose the thread of what we're saying? How do we start a new paragraph so that readers will know why it comes next and how it fits into the overall argument? For that matter, how do we move from sentence to sentence so that the reader sees the connection between one supporting idea and the next?

A caution about transition words

Some writing teachers focus on encouraging students to use transition words like “however,” and “therefore.” As we have seen in the templates above, such words can definitely help show a connection. They are only useful, though, if they really reflect the relationship between the previous idea and the next. As writers, we may be tempted to rely too much on a transition word without thinking through the connection fully. The final test is whether the reader understands the connection between new and old ideas.

Some transition words do not tell us anything about how the previous idea relates to the next one. Be wary of “in addition,” “moreover,” “also,” etc. , They tell us that a new idea is coming, but not much else. We can use them if we also highlight the connection to the previous idea through a repeated key concept. Similarly, the phrases “in conclusion” and “to conclude” don’t help the reader see how the previous paragraphs have been building up to the final point. We can still use them if we make sure that the rest of the words show how your final thoughts grow out of the paragraphs that come before (see the section on conclusions for more on how to do that).

The benefits of clarifying the connections

Providing a clear sense of the connection between one idea and the next can be one of the most challenging parts of the writing process. Don’t worry if it doesn’t come naturally; for most people it requires mental sweat and revision. Even if we have already done an outline, there will be more to figure out as we face the start of a new paragraph. Ultimately, though, hitting upon the right way to link our ideas can be one of the most satisfying moments in the writing process. Everything falls into place. When we do manage to clarify that connection, we can relax and readers can relax as they follow the argument’s flow from one point to the next.

What role does the next idea play in the argument?

If we map out an argument, as we did in Chapter 2 of this book, arrows show when a reason supports a claim. Labels like “counterargument” or “limit” show how one idea modifies or responds to another. When we write our own arguments, though, we need words to stand in for these visual cues. Phrases can signal to readers how a new paragraph or sentence fits into the overall structure. In Chapters 2 and 3 when we talked about reading and summarizing, we looked for typical phrases that signal a reason, a counterargument, a limit, or a rebuttal. Now we can use many of these same phrases to guide our readers through our own arguments.

Paradoxically, the first step toward writing a good transition sentence can be to remind ourselves of the point we have just made. If we can formulate that point in a simple phrase, we can focus better on the nature of the connection. How does the new idea relate to that previous claim? Below are some possible ways it might connect along with accompanying phrases.

A reason for the previous claim

- _____ because _____.
- _____ is a result of _____.

- The reason for _____ lies in _____.
- _____ causes this _____.
- _____ happens because _____.
- We see the cause of _____ in _____.
- Why does _____ happen? One factor seems to be _____.
- _____ occurs as a consequence of _____.
- _____ explains this _____.
- _____ causes _____.
- _____ stems from _____.
- One possible explanation of _____ is that _____.

A result of the previous claim

- _____ leads to _____.
- On the basis of _____, we can conclude that _____.
- As a result of _____, it follows that_____.
- As we have seen, _____. For this reason, _____.
- As_____, _____.
- _____ gives rise to _____.
- _____, hence _____.
- _____, thus _____.
- _____; therefore, _____,
- _____, so _____.
- _____; consequently, _____.
- _____, thereby _____.
- _____ can cause _____.
- _____ may result in _____.
- As a consequence of _____, we often see _____.
- Owing to _____, _____.

An elaboration on the previous claim

- To understand _____, we can compare it to _____.
- By _____, we mean not just _____, but also _____.
- Let's look at what _____ means in greater detail.
- What does _____ mean more specifically? It implies that _____.
- _____ involves _____.
- We should pause to define what we mean by _____ in this context.

An example of the previous claim

- To illustrate_____, we can take the example of _____.
- One instance of _____ is _____.
- Let us take the case of _____, for example.
- _____ serves as a good example.
- A classic example of _____ is _____.

A limitation on the previous claim

- However, _____ is not the case if_____.
- We should clarify that _____ only applies if_____.
- Of course, _____ does not apply if_____.
- We can exclude cases where_____.
- An exception must be made for_____.
- We should note that _____ holds only if _____.

- The only exception to _____ is _____.

A counterargument to the previous claim

If we think the counterargument is completely wrong

- It is a popular misconception that_____.
- Some have fallen for the idea that_____.
- Many people mistakenly believe that_____.

If we want to describe the counterargument without giving our opinion yet

- Many people think _____.
- Some, on the other hand, will argue that _____.
- Some might disagree, claiming that _____.
- Of course, many have claimed that _____.
- Some will take issue with _____, arguing that _____.
- Some will object that _____.
- Some will dispute the idea that _____, claiming that _____.
- One criticism of this way of thinking is that _____.

If we see some merit in the counterargument

- It is true that _____.
- I do concede_____.
- We should grant that_____.
- We must admit that_____.
- I acknowledge that _____.
- X has a point that _____.
- Admittedly, _____.
- Of course, _____.
- To be sure, _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____.

A rebuttal to a counterargument described previously

If we completely disagreed with the counterargument

- This idea misses the fact that _____.
- I disagree because _____.
- This depends on the assumption that _____, which is incorrect because _____.
- This argument overlooks _____.
- This argument contradicts itself _____.
- This is mistaken because _____.

If we partly agreed with the counterargument

- It is true that _____, but_____.
- I do concede_____, and yet_____.
- We should grant that_____, but we must still acknowledge that _____.
- We can admit that_____ and still believe that _____..
- I acknowledge that _____, and yet we should nevertheless recognize that _____.
- Critics have a point that _____; however it is more important that we focus on _____.
- Admittedly, _____. However, _____.
- Of course, _____, but I still insist that_____..
- To be sure, _____; but _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____, and yet _____.

Practice Exercise 9.3.1

Choose one of the sample annotated essays contained in this textbook.

1. Label the paragraphs according to the categories in this section: reason, result, elaboration, example, limitation, counterargument, and rebuttal.
2. Highlight the phrases that signal the paragraph's role in the larger argument. You may see phrases listed as templates in this section, but you may see other phrases as well.

Practice Exercise 9.3.2

Choose an essay you wrote previously and review the topic sentences. Are there any places where you could make it clearer what role the paragraph plays in the overall argument, perhaps using a phrase listed above?

1. Label the paragraphs according to the categories in this section: reason, result, elaboration, example, limitation, counterargument, and rebuttal.
2. Revise the topic sentences to make it clearer what role the paragraph plays. Consider using one of the template phrases listed in this section.

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9.4: Referring Back to Make the Connection (Cohesion)

Media Alternative

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In the popular handbook *They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein suggest that as readers move from one idea to the next, they need to know not just what is new, but how it connects to what came before. Graff and Birkenstein visualize this as two hands, one pointing back in the text and one pointing forward. We remind the reader of the old and put it into relationship with the new. But how do we reference ideas we've already covered without repeating ad nauseum?



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Repetition

Repetition sounds like something boring we are supposed to avoid, and it can be. However, some repetition is actually essential to cohesion. **Repeating a short key phrase** can link two sentences or paragraphs by showing what topic they have in common. If we find we are using a particular phrase too much, we can vary the wording without changing the concept. As an example, imagine we want to prove the following thesis:

> *Economic inequality in America will only increase unless the government takes the excess possessions of the ultra-rich.*

We can be pretty sure we'll need to repeat the key phrase "economic inequality" in ensuing paragraphs or substitute variations like "inequality," "economic stratification" or "the disparity between rich and poor," to remind readers of our central idea. That will allow us to suggest the causes of inequality, define the extent of inequality, and make predictions about future inequality without seeming like we are jumping from one random point to another.

If we think the reader may not remember what we are referring to, or if its complexity makes it worth summing up, we might need to **briefly restate an idea**. We can paraphrase and condense a point made in a previous paragraph into just a few words. Often looking at a previous topic sentence can help us focus on the key idea and describe the heart of it.

Pointing words

In order to remind the reader that we have already discussed an idea, we can use what Graff and Birkenstein call **pointing words** like "this" or "that." These combine with the repeated phrase or concept to work like an arrow pointing back to a section of a previous paragraph. For example, we might use the phrase "this growing inequity" or "that very economic inequality." The words "this" and "that" reassure readers they can go back and look up the earlier idea if needed.

Abstract nouns

To make the reference to the prior idea clear, we can couple "this" or “that" with an **abstract noun,** or a word that represents the kind of idea we are talking about. You may also see these referred to as anaphoric nouns or shell nouns.

Below are a few common abstract nouns that can refer back to an established idea. There are many others. As you'll notice, the first few refer to elements of an argument.

- reason / evidence
- claim
- fact
- argument
- findings / conclusion
- purpose
- cause / factor
- effect / result / consequence
- idea / concept
- subject / issue / topic
- phenomenon
- problem / challenge / difficulty
- solution
- feature / characteristic / aspect
- method / technique / strategy / approach / way / manner
- tendency / trend / pattern

Examples of these connection techniques

Here is an example template that combines repetition, a pointing word, "this," and an abstract noun, "idea":

As we have seen, _____. This **idea** has implications for _____.

Let's look at a more extended example. Say that we want to write about inequality in the early 21st century. The topic stays the same, and the time period changes. First we give some history about the late 1800s. Then we describe how inequality changed over time, and we want to start a paragraph about the Occupy Wall Street movement that started in 2011. What is the connection between an old idea and a new idea? We might decide that Occupy Wall Street was a direct result of inequality and start the paragraph thus:

> *The increased inequality that became obvious after the 2007 financial crisis eventually* ***led*** *to a backlash. In September 2011, the Occupy Wall Street protest trumpeted the cause of the “99%” of Americans who were left out while the top 1% enjoyed most of the profits of American capitalism.*

The new paragraph thus points back to the cause and ahead to the effect, signaling this causal relationship with the word “led.” Note that the phrase “increased inequality” refers to a core topic of the overall argument, and the phrase “that became obvious after the 2007 financial crisis” reminds us of the concept developed in the previous paragraph.

Practice Exercise 9.4.1

Choose one of the sample annotated essays contained in this textbook. Go through it and circle any repetition, pointing words, or abstract nouns that refer back to an idea. Draw an arrow from each referring word back to the earlier part of the essay it refers to. How do these words help make the essay more cohesive and easier to follow for you as a reader? Discuss with classmates or write a few sentences of reflection.

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9.5: Developing Paragraphs

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Supporting sentences

By itself, a topic sentence will not usually fully clarify an idea or convince readers. Supporting sentences can explain, prove, or enhance the idea in the topic sentence. For example, in a persuasive essay about raising the wage for certified nursing assistants, a paragraph might focus on the expectations and duties of the job, comparing them to that of a registered nurse. Needless to say, a single topic sentence that lists the certified nursing assistant's duties will not give readers a complete enough idea of what these healthcare professionals do. If readers do not have plenty of information about the duties and the writer's experience in performing them for what she considers inadequate pay, the paragraph fails to do its part in convincing readers that the pay is inadequate and should be increased.



A paragraph, like a column, needs support in the middle. Image by Monika Grafik from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

In informative or persuasive writing, a supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

- **Fact**: Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.
- **Statistic**: Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.
- **Quotation**: "We will not allow this situation to continue," stated Senator Johns.
- **Anecdote or example**: Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position, you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Personal testimony in the form of an extended example can be used in conjunction with the other types of support. Let's look at a sample paragraph as a list of all the elements we've just discussed, plus a concluding sentence, which we'll discuss below.

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Sentence 1 (statistic): First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle.

Sentence 2 (fact): Second, they produce very few emissions during low-speed city driving.

Sentence 3 (reason): Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump.

Sentence 4 (example): Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance.

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.

Concluding Sentences

Paragraphs do not necessarily need concluding sentences. However, a concluding sentence can help if you think your readers need a reminder of what the main point was or what we have learned from the paragraph. If the material in the paragraph taken together seems to logically imply an idea, we can name that idea in the concluding sentence. This might take the form of a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph. For example, a paragraph on childhood obesity might conclude, "These statistics indicate that unless we take action, childhood obesity rates will continue to rise."



Sometimes it seems as if all sentences in a paragraph point toward the concluding sentence.
Image by Ryan McGuire from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

If we repeat the main point, we should express it in different words to avoid sounding too repetitive. For example, let's compare the topic sentence and concluding sentence from the first example on hybrid cars:

Topic Sentence: There are many advantages to owning a hybrid car.

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.

Notice the use of the synonyms *advantages* and *benefits*. The concluding sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

> **Note**
>
> Writers should avoid introducing any new ideas into a concluding sentence because a conclusion is intended to provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not covered in the paragraph will confuse readers.

Paragraph Length

Writers often want to know how many words a paragraph should contain. There is no set number; a paragraph needs to develop an idea enough to satisfy the writer and readers. Paragraphs can vary in length from one or two sentences, to over a page; however, in most college assignments, successfully developed paragraphs usually contain one hundred to two hundred and fifty words and span one-fourth to two-thirds of a typed page.



Paragraphs, like pencils, can be of varying lengths.
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If a paragraph is over a page long, consider providing a paragraph break for readers. Look for a logical place to divide the paragraph; then revise the opening sentence of the second paragraph to maintain coherence.

Occasionally a short paragraph may serve to emphasize an idea, but a series of short paragraphs can be confusing and choppy. Examine the content of the paragraphs and combine ones with related ideas or develop each one further.

Exercise 9.5.1

Consider the paragraph below on the topic of trauma in novelist J. D. Salinger's work. Identify the topic sentence and supporting points. Some of the supporting points may be more than one sentence each. Explain how each illustrates the topic sentence.

> *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 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 Esme – 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.*

Answer

Topic sentence: Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works.

Supporting points:

1. A quote to illustrate posttraumatic stress disorder: "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.'"
2. An example of a work with a theme of postraumatic stress disorder from war: "His short story 'A Perfect Day for 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."
3. Another example of a work with a theme of postraumatic stress disorder from war: "Another short Story, 'For Esme – 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."

4. A third example of a work with a theme of posttraumatic stress disorder: "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 9.5.2

Identify the topic sentence(s), 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.*

Answer

- **Topic sentences:** 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.
- **Supporting sentences:** 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.
- **Concluding sentence**: Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Exercise 9.5.3

Read the following incomplete paragraph and then read the supporting sentences below it. Which sentence best fits in which location to illustrate the points made in the paragraph? Match the sentences lettered a, b, c, and d to the locations numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4.

> *Lack of ownership of a television set is a way to preserve innocence, and keep the exposure towards anything inappropriate at bay. From simply watching a movie, I have seen things I shouldn't have, no matter how fast I switch the channel.* ***1. 2.*** *Television shows not only display physical indecency, but also verbal. Many times movies do voice-overs of profane words, but they also leave a few words uncensored.* ***3. 4.*** *All ages can flip through and see or hear such things. They make t.v. toxic for the mind, and without it I wouldn't have to worry about what I may accidentally see or hear.*

a. On *Empire*, one of the most viewed dramas today, the main characters Cookie and Lucious Lyon use profane words during their fights throughout entire episodes.
b. The movie Fast and Furious has the same problem since the women are all half-naked in half tops and mini-skirts or short-shorts.
c. The synopsis of Euro Trip, which describes high school friends traveling across Europe, leads viewers to think that the film is an innocent adventure; however; it is filled with indecency, especially when the students reach Amsterdam.

d. Because *The Big Bang Theory* is a show about a group of science geeks and their cute neighbors, viewers might think that these science geniuses' conversations would be about their current research or other science topics. Instead, their characters regularly engage in conversations about their personal lives that should be kept private.

Answer

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. d

Revised paragraph with supporting sentences:

Not owning a television set would also be a way to preserve innocence and keep my exposure to anything inappropriate at bay. While searching for a program to view, I have seen things I shouldn't have, no matter how fast I switched the channel. The synopsis of Euro Trip, which describes high school friends traveling across Europe, leads viewers to think that the film is an innocent adventure; however; it is filled with indecency, especially when the students reach Amsterdam. The movie *Fast and Furious* has the same problem since the women are all half-naked in half tops and mini-skirts or short-shorts. Television shows not only display physical indecency, but also verbal. Many television shows have no filters, and the characters say profane words freely. On Empire, one of the most viewed dramas today, the main characters Cookie and Lucious Lyon use profane words during their fights throughout entire episodes. Because *The Big Bang Theory* is a show about a group of science geeks and their cute neighbors, viewers might think that these science geniuses' conversations would be about their current research or other science topics. Instead, their characters regularly engage in conversations about their personal lives that should be kept private. The ease of flipping through channels and seeing or hearing such things makes t.v. toxic for the mind, and without a television I wouldn't have to worry about what I may accidentally see or hear.

Explanation: *The original paragraph identifies two categories of indecent material, and there is mention of profanity to provide a clue as to what the student thinks is indecent. However, the paragraph could use some examples to make the idea of inappropriate material clearer. The examples help to convey why the writer thinks they would be better off without a television.*

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9.6: Quoting and Paraphrasing

Media Alternative

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We have seen that paragraphs need supporting sentences, but how specifically can we bring in quotations and paraphrases of other sources into our own essay?

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.[1] 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"[2]. If you included that quote without explaining how it fits into Lee and Staff's actual argument, you would be misrepresenting that source.

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, 2011, p.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, 2011, 24). Drawing on findings in cognitive science, he explains "…"

As the first 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.

Quoted material that does not fit into the flow of the text baffles the reader even more. 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, 2007, p. 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" (2007, p. 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.

Use sources efficiently

Some student writers are in a rut of only quoting whole sentences. Some others, like myself as a student, get overly enamored of extended block quotes and the scholarly look they give to the page.[7] 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 incandescent 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. 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:*

> *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.[4] 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.[5] System 1, Kahneman explains, "does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable."* [6] *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." [7] 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 is 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 (like those listed at the end of this chapter) 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.

Choose precise signal phrases

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:

- 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.

[1]Jennifer C. Lee, J.C. and Jeremy Staff, "When Work Matters: The Varying Impact of Work Intensity on High School Drop Out," *Sociology of Education* 80, no. 2 (2007): 158-178.

[2]Ibid., 159.

[3] It took me a long time to stop abusing block quotes. They made me feel like my paper was an unassailable fortress of citation! With the friendly but pointed feedback of my professors, I gradually came to see how they took too much space away from my own argument.

[4]Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow, 416-7.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid, 416.

[8]Ibid, 417.

[9]Robert B. Marks, The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-first Century (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 95.

Practice Exercise 9.6.1

Review one of your own essays to examine areas where you have paraphrased or quoted an outside source. Circle any verbs of attribution, and decide if an alternative would help the reader see the author's purpose or approach more precisely.

Practice Exercise 9.6.2

Read the sample paragraph below from a student paper. Working alone or with a classmate, revise the paragraph to remove the clunky and unnecessary block quote. Use the main idea in the topic sentence to make a deliberate, thoughtful decision as to which chunks of quote to use.

> Visiting a doctor is often the first step to diagnosing a serious illness, but some people delay seeing a physician because of rising healthcare costs. In the article "Does forgetting a name or word mean that I have dementia?" by Laurie Archbald-Pannone, it states,
>
> > *First, it is important to know that dementia cannot be diagnosed from afar or by someone who is not a doctor. A person needs a detailed doctor's exam for a diagnosis. Sometimes, brain imaging is required. And, forgetting an occasional word – or even where you put your keys – does not mean a person has dementia. There are different types of memory loss and they can have different causes, such as other medical conditions, falls or even medication, including herbals, supplements and anything over-the-counter.*

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9.7: Introductions

Media Alternative

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"In today's world …"

Those opening words—so common in student papers—represent the most prevalent misconception about introductions: that they shouldn't really say anything substantive. The five-paragraph format that most students mastered before coming to college suggests that introductory paragraphs should start very general and gradually narrow down to the thesis. As a result, students frequently write introductions for college papers in which the first two or three (or more) sentences are patently obvious or overly broad. Charitable and well-rested instructors just skim over that text and start reading closely when they arrive at something substantive. Frustrated and overtired instructors emit a dramatic self-pitying sigh, assuming that the whole paper will be as lifeless and gassy as those first few sentences. If you've gotten into the habit of beginning opening sentences with the following phrases, firmly resolve to strike them from your repertoire right now:

- In today's world …
- Throughout human history …
- Since the dawn of time …
- Webster's Dictionary defines [CONCEPT] as …

For one thing, sentences that begin with the first three stems are often wrong. For example, someone may write, "Since the dawn of time, people have tried to increase crop yields." In reality, people have not been trying to increase crop yields throughout human history—agriculture is only about 23,000 years old, after all—and certainly not since the dawn of time (whenever that was). For another, sentences that start so broadly, even when factually correct, could not possibly end with anything interesting.

Sometimes we know that more precise and vivid intros and conclusions are ideal but still settle on the vague language that seems familiar, safe, and do-able. Knowing the general form of academic writing (simplified in the five-paragraph theme) helps writers organize their thoughts; however, it leads some student writers to approach papers as mere fill-in-the-blank exercises.

I hope you will instead envision paper-writing as a task of working through an unscripted and nuanced thought process and then sharing your work with readers. When you're engaged with the writing process, you'll find yourself deciding which substantive points belong in those introductory and concluding paragraphs rather than simply filling those paragraphs out with fluff. They should be sort of hard to write; they're the parts of the paper that express your most important ideas in the most precise ways. If you're struggling with intros and conclusions, it might be because you're approaching them in exactly the right way. Having a clear, communicative purpose will help you figure out what your reader needs to know to really understand your thinking.

So what should you do? Well, start at the beginning. By that I mean, start explaining what the reader needs to know to comprehend your thesis and its importance. For example, compare the following two paragraphs.

Five-paragraph theme version of a paragraph:

> *Throughout time, human societies have had religion. Major world religions since the dawn of civilization include Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Animism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These and all other religions provide a set of moral principles, a leadership structure, and an explanation for unknown questions such as what happens after people die. Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason. However, the notion of embodied cognition is a*

> *place where physical phenomena connect with religious ones. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an embodied cognition that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions, in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state towards spiritual transcendence.*

Organically structured version of the same paragraph:

> *Religion is an endeavor to cultivate freedom from bodily constraints to reach a higher state of being beyond the physical constraints of reality. But how is it possible to employ a system, the human body, to transcend its own limitations? Religion and science have always had an uneasy relationship as empiricism is stretched to explain religious phenomena, but psychology has recently added a new perspective to the discussion. Embodiment describes the interaction between humans and the environment that lays a foundation for cognition and can help explain the mechanisms that underlie religion's influence on believers. This is a rare moment where science and religion are able to coexist without the familiar controversy. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an embodied cognition that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions, in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state towards spiritual transcendence.*

In the first version, the first three sentences state well-known facts that do not directly relate to the thesis. The fourth sentence is where the action starts, though that sentence ("Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason") is still overstated: when was this dawn of religion? And was there "science," as we now understand it, at that time? The reader has to slog through to the fifth sentence before the intro starts to develop some momentum.

Training in the five-paragraph theme format seems to have convinced some student writers that beginning with substantive material will be too abrupt for the reader. But the second example shows that a meatier beginning isn't jarring; it is actually much more engaging. The first sentence of the organic example is somewhat general, but it specifies the particular aspect of religion (transcending physical experience) that is germane to the thesis. The next six sentences lay out the ideas and concepts that explain the thesis, which is provided in the last two sentences. Overall, every sentence is needed to thoroughly frame the thesis. It is a lively paragraph in itself, and it piques the reader's interest in the author's original thinking about religion.

Sometimes a vague introductory paragraph reflects a simple, obvious thesis and a poorly thought-out paper. More often, though, a shallow introduction represents a missed opportunity to convey the writer's depth of thought from the get-go. Students adhering to the five-paragraph theme format sometime assume that such vagueness is needed to bookend an otherwise pithy paper. As you can see from these examples, that is simply untrue. I've seen some student writers begin with a vague, high-school style intro (thinking it obligatory) and then write a wonderfully vivid and engaging introduction as their second paragraph. Other papers I've seen have an interesting, original thesis embedded in late body paragraphs that should be articulated up front and used to shape the whole body. If you must write a vague "since the dawn of time" intro to get the writing process going, then go ahead. Just budget the time to rewrite the intro around your well developed, arguable thesis and ensure that the body paragraphs are organized explicitly by your analytical thread.

Here are two more examples of excellent introductory paragraphs written by undergraduate students in different fields. Note how, in both cases, (1) the first sentence has real substance, (2) every sentence is indispensable to setting up the thesis, and (3) the thesis is complex and somewhat surprising. Both of these introductory paragraphs set an ambitious agenda for the paper. As a reader, it's pretty easy to imagine how the body paragraphs that follow will progress through the nuanced analysis needed to carry out the thesis.

From Davis O'Connell's "Abelard":

> *He rebelled against his teacher, formed his own rival school, engaged in a passionate affair with a teenager, was castrated, and became a monk. All in a day's work. Perhaps it's no surprise that Peter Abelard gained the title of "heretic" along the way. A 12th-century philosopher and theologian, Abelard tended to alienate nearly everyone he met with his extremely arrogant and egotistical personality. This very flaw is what led him to start preaching to students that he had stolen from his former master, which further deteriorated his reputation. Yet despite all of the senseless things that he did, his teachings did not differ much from Christian doctrine. Although the church claimed to have branded Abelard a heretic purely because of his religious views, the other underlying reasons for these accusations involve his conceited personality, his relationship with the 14-year-old Heloise, and the political forces of the 12th century.*

From Logan Skelly's "Staphylococcus aureus"[3]:

> *Bacterial resistance to antibiotics is causing a crisis in modern healthcare. The evolution of multi-drug resistant Staphylococcus aureus is of particular concern because of the morbidity and mortality it causes, the limited treatment options it poses, and the difficulty in implementing containment measures for its control. In order to appreciate the virulence of S. aureus and to help alleviate the problems its resistance is causing, it is important to study the evolution of antibiotic resistance in this pathogen, the mechanisms of its resistance, and the factors that may limit or counteract its evolution. It is especially important to examine how human actions are causing evolutionary changes in this bacterial species. This review will examine the historical sequence of causation that has led to antibiotic resistance in this microorganism and why natural selection favors the resistant trait. It is the goal of this review to illuminate the scope of the problem produced by antibiotic resistance in S. aureus and to illustrate the need for judicious antibiotic usage to prevent this pathogen from evolving further pathogenicity and virulence.*

If vague introductory paragraphs are bad, why were you taught them? In essence, you were taught the form so that you could later use it to deepen your thinking. By producing the five-paragraph theme over and over, it has probably become second nature for you to find a clear thesis and shape the intro paragraph around it, tasks you absolutely must accomplish in academic writing. However, you've probably been taught to proceed from "general" to "specific" in your intro and encouraged to think of "general" as "vague". At the college level, think of "general" as context: begin by explaining the conceptual, historical, or factual context that the reader needs in order to grasp the significance of the argument to come. It's not so much a structure of general-to-specific; instead, it's context-to-argument.

[1] This example is slightly adapted from a student-authored essay: Victor Seet, "Embodiment in Religion," Discoveries, 11 (2012). Discoveries is an annual publication of the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines of Cornell University which publishes excellent papers written by Cornell undergraduates.

[2] Davis O'Connell, "Abelard: A Heretic of a Different Nature," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 36-41.

[3] Logan Skelly, "Staphylococcus aureus: The Evolution of a Persistent Pathogen," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 89-102.

Exercise 9.7.1

Browse online articles on *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Medium.com, *The Atlantic*, *Time*, or other reputable websites, journals, or newspapers. Find an article where the introduction really engages you. Read the whole article, post a link to it, and reflect in your discussion post on why you found it so compelling. Did it meet the following three criteria described in this section?

If it did meet those criteria, how was the thesis surprising?

1. The first sentence has real substance,
2. Every sentence is indispensable to setting up the thesis, and
3. The thesis is complex and somewhat surprising.

Exercise 9.7.2

Choose one of the essays from Section 12.1: Suggested Short Readings. Read the whole essay and reflect in your discussion post on the introduction. Did it meet the following three criteria described in this section? If so, how was the thesis surprising?

Do you have any ideas for how it could be improved?

1. The first sentence has real substance,
2. every sentence is indispensable to setting up the thesis, and
3. the thesis is complex and somewhat surprising.

Exercise 9.7.3

Choose an essay you have written in this or another class and rewrite the introduction to improve it according to the principles in this section. Write an additional paragraph of reflection on how the new introduction would make a stronger impression on readers and better serve your purpose in the essay.

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9.8: Conclusions

Media Alternative

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Strong conclusions do two things: they bring the argument to a satisfying close and they explain some of the most important implications. You've probably been taught to re-state your thesis using different words, and it is true that your reader will likely appreciate a brief summary of your overall argument: say, two or three sentences for papers less than 20 pages. It's perfectly fine to use what they call "metadiscourse" in this summary; metadiscourse is text like, "I have argued that …" or "This analysis reveals that … ." Go ahead and use language like that if it seems useful to signal that you're restating the main points of your argument. In shorter papers you can usually simply reiterate the main point without that metadiscourse: for example, "What began as a protest about pollution turned into a movement for civil rights." If that's the crux of the argument, your reader will recognize a summary like that. Most of the student papers I see close the argument effectively in the concluding paragraph.

The second task of a conclusion—situating the argument within broader implications—is a lot trickier. A lot of instructors describe it as the "So what?" challenge. You've proven your point about the role of agriculture in deepening the Great Depression; so what? I don't like the "so what" phrasing because putting writers on the defensive seems more likely to inhibit the flow of ideas than to draw them out. Instead, I suggest you imagine a friendly reader thinking, "OK, you've convinced me of your argument. I'm interested to know what you make of this conclusion. What is or should be different now that your thesis is proven?" In that sense, your reader is asking you to take your analysis one step further. That's why a good conclusion is challenging to write. You're not just coasting over the finish line.

So, how do you do that? A thesis can situate an arguable claim within broader implications. If you've already articulated a thesis statement that does that, then you've already mapped the terrain of the conclusion. Your task then is to explain the implications you mentioned: if environmental justice really is the new civil rights movement, then how should scholars and/or activists approach it? If agricultural trends really did worsen the Great Depression, what does that mean for agricultural policy today? If your thesis, as written, is a two-story one, then you may want to revisit it after you've developed a conclusion you're satisfied with and consider including the key implication in that thesis statement. Doing so will give your paper even more momentum.

Let's look at the concluding counterparts to the excellent introductions that we've read to illustrate some of the different ways writers can accomplish the two goals of a conclusion:

Victor Seet on religious embodiment:[1]

> *Embodiment is fundamental to bridging reality and spirituality. The concept demonstrates how religious practice synthesizes human experience in reality—mind, body, and environment—to embed a cohesive religious experience that can recreate itself. Although religion is ostensibly focused on an intangible spiritual world, its traditions that eventually achieve spiritual advancement are grounded in reality. The texts, symbols, and rituals integral to religious practice go beyond merely distinguishing one faith from another; they serve to fully absorb individuals in a culture that sustains common experiential knowledge shared by millions. It is important to remember that human senses do not merely act as sponges absorbing external information; our mental models of the world are being constantly refined with new experiences. This fluid process allows individuals to gradually accumulate a wealth of religious multimodal information, making*

> *the mental representation hyper-sensitive, which in turn contributes to religious experiences. However, there is an important caveat. Many features of religious visions that are attributed to embodiment can also be explained through less complex cognitive mechanisms. The repetition from religious traditions exercised both physically and mentally, naturally inculcates a greater religious awareness simply through familiarity. Religious experiences are therefore not necessarily caused by embedded cues within the environment but arise from an imbued fluency with religious themes. Embodiment proposes a connection between body, mind, and the environment that attempts to explain how spiritual transcendence is achieved through physical reality. Although embodied cognition assuages the conflict between science and religion, it remains to be seen if this intricate scientific theory is able to endure throughout millennia just as religious beliefs have.*

The paragraph first re-caps the argument, then explains how embodiment relates to other aspects of religious experience, and finally situates the analysis within the broader relationship between religion and science.

From Davis O'Connell:[2]

> *Looking at Abelard through the modern historical lens, it appears to many historians that he did not fit the 12th-century definition of a heretic in the sense that his teachings did not differ much from that of the church. Mews observes that Abelard's conception of the Trinity was a continuation of what earlier Christian leaders had already begun to ponder. He writes: "In identifying the Son and Holy Spirit with the wisdom and benignity of God, Abelard was simply extending an idea (based on Augustine) that had previously been raised by William of Champeaux." St. Augustine was seen as one of the main Christian authorities during the Middle Ages and for Abelard to derive his teachings from that source enhances his credibility. This would indicate that although Abelard was not necessarily a heretic by the church's official definition, he was branded as one through all of the nontheological social and political connotations that "heresy" had come to encompass.*

O'Connell, interestingly, chooses a scholarly tone for the conclusion, in contrast to the more jocular tone we saw in the introduction. He doesn't specifically re-cap the argument about Abelard's deviance from social norms and political pressures, but rather he explains his summative point about what it means to be a heretic. In this case, the implications of the argument are all about Abelard. There aren't any grand statements about religion and society, the craft of historiography, or the politics of language. Still, the reader is not left hanging. One doesn't need to make far-reaching statements to successfully conclude a paper.

From Logan Skelly:[3]

> *Considering the hundreds of millions of years that S. aureus has been evolving and adapting to hostile environments, it is likely that the past seventy years of human antibiotic usage represents little more than a minor nuisance to these bacteria. Antibiotic resistance for humans, however, contributes to worldwide health, economic, and environmental problems. Multi-drug resistant S. aureus has proven itself to be a versatile and persistent pathogen that will likely continue to evolve as long as selective pressures, such as antibiotics, are introduced into the environment. While the problems associated with S. aureus have received ample attention in the scientific literature, there has been*

> *little resolution of the problems this pathogen poses. If these problems are to be resolved, it is essential that infection control measures and effective treatment strategies be developed, adopted, and implemented in the future on a worldwide scale—so that the evolution of this pathogen's virulence can be curtailed and its pathogenicity can be controlled.*

Skelly's thesis is about the need to regulate antibiotic usage to mitigate antibiotic resistance. The concluding paragraph characterizes the pathogens evolutionary history (without re-capping the specifics) and then calls for an informed, well planned, and comprehensive response.

All three conclusions above achieve both tasks—closing the argument and addressing the implications—but the authors have placed a different emphasis on the two tasks and framed the broader implications in different ways. Writing, like any craft, challenges the creator to make these kinds of independent choices. There isn't a standard recipe for a good conclusion.

[1] This example is slightly adapted from a student-authored essay: Victor Seet, "Embodiment in Religion," Discoveries, 11 (2012). Discoveries is an annual publication of the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines of Cornell University which publishes excellent papers written by Cornell undergraduates.

[2] Davis O'Connell, "Abelard: A Heretic of a Different Nature," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 36-41.

[3] Logan Skelly, "Staphylococcus aureus: The Evolution of a Persistent Pathogen," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 89-102.

Practice exercise

1. Choose one of the suggested short essays presented in this book. Read the whole essay and reflect in your discussion post on the conclusion:
   a) Which words did it use to repeat the thesis and other main ideas? Did it contain too much or too little summary of these for your taste?
   b) How did it answer the "So what?" question and described some meaningful implications of the essay's main ideas? Do you think it could have added or clarified anything to increase its impact on the reader?

2. Choose an essay you have written in this or another class and rewrite the conclusion to improve it according to the principles in this section. Write an additional paragraph of reflection on how the new conclusion would make a stronger impression on readers and better serve your purpose in the essay.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Assessing the Strength of an Argument (Logos)

Learning Outcomes

- Check arguments for common problems such as exceptions, faulty evidence, invalid assumptions, and inadequate treatment of counterarguments.
- Identify insights in an argument that can contribute to future discussions on the topic.
- Write a complete assessment of an argument's strengths and weaknesses with a thesis that points to the most crucial ones.
- Use precise and varied phrases to highlight the argument's flaws and insights.

10.1: Use a Summary to Launch an Opinion

10.2: Check If the Meaning Is Clear

10.3: Look for Exceptions

10.4: Decide How Strong the Evidence Is

10.5: Check the Argument's Assumptions

10.6: Check How Well the Argument Addresses Counterarguments

10.7: Reflect on an Argument's Strengths

10.8: Come up with an Overall Assessment

10.9: Fallacies List

10.10: Common Assessment Phrases

10.11: Sample Assessment Essays

10.11.1: Sample Assessment- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

10.11.2: Sample Assessment- "Typography and Identity"



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10.1: Use a Summary to Launch an Opinion

Media Alternative

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In Chapters 2 and 3, we have analyzed and summarized arguments but restrained ourselves from offering our own opinions. When reading through an argument, we naturally ask ourselves whether we agree or disagree as we go. We may be writing exclamation marks or expressions of outrage in the margins, or we may be feeling uneasy because we are not sure yet what we think. Either way, we are probably impatient to find our own voice. When do we get to weigh in? Once our readers understand the original text and trust that we understand it, they are in our hands, ready to listen to our assessment. Our critique will be clearer since we have spent time thinking about the foundations of the argument and the author's purpose and meaning. The work we have done puts us in the best position to add something of our own to the conversation.

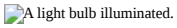


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Most college essay assignments do ask us to critically evaluate arguments, not just summarize them. To give a taste of what these kinds of assignments look like and how common they are, let's turn to courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a highly regarded university specializing in engineering, science, mathematics, and technology. We might not expect MIT to emphasize writing skills, but the assignments in its publicly available "Open Courseware" frequently ask students to critically evaluate arguments. Here are four examples:

1. A prompt from the MIT course "American History Since 1865," taught by professor Caley Horan, reads as follows:

> The historian Eric Foner argues that Reconstruction should be understood as an "unfinished revolution." In what ways, if any, were the American Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed revolutionary, and for whom? What was left "unfinished" by Reconstruction? Essays should present an original argument that responds to the above prompt. This argument should be unique (of your own making) and should reflect careful and serious engagement with course materials.

2. In the economics course "The Challenge of World Poverty" at MIT, students are asked to write an essay on the following topic:

> Despite being quite poor, China currently has a savings rate that is much higher than most other countries in the world. An article by Shang-Jin Wei in VoxEU proposes one interesting reason why Chinese households tend to save so much. Do you find the article's evidence plausible? What other factors may explain why initially poor East Asian countries have saved at very high rates over the past sixty years?

3. A third prompt comes from the MIT course "Globalization: the Good, the Bad, and the In-Between":

> In his introduction to The Ornament of the World, Harold Bloom says: "...Our current multiculturalism, the blight of our universities and of our media, is a parody of the culture of Cordoba and Granada in their lost prime." What does Bloom mean? Is multiculturalism today different from the tolerance exhibited by the societies of Al-Andalus? Do you agree with him? Argue either for or against Bloom's position.

4. Finally, an experimental biology class demands the following:

> Write a brief critique (2-3 pp.) of Arbuckle, Melissa R., et al. "Development of Autoantibodies before the Clinical Onset of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus" from The New England Journal of Medicine, focusing on the illustrations.

All four of these essay prompts direct the student to focus deeply on one argument and explain it. Then the student must express an original critical response. This is in some ways similar to a movie review: a reviewer has to give some picture of what the movie is like before praising or panning it. We might not think of history, economics, and biology courses as all calling on one skill, but the student who has practice summarizing arguments and critiquing them can likely do well on all of the above assignments.

So how do we get started? In this chapter, we will discuss how to return to the structure of the argument map to search for any faults. We will look at problems with the clarity of the claims, the solidity of the reasons, and the validity of the assumptions. In the next chapter, we will talk about the options for making recommendations in response to any problems we find.

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10.2: Check If the Meaning Is Clear

Media Alternative

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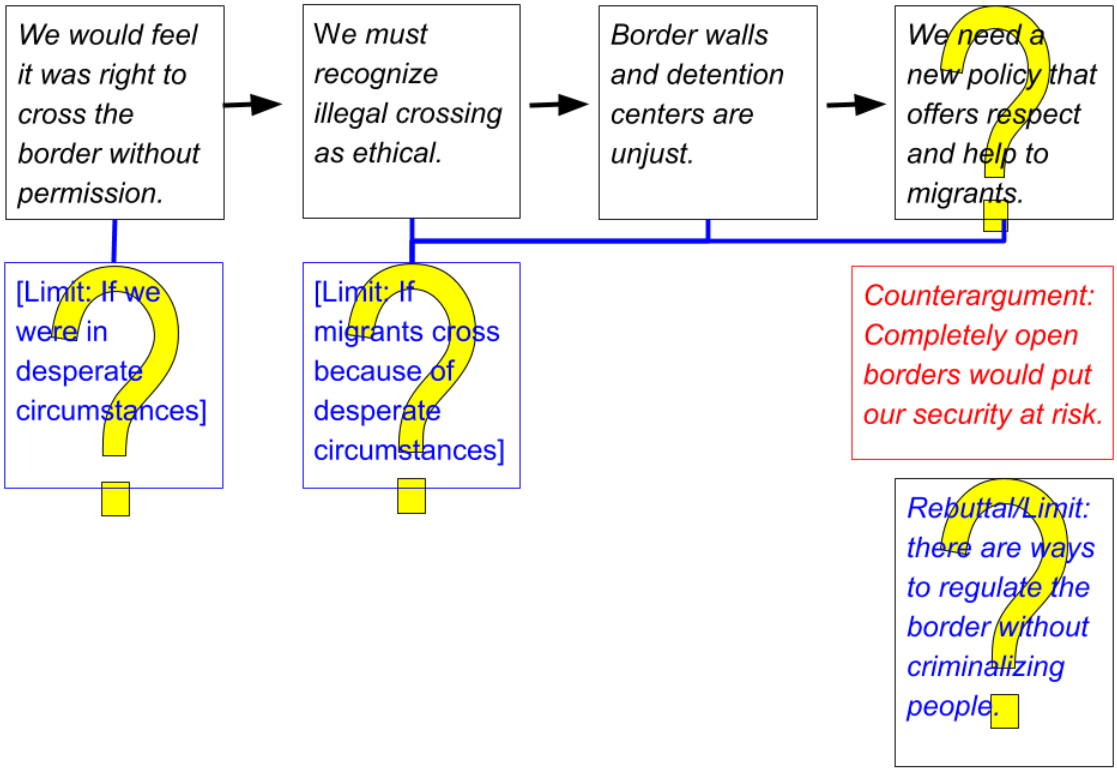
Overview

Sometimes we can identify the point a writer is trying to make, but major questions still remain about what the writer means. A critique can point out the **ambiguity**--the many possible meanings of some part of the argument. Often arguments are ambiguous because they use words or phrases that have multiple definitions. For example, “We should all support reproductive justice.” There isn’t one widely accepted definition of reproductive justice. Even if readers are aware that the phrase refers to options different groups of women have around pregnancy, they may be wondering if it means access to abortion across racial and economic groups or access to birth control or sex education or some combination of all of those. Are supporters of reproductive justice always pro-choice? What is it exactly that the argument is asking us to support?



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Let’s look at the elements of the border argument we have studied and ask ourselves if any of the statements need to be clarified. Below, question marks indicate statements that are in some way ambiguous.



In our assessment, we can describe any areas of ambiguity by adding questions to our summary of the argument. Let's look at some sample writing about the ambiguities marked with question marks in the map above.

- When the author limits her claim to migrants in "desperate circumstances," what does she mean? She describes this in different words in different places, calling the migrants people "who are driven by need and good intentions" and giving the example of a parent "raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence." But we might find it important to ask where she draws the line between desperation and discontent. Does she want to check first to see how desperate migrants are? Would she consider it appropriate to put an immigrant in a detention center for trying to cross illegally if they were wealthy and safe in their country of origin?
- What does she mean by "help"? The word makes us think of humanitarian relief: handouts of food, shelter, and medical care. How much material assistance is she talking about and how much money does she think the United States should spend on this? Doesn't the current system provide some material assistance, in part through the detention centers? More fundamentally, does "help" mean that she wants us to let migrants in? Would she still consider it "help" to assist them to settle in another country or to improve their life in their country of origin? How would either of those versions of "help" work? We might imply that she should specify her meaning. Or we might suggest that she left the concept of "help" ambiguous because there is no good answer to these questions: there is no satisfactory way to offer people a better life where they came from, and we cannot endlessly support them at the border.
- What does she mean by "regulate"? The word sounds reassuring, but it implies some control and yet she is talking about not keeping people out. If you can't turn people away, what kind of control or safety guarantee can you have? Does she just mean inspecting them for arms and drugs? Or does she mean some kind of extensive background check? But in that case, wouldn't we need detention centers while we waited for the result?

Phrases for pointing out what is not clear

We do not need any special vocabulary to point out ambiguity, but sometimes seeing typical phrases can help jumpstart our thinking. Here are some approaches:

Ask a question

- What exactly does she mean by _____?

Describe the author's actions and shortcomings

- He seems to imply that _____, but leaves ambiguous whether or not that means_____.
- They fail to clarify what exactly _____ refers to.
- He does not define what he means by _____.
- She explores _____, but fails to articulate a clear message.

Refer to the argument's failure to clarify

- This leaves open the question of _____.
- The argument never specifies whether _____ or _____.

Refer to readers' probable confusion

- Readers will wonder if they mean_____ or _____.
- Readers may be confused by the shifting meaning of the term "_____."
- Many will interpret _____ to mean _____, but some might also take it to mean _____.

How much of a problem is the lack of clarity?

Since our goal in an assessment is to decide how effective we think the argument will be at getting its point across, any charge of vagueness implies some failure to communicate that point. This becomes a critique. But is it a minor flaw in the argument, or does it mean that the whole argument has no validity? The seriousness of the critique depends on how central the lack of clarity is to what the writer is trying to claim in the argument and whether there is an obvious way to clarify the argument or not.

Sometimes we can make an educated guess as to what the author meant based on clues we find in the rest of the argument. We can describe what the most likely meaning is but still note why readers might reasonably have another interpretation. Sometimes it isn't possible to figure out what the author means. In our assessment, we just have to put our finger on what isn't clear.

The lack of clarity may not be a serious flaw if we can make a reasonable guess as to what the author intends based on the rest of the argument. We can simply point out such a case:

- The writer does not specify whether _____ or _____, but we can infer that _____ because _____.

It also may not be too serious if it is a side point rather than a central point that needs to be clarified. In that case, we might want to think about how one clarification or another might affect our assessment. We can specify in our assessment that we support the argument if it means what we think it means but not if it means something else.

However, sometimes the vagueness covers a fatal flaw in the argument, a difficulty, contradiction, or gap that cannot be explained away. One particular kind of ambiguity that undermines the argument is when the writer uses a word in two different ways while acting as if it only has one meaning. A change in a word's meaning, whether intentional or not, can lead to an unjustified conclusion. This is called **equivocation**.

For example, consider the following paraphrase of an example found on fallacyfiles.org:

"No medical professional should be allowed to intentionally harm a human. What is a fetus if not human? How, then, can anyone dispute that abortion is wrong and should be illegal?"

There may or may not be legitimate reasons to oppose legal abortion. However, the above argument does not hold up because it depends on a sleight of hand, a shift from the idea of a human, meaning a human being, to the adjective "human," which can apply to anything with human cells and DNA, including hair and toenails. We can tell that the above argument is faulty if we substitute "fetus" for "hair" to construct a similar argument:

"No medical professional should be allowed to intentionally harm a human. Surely our hair and fingernails are human, not animal. Therefore cutting hair and nails should be illegal."

The question any argument about abortion needs to resolve, of course, is whether a fetus can be considered a human being, not whether a fetus has human cells. So this ambiguity of meaning means that the reason and the claim are not talking about the same thing. The reason doesn't really lead to the claim.

In our assessment, we need to indicate how much of a problem the vagueness is for the overall validity of the argument.

- This ambiguity undermines the author's claim that _____.
- Without knowing _____, we cannot conclude that the author is right that _____.

Practice Exercise 10.2.1

In a few sentences, give your opinion on an issue related to current events. Make a short argument with a claim and at least one reason. Then, exchange arguments with a classmate. Read your classmate's argument and write down at least one clarifying question. Can you imagine a way in which two readers could get different ideas about what they mean based on what they wrote? Is there a term they are using that could mean more than one thing?

Here are some ideas for phrasing such direct requests for clarification:

- You seem to imply that _____, but I wasn't sure whether or not that means_____.
- Can you clarify what you're referring to when you say _____?
- Could you define the term _____? Some might think of _____, while others could imagine you mean _____.
- I'm interested in the way you explore the issue of _____, but I wasn't sure I understood what you wanted to argue in the end. Did you mean _____?
- I wondered if you meant_____ or _____.

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10.3: Look for Exceptions

Media Alternative

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Why are generalizations important to arguments?

In order to make a point that is worth making, we may need facts or evidence, but we will also need ways to connect those specifics to bigger points or other related specifics. A generalization tells us that something is true for a group of cases that have something in common.

Find the generalizations and question them

We can check an argument by looking for possible exceptions to any **generalization** it makes. If we see a general statement, we should ask ourselves whether it is always true or whether we can identify any case that doesn't fit the pattern. If there is an exception that the argument hasn't accounted for, that may point us to a weak spot that we should mention in our assessment. Often, a particular claim or reason may sound plausible, but we need to slow down and ask if it is true in all cases. For example, take the following argument:

> *The First Amendment guarantees the right of free speech to all Americans. Therefore, teachers have the right to express themselves freely in the classroom.*

But is the general statement always true? Does the First Amendment really guarantee absolute freedom to say whatever we want in any situation? U.S. courts have recognized many exceptions to this freedom. For example, doctors are not allowed to discuss confidential patient information without permission. No one is allowed to call for immediate acts of violence. Teachers may not tell students to go out and shoot the president. "Hate speech" is also prohibited: a teacher does not have the right to spout racial slurs. Another exception that applies to this case is not so widely known: the First Amendment does not apply when a person is working for an employer. Unless there is a local law protecting employee speech, an employer can tell workers what they are and are not allowed to say on the job.

The original argument does not mention any of these exceptions. By pointing this out, we can show that the argument as expressed is invalid. If it isn't always true that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, then we cannot necessarily conclude that teachers in classrooms are guaranteed freedom of speech.

Exceptions are not always so damaging to an argument. For example, let's take the following argument:

> *Across the country, we have seen so many cases of teachers openly expressing their political beliefs in the classroom. This country's teachers behave as if their First Amendment rights extend to the workplace, but indoctrinating students is an abuse of power.*

We can surely think of teachers who do not express political beliefs in the classroom. An assessment could critique this argument for not acknowledging that. However, there may well still be enough examples of teachers expressing political beliefs to claim that there is a trend. The entire argument is not invalidated just because there are counterexamples. As we saw in Section 2.8: Finding the Limits on the Argument, many arguments limit their claims to acknowledge exceptions. The claim in the example above would need to be limited, perhaps by revising the central claim to "many of this country's teachers" in front of "teachers." Of course, the validity would still depend on whether there really are so many such cases.



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Phrases for pointing out exceptions

Here are some sample ways to critique an argument for ignoring a plausible exception:

- The argument is based on the idea that _____, but this is not entirely true because _____.
- The reason given is that _____, but the author has not considered the possibility that, in fact, _____.
- The author does not acknowledge that _____ might be the case.

Common ways that arguments that leave out exceptions

We can look for exceptions with any argument, but there are some patterns worth learning about so we can spot them quickly.

Arguments that start with generalizations (deductive arguments)

Arguments that start with a generalization and apply it to a specific case or cases are known as **deductive** arguments. If it turns out the generalization is not true, then it certainly won't apply to specific cases. For example, the argument given above about teachers' right to free speech starts with a general statement about a right of all Americans to free speech and applies it to a specific group (teachers) in a specific setting (the classroom). Once we identified exceptions to the general right to free speech, we could no longer be sure that teachers in classrooms have that right, at least not based on the generalization about free speech.

Arguments that start with examples (inductive arguments)

An argument that uses examples to make a general claim is called an **inductive argument**. If it turns out that the general claim has exceptions, we may be able to limit it to account for those, as we saw above. There we observed that changing the claim from "this country's teachers" to "many of this country's teachers" would account for the exceptions, teachers who did not fit the generalization.

False dilemmas

Sometimes an argument asserts that there are only two or three options, when in fact there may be others. This is often called a **false dilemma** or **false choice** fallacy. If the writer is arguing for something that obviously has downsides, they may present it as the lesser of two evils. However, we should always ask whether those two are really the only options. For example, consider the following argument:

> *Americans are faced with a choice: either we open our borders or we turn our backs on the needs of desperate people. Clearly, the only ethical course is to open our borders.*

There are other ways to try to help desperate people. As a country, we give billions in direct aid and security assistance to struggling countries every year and could conceivably give more to the countries migrants are escaping. Other possible options would be to establish refugee camps at the border, or to allow people to enter the U.S. temporarily but not permanently. These

options may or may not be good ones, but the point is that the way this argument has presented the choice as an either/or is misleading.

Here is a sample way to point out a false dilemma:

- The argument presents only two possibilities,_____ and _____, when in fact it could be the case that _____

Loaded questions

Sometimes a false dilemma is implied when an argument asks a question with an obvious answer, a question phrased in such a way that it pushes us to agree with the author without examining the real range of possibilities. This **loaded question** implies that there are only two options, one of them very bad. As an example, we can reframe the statement from the false dilemma example as a question and answer:

> *Can we justify turning our backs on the needs of desperate people? There is no justification for such selfishness. The time has come to open our borders.*

The argument would be more transparent and less manipulative if it tried to prove that other ways of helping desperate people, such as direct aid in people's countries of origin, would not do enough.

We can critique a loaded question with a sentence like this:

The question _____ assumes that _____, when, in fact, it could be that_____.

Exercise 10.3.1

Consider the following argument: "Technology is so much a part of all aspects of our lives now that we cannot do without it."

- What exceptions could you point out to either the claim, "We cannot do without it," or the reason, "Technology is so much a part of all aspects of our lives now"?
- Use one of the phrases from this section or a phrase of your own to critique the argument.
- Would the argument be valid if it just narrowed its focus? Or does the exception reveal a fundamental problem with the argument?

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10.4: Decide How Strong the Evidence Is

Media Alternative

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Is there enough evidence?

An argument may not have obvious exceptions, but we should still ask whether it gives enough evidence to convince us of the claim. The reason is the foundation of the argument: is the foundation secure? In some cases we may suspect that some part of the reason is not true, and in others we may simply want to note that little or no evidence has been offered. For example, the border argument we have examined makes two claims without any evidence: “Completely open borders would put our security at risk” and “There are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people."

The evidence may lack substance (circular reasoning)

Sometimes a reason given is not really a reason at all, just a repetition of the claim itself in different words. In effect, the writer asks us to believe an idea because of that very same idea. This is called **circular reasoning** or "begging the question."

For example, consider the following argument:

> Anyone born in the United States has a right to citizenship because citizenship rights here depend on birth, not ethnicity or family history of immigration.

The idea that “anyone born in the United States has a right to citizenship” and the idea that “citizenship rights here depend on birth” are really one and the same. We still need a reason to accept this focus on birth as the determining factor.

Circular reasoning is often not deliberate. In reaching to explain the reason for a deeply held belief, a writer may end up summarizing that belief again in a different way. Other times the writer may knowingly perform this sleight of hand, hoping the reader will not notice. In either case, the argument lacks substantive support.

We can critique circular reasoning with phrases like the following:

- The argument presents _____ as a reason to believe _____, but this supposed reason is just a rewording of the claim.
- The writer provides no real justification for the idea that _____; to convince us they just repeat that idea with different phrasing.

The evidence may not be representative (hasty generalization)

Most academic arguments explore evidence in the form of specific examples, facts, statistics, testimonials, or anecdotes in order to arrive at a general conclusion. This is called **inductive reasoning**.

If an argument gives evidence, we need to know if the evidence is enough. A few examples may not be representative of a general pattern. If the argument makes a sweeping generalization based on one or two anecdotes or solely on the writer's own experience, it can be considered a **hasty generalization.**

How do we decide when the evidence is enough? The science of statistics addresses this question in very specific, technical ways that are worth learning but beyond the scope of this book. Often, however, an intuitive assessment will be enough. We all probably already guard against this fallacy when we search online for products that have been reviewed many times. Clearly one five-star review could be a fluke, but 2,000 reviews averaging 4 1/2 stars is a more reliable indicator.

People who deny that global warming is a genuine phenomenon often commit this fallacy. In February of 2015, the weather was unusually cold in Washington, DC. Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma famously took to the Senate floor wielding a snowball. “In case we have forgotten, because we keep hearing that 2014 has been the warmest year on record, I ask the chair, ‘You know what this is?’ It’s a snowball, from outside here. So it’s very, very cold out. Very unseasonable.”

Senator Inhofe commits the hasty generalization fallacy. He’s trying to establish a general conclusion—that 2014 wasn’t the warmest year on record, or that global warming isn’t really happening. But the evidence he presents is insufficient to support such a claim. His evidence is an unseasonable coldness in a single place on the planet, on a single day. We can’t derive from that one example any conclusions about what’s happening, temperature-wise, on the entire planet, over a long period of time. The claim that the earth is warming is not a claim that everywhere, at every time, it will always be warmer than it was. The claim is that, on average, across the globe, temperatures are rising. Cold snaps can happen even if temperatures are rising.

A particularly damaging example of the hasty generalization fallacy is the development of negative **stereotypes**. Stereotypes are general claims about religious or racial groups, ethnicities and nationalities. Even if we do have evidence that a certain trait is more common among people of one ethnicity, we still cannot assume that a particular individual of that ethnicity will have the trait.

A specific form of hasty generalization is when an author will point to a lack of evidence as a sign that no evidence is out there. This fallacy is often called **appeal to ignorance** because the arguer is citing their own lack of knowledge as the basis for their argument**.**

For example, consider the following: “No one I know has heard about any anti-Asian violence lately; therefore, reports of such violence are exaggerated.” The speaker and their acquaintances may simply not have come in contact with the people who have experienced such incidents of violence.

Absence of evidence can sometimes tell us something useful. It may be a reason to doubt the conclusion even if it doesn't disprove it. During the 2016 presidential campaign, reporter David Fahrenthold took to Twitter to announce that despite having “spent weeks looking for proof that [Donald Trump] really does give millions of his own [money] to charity...” he could only find one donation, to the NYC Police Athletic League. Trump has claimed to have given millions of dollars to charities over the years. Does this reporter’s failure to find evidence of such giving prove that Trump’s claims about his charitable donations are false? No. To draw such a conclusion relying only on this reporter's testimony would be to commit the fallacy.

However, the failure to uncover evidence of charitable giving does provide some reason to suspect Trump’s claims may be false. How much of a reason depends on the reporter’s methods and credibility, among other things. In fact, Fahrenthold subsequently performed and documented in the *Washington Post* on 9/12/16 a rather exhaustive unsuccessful search for evidence of charitable giving, providing strong support for the conclusion that Trump didn’t give as he’d claimed.

Is the evidence trustworthy?

If the writer has offered evidence, we should ask ourselves whether it is credible. Can it be verified? The validity depends on the source. Is the evidence from trustworthy sources? For example, if the argument cites a statistic from the Pew Research Center, we need to know whether that institution is credible. Is it biased? Does it try to promote a particular product or ideology? Do experts in the field review its studies? If we are not familiar with the source, we can look it up online and include this information in our assessment. We will discuss assessing the credibility of sources much more in Chapter 6: The Research Process and also in Chapter 9: How Arguments Establish Trust and Connection (Ethos).

Is there enough variety in the evidence?

There are different kinds of evidence and each kind has its limitations as far as what it can show. Thus, arguments are often most convincing when they provide a variety of kinds of evidence. For example, an anecdote might give a sense of how difficult an immigrant's situation in their country of origin may be, but a statistic on how common that difficulty is will be needed to show that the anecdote is typical of many others' experiences as well. In your assessment, you may want to note the limitations of the evidence offered and point out another kind of evidence that would complement it. Are there enough statistics, anecdotes, or testimonials? Is there enough variety in the kinds of evidence? There isn’t a set formula for what’s needed; the question is whether the readers should be convinced that any claim that makes up part of the argument is valid.

Types of evidence and their limitations

Facts

Facts are statements that can be independently verified. For example, an argument might state that “According to the Pew Research Center, the United States has more immigrants than any other country.” We could theoretically check whether the Pew Research Center issued this statement and also check whether it is true based on the census of each country as well as other population estimates.

Statistics

Statistics are numbers that are used to describe a pattern. They often represent information about a large number of cases of a given phenomenon, so they may be more convincing because they are more likely to represent a general trend than one or two cases might be. If the statistics are accurate and relevant, they can provide strong support. For example, an argument might cite evidence that according to the Pew Research Center, “immigrants today account for 13.6% of the U.S. population.” Statistics have an air of authority because they quantify things, making them and the claim they support sound indisputable. For this reason, writers can be tempted to overuse them or to throw them in where they don’t really add to the logic of the argument. A famous book called *How to Lie with Statistics* by Darrell Huff goes over all the ways in which statistics can be used to mislead readers about the strength of a claim. We need to examine closely what a given statistic actually shows and exactly how it connects to the claim at stake in the argument. This will usually involve checking the assumptions made to link the statistic to the claim, as we will see in Section 4.5: Check the Argument’s Assumptions.

Expert testimonials

Testimonial evidence can be convincing if it is collected from relevant authorities. Whether or not a testimonial is convincing depends not just on how well regarded the expert is but on how relevant their expertise is to the topic at hand. Who would be an expert source of a testimonial for an argument based on immigration? A social scientist? A philosopher? An immigration lawyer? We would want to question the testimony of a celebrity who has no special knowledge of immigration. In addition, we want to know if the expert’s perspective is representative of the opinion of others in the field. Is the person an extremist? Do they have a stake in promoting a particular product or position?

Statements from experts or organizations that represent a field of knowledge can be especially helpful in laying the foundation for a **deductive** argument, where we need a credible general principle as the foundation for a conclusion about a specific case. This can be especially helpful if we are looking to make a prediction about a future trend or the outcome of an experiment. We will need to cite experts to substantiate the general principle. But the question arises whether the experts really speak for the field and whether others have alternate expert interpretations of the pattern or draw other generalizations from the body of evidence.

For example, take the following general claim supported by expert testimony:

As psychiatrist Dr. Robert Spitzer of Columbia University told *The Washington Post* in 2001 that his study showed that, "some people can change from gay to straight, and we ought to acknowledge that." It’s not impossible to convert to heterosexuality.

However, an inquiry into Dr. Robert Spitzer will show that his 2001 study was widely criticized by other psychiatrists and that he himself recanted the study and apologized for it in the journal of the American Psychiatric Association in 2012, writing, “I … apologize to any gay person who wasted time and energy undergoing some form of reparative therapy because they believed that I had proven that reparative therapy works with some ‘highly motivated’ individuals.” An assessment could note that at the very least the argument should have mentioned this later apology when it quoted Spitzer.

Anecdotes

Anecdotes can illustrate a point with a story that makes it come to life. They are more compelling if they are based on first-hand accounts. Often these stories appeal strongly to readers' emotions, and we will discuss in much more depth how to analyze and evaluate these appeals in Chapter 8: How Arguments Appeal to Emotion. We should examine any story closely to see how opinions and assumptions may be woven into the storytelling. In our assessment, we may want to point out any possible bias or limitation of the person who provides the anecdote.

If anecdotes or specific examples are used to establish a general pattern, we can ask how the argument convinces us that these are typical. Sometimes statistics can help to establish this **typicality**.

Does the evidence really support the claim?

The argument may have offered some facts as evidence, and we may be ready to accept them as facts, but do they prove what the argument wants them to prove? Sound evidence can be used in misleading ways. As we'll see in Section 4.5: Check the Argument's Assumptions, a reason depends on assumptions to prove a claim. If the assumptions are wrong, then the reason does not really prove the claim. This type of fallacy, or logical problem, can be called a **non sequitur**.

Is the claim too broad or too definite given the evidence?

Sometimes an argument makes a broad claim based on narrow evidence. In our assessment, we can comment on any mismatch between the scope of the claim and the scope of the evidence offered. We might suggest that the argument should limit its claim with a particular phrase such as with "few," "many," "most," "some," or "in a few cases."

Sometimes an argument makes a bold, absolute claim, but the evidence really only justifies a more tentative conclusion. We can point out in our assessment that the argument lacks the appropriate qualifying words like "possibly," "maybe," "probably," "almost certainly," or "in all likelihood."

See Section 2.8: Finding the Limits on the Argument for more ways to limit the scope or degree of certainty.

Phrases for assessing an argument's evidence

Praising evidence

- She convincingly supports this claim by _____.
- They give many examples of _____ to support the idea that _____.
- His evidence of _____ ranges from anecdotes to large-scale academic studies to expert testimonials.
- X refers to credible academic studies of _____ to bolster their argument that _____.
- X refers to a number of credible experts to establish that, in general, _____.

Critiquing evidence

- X asserts that _____ but does not offer any evidence.
- The argument builds on the premise that _____, but fails to support that premise.
- X offers scant evidence for the claim that _____.
- The argument gives an example to support the claim that _____, but gives no evidence that this example is typical.
- _____ is not enough to show that _____.
- The essay offers only _____ as evidence when it should also point to _____ and _____.
- X's claim that _____ is too broad given that they only give evidence related to _____.
- The evidence does not warrant such a definite conclusion about _____.
- X has been a bit hasty to declare that_____. So far, the scanty data on _____ only warrant cautious speculation.

Exercise 10.4.1

Choose an argument you have recently read for class, or select one from Section 15.1: Suggested Short Readings. Make a list of the pieces of evidence the argument presents and decide whether each piece is a fact, statistic, testimony, or anecdote. Is a credible source given for each?

Attributions

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10.5: Check the Argument's Assumptions

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (21 min, 42 sec):

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Why assumptions matter

One of the most powerful techniques for testing whether an argument is valid is to find out what assumptions it makes and check those assumptions. Noticing and questioning assumptions is a core slow thinking practice in college. Beyond that, questioning assumptions may be one of the most powerful mental habits a human can learn.

In his bestseller *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*, Don Miguel Ruiz advises, "Don't make assumptions." But we do make assumptions; every belief, every argument depends on them. Perhaps Ruiz's advice is a shorthand way to ask us to learn to recognize our assumptions so we can decide when to set them aside.

Questioning assumptions is a habit we may find empowering, freeing, and useful in any area of life. Novelist Isaac Asimov put it another way: "Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in." Discovering a hidden assumption can be a revelation; it suggests the possibility that things might work another way. There may be other angles to consider.

Questioning assumptions can be a way to speak back to authority. Those in power often make assumptions based on their privilege, assumptions that help them stay in power. They may rationalize their decisions by justifying them with better-sounding reasons. The white defenders of slavery made a thousand such arguments. Abraham Lincoln responded, "Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally." Questioning the assumptions of such arguments can help expose their immorality and challenge the power structure.

Questioning the assumptions of the dominant culture can help anyone less privileged feel personally empowered. Bob Marley famously sang "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery. // None but ourselves can free our minds."

Questioning assumptions about other people makes it possible to set aside stereotypes and connect authentically. Michelle Obama, in her book *Becoming*, calls on us to "fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us."

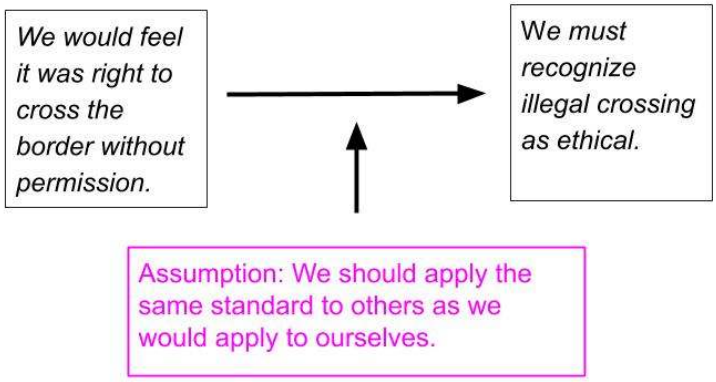
On a practical level, questioning assumptions can also help us problem-solve. There may be a way around a difficulty if we realize how our assumptions have limited our view. By first recognizing and then changing our assumptions, we can, to use a common phrase, "think outside the box."



Image by Arek Socha from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

What assumptions does the argument make?

Most arguments don't mention their assumptions, so summaries don't typically mention them either. However, when we assess an argument or write a critical analysis, we need to know whether the argument has a strong foundation. The reason might seem to prove the claim, but that leap from one to the other depends on assumptions. The writer may not even be aware of these ideas, but they are still necessary to the argument. Philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin popularized the process of finding the assumptions that link the reason to the claim. He called these **warrants**, and he found it useful to write them into an argument map such as the one below (see Chapter 2: Reading to Figure out the Argument for more on argument mapping).



"Argument Map with Assumption" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the argument map with assumption.

In the map, the assumption goes underneath with the arrow pointing up because the assumption supports or props up the whole argument. Note that this assumption is similar to the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Arguments depend on more than one assumption. The above example also depends on the assumption that "People currently need permission to cross the border legally." We know that under current policy, governments decide whether or not to allow people in. However, it is probably not useful to identify assumptions that are easily verified and not controversial. In fact, we do not need to find every underlying assumption in order to assess an argument; we only need to know which are questionable.

So if we are reading an argument, how do we identify the assumptions it makes? In a few cases writers will point out their assumptions with phrases like the following:

- I will assume here _____.
- This rests on the assumption that _____.
- Of course, this depends on _____.
- As we know, _____.
- This argument rests upon the idea that _____.
- The underlying principle here is that _____.

More commonly, though, writers do not state assumptions, sometimes because they seem obvious and sometimes because drawing attention to the assumptions might draw attention to a weakness in the argument. We will need to identify these assumptions on our own.

The basic method is to ask ourselves what the reason needs to support the claim. What other idea is necessary for us to make the leap from reason to claim? What underlying idea does that leap depend on?

In the border example above, most people would probably agree that we should apply the same standards to ourselves as we do to others. The border argument also depends on the assumption that "People currently need permission to cross the border legally." Both of those assumptions are uncontroversial, so why do we need to talk about them? In fact, we do not need to find every

possible underlying assumption in order to assess an argument. We need to focus on assumptions that might not be true or that might not be universally accepted.

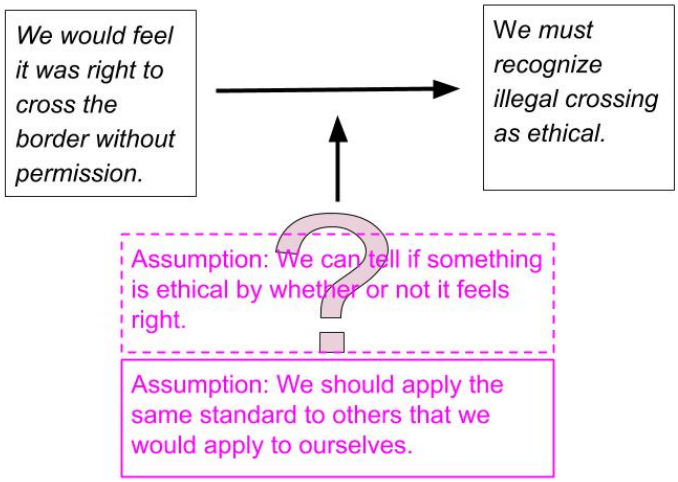
One way to uncover problematic assumptions is to brainstorm cases where the reason wouldn't necessarily lead to the claim. We can put the reason and the claim into the following question:

> Just because [reason] does that necessarily mean that [claim]?

If we can think of a case in which the reason doesn't lead to the claim, then there must be a problematic assumption. We can try to find this assumption by filling in the "scenario" blank below with a case in which the reason was true but the claim was not. This technique is sometimes called a **scenario test**:

> Just because [reason] that doesn't mean [claim] because it could be that...[scenario].

For example, in the case of the border argument, we could write, "Just because we would feel it was right to cross the border without permission doesn't necessarily mean that we must recognize illegal crossing as ethical because it could be that..." I am tempted to complete this with the idea that "our personal feelings are not always the best guide to ethics." Or I could complete it with a more specific case: "It might be that crossing without permission isn't really right even though some people might feel it is." This helps us to identify another assumption--that we can tell if something is ethical by whether or not it feels right.



"Questionable Assumption Argument Map" by Anna Mills is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.
See the accessible text description of the questionable assumption map.



Like a house, an argument needs a solid foundation.
Photo by Cindy Tang on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Are the assumptions valid?

Look for exceptions to the assumptions

If we want to test an assumption, we can look to cases unrelated to our argument that might prove it wrong. We can probably think of a person who sincerely believes they are doing right, while we are sure their action is unethical. A suicide bomber may believe they are doing God's will by killing people. We can use such a counterexample to help us argue that the assumption in question is not universally true and thus the reason does not necessarily imply the claim.

Look for evidence for the assumptions

In the rare case that an argument lists its assumptions and explains why they are justified, we can check whether we find these justifications convincing. More often, though, the author will not have stated the assumptions or provided evidence to support them. Our critique is a place to call for evidence of any key assumption we have uncovered. We don't have to make a final pronouncement on whether the assumption is true or not; we may not have formed an opinion on that yet. We may be inclined to doubt it or to believe it, but either way, we should point out when the assumption needs support. (Philosopher Stephen Toulmin called support for an assumption "**backing**" so you may see that term used in other rhetoric textbooks).

For example, the argument below relies on the idea that chronic stress is bad for health:

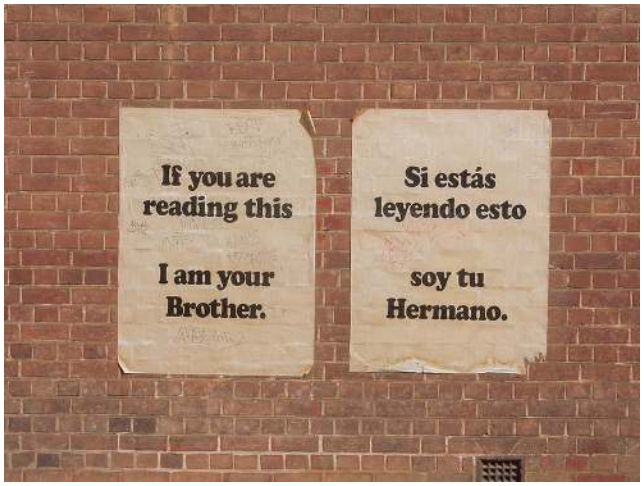
> **Reason**: According to Penn Medicine News, "exposure to weight bias and stigma . . . can lead to a physiological stress response such as increased inflammation and cortisol levels."
>
> **Claim**: Fat-shaming may be one cause of the health problems associated with being fat.
>
> **Assumption**: Chronic stress leads to health problems.

We can check if this assumption is valid by consulting a range of reputable medical journals, and we will find many statements and studies that back it up. For example, the popular and well-regarded site MayoClinic.org includes an article with the title, "Chronic stress puts your health at risk" and lists effects from heart disease to memory impairment.

Common problems with assumptions

Assuming a logical connection where there isn't one

Sometimes an argument leaps from a reason to a claim that is not really related. This problem is known generally as a **non sequitur**, which is Latin for "It does not follow." The scenario test will turn up cases like this. Again, we ask ourselves *Just because [reason] does that necessarily mean that [claim]?*



"Non Sequitur" by mikecogh on Flickr is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

When we use the phrase "non sequitur" in conversation, we usually mean that a statement seems random or out of place. However, in argument non sequiturs often sound convincing and not random at all. On closer examination we see that logically speaking, the

reason does not necessarily make the claim true. For example, let's take the assertion that "Overseas Filipino workers (O.F.W.s) are not citizens in the countries where they work, so they have no legal rights." Just because workers are not citizens does not mean that they have no legal rights. People can have legal rights without being citizens although the law may treat citizens and non-citizens differently in some cases.

One special case where a logical connection is missing is known as a red herring fallacy or a fallacy of distraction. We commit the red herring fallacy if we attempt to distract the audience from the main thread of an argument, taking things off in a different direction. The diversion is often subtle, with the detour starting on a topic closely related to the original—but gradually wandering off into unrelated territory. The tactic is often, but not always, intentional: if the arguer is not comfortable arguing about a particular topic on the merits, they change the subject to an issue about which they feel more confident and pretend to have won the original argument.



"Red Herring" by Laurel Russwurm on Flickr is licensed under CC0.

The red herring fallacy gets its name from the actual fish. When herring are smoked, they turn red and are quite pungent. Stinky things can be used to distract hunting dogs, who of course follow the trail of their quarry by scent; if you pass over that trail with a stinky fish and run off in a different direction, the hound may be distracted and follow the wrong trail.

An argument like the following is a good example of the red herring fallacy:

> Our staff sanitize every classroom surface multiple times throughout the day. Therefore, our school is a leader in stopping the spread of Covid 19.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, many people and institutions have focused on what Atlantic writer Derek Thompson called "hygiene theater"--the tendency to showcase practices like sanitizing surfaces beyond their actual protective value. This continued even after scientists had known for some time that airborne transmission was much more common than transmission through surfaces. The focus on surface hygiene diverted attention away from mask-wearing and ventilation systems, which were more statistically effective in preventing transmission.

Assuming two things are comparable

False analogy

Many arguments rely on a similarity between two things, usually referred to as an analogy, to conclude that if something is true for one, it will be true for the other. But things that are similar will also have differences, and so for any such argument we need to ask whether there are any differences significant enough to change the outcome. Are the two things really similar enough to justify the conclusion? If not, we have what is often called a **false analogy** fallacy.

For example, consider the following argument:

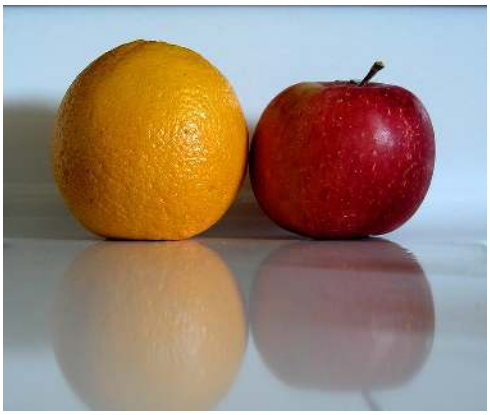
> People have a First Amendment right to express opinions by donating money to political candidates, so corporations should also have that right.

This is a summary of the decision the Supreme Court came to in the landmark 2010 decision Citizens United vs. FEC. It depends on an analogy between corporations and people, an idea called "corporate personhood" in legal terms. Chief Justice Roberts argued, essentially, that the First Amendment applies to groups of people, such as corporations, as well as to individuals. Now, is this a fallacy? In a dissenting opinion, Justice Stevens argued that the Constitution was intended to apply to "We, the People," not corporate entities. He listed the key differences that led him to conclude that:

> In the context of election to public office, the distinction between corporate and human speakers is significant. Although they make enormous contributions to our society, corporations are not actually members of it. They cannot vote or run for office. Because they may be managed and controlled by nonresidents, their interests may conflict in fundamental respects with the interests of eligible voters. The financial resources, legal structure, and instrumental orientation of corporations raise legitimate

> concerns about their role in the electoral process. Our lawmakers have a compelling constitutional basis, if not also a democratic duty, to take measures designed to guard against the potentially deleterious effects of corporate spending in local and national races.

As we can see, Justice Stevens thought that this was a case of false analogy, but Chief Justice Roberts disagreed. Introducing the fallacy label here does not resolve the debate, but it may help to clarify where the disagreement lies.



Are apples and oranges too different to compare? "Like apples and oranges" by Sarah Braun on Flickr is licensed under CC BY NC SA 2.0.

Slippery slope

One type of invalid comparison comes in arguments that make a dramatic prediction that if one thing happens, other more dramatic things will inevitably follow. It depends on the idea that the first event is comparable to the other, more dramatic events. A **slippery slope** argument claims a disastrous cascade effect will take place if we take certain action. It presents a chain of events leading to disaster as if it is unstoppable or highly probable. But how slippery is the slope really? How likely is the disaster? Are there factors that could stop the chain reaction?

For example, take the following argument:

> If we allow people to self-identify their gender regardless of their biology, they will expect to be able to self-identify their race and then their age and species. Next thing we know, the law will demand we pretend a person is a gorilla!

There is a certain appealing momentum to these arguments: we imagine a boulder rolling down a hill. But will one thing really lead to another? Just because we can imagine that one thing might lead to another does not mean that it inevitably will. Many transgender people already legally claim a gender identity different from the one they were assigned at birth. However, very few people believe themselves to be a different age than their chronological age or a species other than human. There is no movement to push for legal recognition of self-identified age or species.



If it falls, this boulder will not roll far; the slope is not slippery. Photo by Prashant Kumar on Pixahive, licensed under CC0.

Fallacious slippery slope arguments have long been deployed to resist social change. Those opposed to the abolition of slavery warned of economic collapse and social chaos. Those who opposed women's suffrage asserted that it would lead to the dissolution of the family, rampant sexual promiscuity, and social anarchy. Of course, none of these dire predictions came true; the slopes weren't slippery.

We can critique a slippery slope argument with phrases like the following:

- The argument claims that _____ will inevitably lead to _____, but this is far from certain.
- They assume that _____ will set off a chain reaction leading to _____; however this is unlikely because _____.

(We can also think of the slippery slope arguments as committing the fallacy of false analogy. We saw above that one argument against letting people identify their own gender depended on a comparison between gender identity and other forms of identity such as species and age, but most would argue that key differences between these categories would lead to different legal treatment. The differences would stop the slide down the slope. Faulty arguments can often legitimately be classed under different fallacy labels.)

Assuming that one thing causes another

Arguments often claim casually that an earlier event caused a later event. To be sound, such arguments need quite a bit of support. They need to show that there is a likely way in which the first event *could* cause the second. They need to ask if something else have caused the second event. Could a third factor have caused both events? Maybe the first event contributed to the second, but other factors did as well. Or maybe there is no link between the two events at all.

Assuming that a first event caused a second without further justification is a fallacy variously referred to as false cause, doubtful cause, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, *post hoc*, *post hoc* reasoning, or with the catchphrase "correlation is not causation." Once we look for it, we see it everywhere, including on the news and in reputable academic settings.

One example lies in the way we evaluate the performance of presidents of the United States. Everything that happens during or immediately after their administrations tends to be pinned on them. But presidents aren't all-powerful; they don't cause everything that happens during their presidencies. Similar claims on behalf of state governors are even more absurd. At the 2016 Republican National Convention, Governors Scott Walker and Mike Pence—of Wisconsin and Indiana, respectively—both pointed to record-high employment in their states as vindication of their conservative policies. But some other states were also experiencing record-high employment at the time: California, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Washington. Yes, they were all controlled by Democrats. Maybe there's a separate cause for those strong jobs numbers in differently governed states? Possibly it has something to do with the improving economy and health of the job market in the country as a whole.

Proving that one thing caused another can be tricky. We talk more about various strategies for showing causation in Section 7.5: Causal Arguments.

Phrases for critiquing assumptions

Once we have identified an assumption that we want to question, we can introduce the assumption and explain its weakness with it with phrases like the following:

- _____relies on the idea that _____; however, _____.
- The argument assumes that _____ without providing evidence.
- _____takes for granted that _____, but we may wonder whether this is a justified assumption because_____.
- _____depends on the assumption that_____. Is this always the case? Some might say that _____.
- _____ depends on a belief in _____, which may not be shared by all readers because _____.
- The underlying idea here is that _____; however we must ask ourselves whether _____.
- The implicit assumption is that _____ but some may question whether, in fact, _____.

Attributions

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10.6: Check How Well the Argument Addresses Counterarguments

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Did they overlook a counterargument?

We may have already uncovered counterarguments that were left out when we looked for exceptions to the argument and faulty assumptions. Still, it's worth asking ourselves if there's any other objection the argument should have addressed. We can mention any compelling or popular counterargument in our critique.

Here are three ways to brainstorm counterarguments:

1. **Try out the phrases often used to introduce counterarguments**
   Scan the common phrases used to introduce counterarguments listed in Section 2.6: Finding the Counterarguments. Does a particular phrase suggest any counterarguments that could apply in the case of the argument you are assessing?
2. **Imagine a lively, informal conversation on the topic**
   This can help get our minds going. Instead of the more formal phrase "This way of thinking is completely wrong," why not consider the argument we're assessing and then try out the phrase, "What, are you crazy? You think _____? But haven't you considered_____?"
3. **Take a different perspective**
   Ask ourselves if there is any particular group of people or school of thought likely to object to the argument. What would they say? For example, if we are assessing an argument by a Democratic politician, we can ask ourselves what a Republican might say in response. Or, if we are assessing an argument promoting capitalism, we can ask ourselves what a socialist counterargument might be.



Who would disagree with the argument and why? Photo by Markus Spiske from Pexels, under the Pexels License.

Is the description of the counterargument fair and accurate?

If an argument describes counterarguments, we have to wonder whether it gets them right. Often, a writer may be tempted to summarize the other side in a distorted way, to exaggerate the counterargument in order to make it easier to disprove. This goes by

the name of the **straw man fallacy**. For example, consider these two exaggerated descriptions of political parties' positions:

> - *Democrats want completely open borders.*
> - *Republicans want to kick all immigrants out of America.*

This fallacy involves the misrepresentation of an opponent's viewpoint—an exaggeration or distortion of it that renders it indefensible, something nobody in their right mind would agree with. You make your opponent out to be an extremist, then declare that you don't agree with their made-up position. Thus, you merely *appear* to defeat your opponent: your real opponent doesn't hold the crazy view you imputed to them; instead, you've defeated a distorted version of them, one of your own making, one that is easily dispatched. Instead of taking on the real person, you construct one out of straw, thrash it, and pretend to have achieved victory. It works if your audience doesn't realize what you've done, if they believe that your opponent really holds the crazy view.

If an argument constructs and defeats a straw man, it is really only defeating a made up debate. But this distraction only works if the audience believes the straw man is the real thing. We can detect the distortion by checking the description of the other side against what the other side has actually commonly argued.



A straw man, like an exaggerated version of an argument, is easy to knock down. Photo by Skitterphoto from Pexels, licensed CC0.

Is the rebuttal convincing?

We should remember to ask the same critical questions about the author's response to counterarguments as we do about the main argument itself. Counterarguments and rebuttals are often left to stand on their own. As we assess the argument, we should test these as well to see if they might be incorrect or might need additional support. Is there a better way to disprove the counterargument?



Does the argument offer a credible perspective on any likely objections? Image by Mariana Anatoneag from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Phrases for assessing the handling of counterarguments

Praise for the handling of counterarguments

- The author effectively counters the common view that _____ by arguing that, in fact, _____.
- The writer acknowledges that _____ but explains that this is because _____.
- The argument responds to the _____ critique of their position by noting that _____.

Critique of the handling of counterarguments

- The argument fails to mention the opposing view that _____.
- The author attempts to respond to critics by claiming that _____, but this response is not convincing because _____.

Exercise 10.6.1

Pick an argument on a controversial topic. You might choose something you have recently read for class or an editorial from a major news outlet. Identify at least one possible counterargument that the article does not mention.

Exercise 10.6.2

Pick an argument that mentions a counterargument and use the phrases in this section or phrases of your own to answer these questions:

1. Is the description of the counterargument fair and accurate?
2. Is the rebuttal convincing?

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10.7: Reflect on an Argument's Strengths

Media Alternative

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Why look for strengths if the argument is flawed?

Often in assessing an argument we focus first on the negative as we test the argument for flaws. If we do not uncover any weaknesses as we review the argument's logical structure, use of evidence, and handling of counterarguments, then we can naturally describe those as strengths.

However, even if we do find weaknesses, it's important to recognize any contributions as well. Doing so will show readers that our assessment is fair-minded. An assessment can be precise about what holds up to scrutiny and what doesn't. Even if the argument is fatally flawed, it may still contain some valuable insight or move the conversation forward in another way. We might conclude that an argument is not valid, but still see ways in which this argument can help us get closer to the truth on a particular topic. At the very least, if we see nothing redeeming in the article itself, we can pull a lesson or an insight out of our own experience of assessing it.

The following sections outline some ways we can point to strengths in an argument.



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Praise part of the argument

After we zero in on the weakness, we can highlight whatever parts of the argument proved to be sound. If we are assessing an argument that is developed over the course of one or more pages, there will be many related claims and reasons. The reasoning in one section might be valid even if the next point has us wincing or wanting to rant.

Often, **inductive** arguments might present evidence that is suggestive, intriguing or compelling even if it does not leave us completely convinced of the conclusions the authors draw. For example, an assessment of an argument about UFOs might conclude, "Although X's speculation that UFOs have abducted people seems unjustified given the scant data, their factual recounting of the details of two credible sightings of UFOs does convince us that they are probably real."

Here are some sample phrases for praising a subsection of an argument:

- Although the argument does not succeed in proving that _____, it does help us understand _____.
- Though the evidence X presents does not prove _____, it does provide rich material for further discussion.
- X's conclusion that _____ doesn't seem fully justified, but the evidence does show that _____.
- X makes an important point when they note that _____.

- X's insight into _____ sheds new light on _____.
- X clearly outlines the problem of _____, even though their solution leaves much to be desired.
- This piece does clarify the nature of _____ even though it does not _____.



We may find value in a piece of the argument if not the whole. Image by PIRO4D from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Praise the argument for bringing attention to an issue

Sometimes we see value not in the content of the argument but in the focus it brings to a topic. Perhaps the argument shows why something is urgent or relevant. For example, let's imagine we want to assess a proposal for a law that stops mentally ill people from buying guns. It might say, "This proposal draws attention to the terrifying consequences of the lack of social support for people with mental illness. Yet the decision to focus gun control legislation on this population only stigmatizes it further."

We can praise an argument for drawing attention to something with phrases like these:

- X brings much-needed attention to the issue of _____, which is helpful because_____.
- The essay drives home the need for more focus on _____.
- This piece highlights the urgent situation of _____.

Praise the argument for framing an issue in a useful way

Sometimes an argument's value lies in its particular approach to an issue. We may not agree with all of the reasoning but may feel that the argument frames its topic in a useful way. A fresh way to think about something could lead to other insights in other arguments.

For example, here is an assessment of a book about nurse practitioners that focuses on *how* an argument approaches its subject:

In her book *More than Medicine: Nurse Practitioners and the Problems They Solve for Patients, Health Care Organizations, and the State*, sociologist LaTonya Trotter argues that nurse practitioners often help patients with problems that are not medical at all. Her great contribution to the study of this profession is to frame nurse practitioners not as substitute doctors but as first responders to the crisis of poverty.

We can praise the framing of an argument with phrases like the following:

- X's discussion of _____ provides a new way to think about _____.
- The argument's biggest contribution lies in its framing of _____ as _____.

Praise it for raising an important question

Sometimes an argument points toward something worth considering even if it doesn't convince us completely. It may raise an important question for further discussion or study. For example, let's take this sentence from an assessment of a book about America's mental health crisis: "Sheila Chin asks a crucial question: how can doctors and therapists collaborate to learn more about the links between physical and mental health?"

Here are some ways to praise an argument for pointing out a question:

- X's focus on _____ helps clarify an important question for further exploration: _____?
- The argument points toward the need for further study of _____ to determine _____.
- X's analysis reveals the gaps in our understanding of _____.



By raising a question, an argument can help move a conversation forward. Image by PublicDomainPictures from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Praise it for clarifying a position

Even if we find the reasoning flawed, we may want to give the argument some credit for articulating that reasoning. Laying out the reasons and evidence for a claim at least facilitates critical thinking about the topic. It may lay bare the underpinnings of a common belief and enable more substantive discussion of that belief.

For example, let's take this excerpt from a review of a Heritage Foundation article by Ryan T. Anderson entitled, "Transgender Ideology Is Riddled With Contradictions. Here Are the Big Ones":

> Anderson's attack on transgender identity does clearly represent the reasoning of those who object to recognizing transgender identity. Thus, it provides opportunities for transgender activitsts to clarify their own positions and correct common misconceptions.

We can praise an argument for clarity with phrases like the following:

- This piece clearly articulates the case that _____.
- The argument lays bare the assumptions on which the whole case for _____ is based.
- X has clarified the reasoning that underpins the common opinion that _____.

Exercise 10.7.1

Pick an argument you disagree with. It might be one you have recently read for class or an argument you commonly hear in everyday life. Describe a strength you can genuinely appreciate in it. How does this flawed argument help to move the conversation on the topic forward?

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10.8: Come up with an Overall Assessment

Media Alternative

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Decide what's important

It can be empowering to learn to identify problems in arguments; we may start to see flaws everywhere in the arguments we encounter in everyday life, as well as in college or in professional settings. Finding a problem, however, does not necessarily mean the argument is completely invalid. In the process of summarizing and then questioning all the aspects of an argument, we will probably identify many strengths and/or flaws. These form the starting point for an overall assessment.

Think of the parallel to a Yelp or Amazon review of a product. We might appreciate some aspects of the product and have frustrations with others, but we need to decide how many stars to give it and we need to have a short caption for our whole review. Then in the text of the review, we can explain why we rated the product the way we did in more detail, exploring the particular strengths and weaknesses.



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Even though we don't give stars when we write a paper assessing the strength of an argument, readers will still want an overall sense of how strong or weak we find the argument to be. How serious are any flaws? To write an essay assessing the argument, we have to decide what to emphasize in our thesis statement or topic sentence. Neither of these needs to mention everything we found when assessing the argument; it can focus on one or two highlights.

Sometimes we come away from an argument with a very clear sense of what the most important strengths or weaknesses are. Other times, as we are practicing slow thinking and doing a thorough job of considering the argument from many angles, we will need some strategies to figure out what to emphasize.

Sort the strengths and weaknesses into categories

One place to start is to make a list of the strengths and weaknesses of the argument that emerged as we checked the argument for clarity, evidence, assumptions, exceptions, and counterarguments. Let's take the example of an assessment of Swigart's border argument, "The Weight of the World" which we summarized in Section 3.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments. Let's say that we have applied all the assessment strategies described earlier in this chapter and come up with the following list of strengths and weaknesses.

Sample list of strengths and weaknesses

- Swigart relies on the idea that all Americans consider themselves American first, human second; however, many Americans believe the opposite and maintain that alleviating human suffering is their first moral duty.

- Swigart writes, “An influx of immigration… strains a nation's resources.” This ignores the fact that immigrants bring in at least as much as they take in the form of labor. Entire sectors of industry rely on the labor of immigrants.
- Swigart asserts that illegal immigration endangers national security, but she fails to support the claim, while ignoring evidence that illegal immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than American citizens.
- Swigart gives a distorted version of the argument for supporting refugees when she writes, “It is unjust, impractical, and unrealistic for one nation to solve the problems of so many non-citizens.” No one is arguing that we have to solve all the problems of people who immigrate. Also, the focus in this sentence on the problems of non-citizens distracts us from the fact that immigrants actually solve some problems for American citizens.
- Swigart sees only two extreme options for managing the border, an open border or a closed one, when in fact there are other strategies for maintaining security.
- Swigart assumes that breaking the law is by definition unethical, but she has not considered Martin Luther King Jr.’s contention that, in fact, we are obligated to disobey ordinances that are morally wrong.

Strategies for organizing the list



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As we read the list of strengths and weaknesses, we can try these techniques to help us come up with a much shorter overview:

- Try putting the strengths and weaknesses in order from most important to least important. This may help us decide what to highlight in our thesis.
- Look for something that one or more of the strengths and/or weaknesses have in common. Can we group some of them together? Is there a larger category they fall into? If we can combine two or more under one category, then we only need to mention that category in the thesis rather than listing the individual points.

In the case of the assessment of Swigart’s “The Weight of the World,” we may notice that the first and last points are about ethics and morality. The rest of them critique the evidence Swigart offers about practical considerations of cost and benefit for American citizens.

If the moral critique seems most important to us, we could focus on it in our thesis thus:

> *Thesis: Swigart’s argument on immigration policy is fatally flawed because it does not consider any moral basis for our behavior toward people who are trying to enter the United States. It offers only national self-interest as a motivating factor.*

On the other hand, if the practical issue of costs and benefits seems more important, we might come up with a thesis statement like this:

> *Thesis: Ultimately, Swigart’s argument fails to convince because it is based on faulty evidence that immigration is bad for American citizens. She ignores the ways immigration benefits American citizens economically and results in lower crime rates.*

Phrases for overall assessments

In our overall assessment, we want to make it clear to what extent we agree, disagree, or partially agree with an argument. Here are a few phrases we can use:

Positive assessments

- X offers an important contribution to our understanding of _____ by showing that _____.
- With sound reasoning and evidence, X presents a convincing case for _____.
- All in all, X makes a compelling argument that _____.

Mixed positive and negative assessments

- While X makes an important point about _____, they fail to explain _____.
- Although the argument _____ has some merit, we should question_____.
- X makes a plausible case for _____, but they don't give enough evidence to convince us fully that _____.
- X makes some valid observations on _____, but their conclusion that _____ is wrong because _____.

Negative assessments

- X completely fails to convince us of _____, largely because _____.
- The fatal flaw in X's argument is that _____.
- The problem with X's whole approach is that it ignores something crucial: _____.



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Organizing the assessment essay

Once we have the overview or thesis of our assessment, we will need to decide how and in what order to explain the details. In most cases, an assessment starts with a summary of the argument. We don't assume our readers have also read the argument we are talking about.

If our overall assessment has more than one part, we might consider dedicating a paragraph or more to each part with explanation and support. Strengths and weaknesses from our original list might each be explored in a whole paragraph of an assessment essay. In a shorter assessment, we might spend a sentence or two explaining each point before moving on to the next. For an example of a paragraph-long assessment, see the final paragraph of the Sample Assessment: "Typography and Identity."

Sample assessment essay outline

Let's take one of the sample theses assessing Swigart's "The Weight of the World" and look at one way to organize an essay based on it.

Thesis: Ultimately, Swigart's argument fails to convince because it is based on faulty evidence that immigration is bad for America. She ignores the ways in which immigration benefits American citizens and results in lower crime rates.

- **Paragraph 1:** Summarize and critique Swigart's evidence that undocumented immigrants pose a security risk.
- **Paragraph 2:** Summarize and critique Swigart's evidence that needy immigrants would disproportionately use expensive social services.
- **Paragraph 3:** Point out the need to factor in the labor and tax contributions of immigrants when assessing the financial picture.

The next step: making our own recommendation

Given the strengths and weaknesses we've uncovered, we probably have our own ideas to add about how to build on the writer's points, fix the argument, or offer a different way to look at the issue. There are many ways to follow up on your critique, as we will see in the next chapter on making recommendations in response to an argument.

Exercise 10.8.1

Imagine that you have made the following list of strengths and weaknesses of the argument "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?" that we looked at in Chapters 2 and 3. Come up with at least two groups of points that have something in common. For each group, write a possible thesis statement that combines the points and emphasizes their importance.

- Mills assumes that we should base our moral standards on our feelings, but she does not justify or defend this idea.
- Mills does not explain how it could be possible to ensure security without stopping people who don't have permission from crossing the border.
- Mills' argument depends on finding a way to distinguish between people who genuinely have no other option but to escape their countries of origin and those who simply prefer to live in the U.S.
- Mills does not consider that our personal concern for our families can lead to unethical actions. For example, some people use their influence in unfair ways to do favors for family members.
- Mills mentions a counterargument about security but does not go into any detail about how serious the threats are.
- Mills assumes that an impoverished family would be making a good decision by immigrating to the U.S., when in fact such a decision would involve many dangers and costs.
- Mills assumes that the only way the U.S. could help desperate people in other countries would be by allowing them to immigrate.
- Mills provides no researched, real-life examples of desperate undocumented immigrants and their reasons for immigrating.
- Mills reminds us of something fundamental: our immigration policy should follow the Golden Rule: we must treat others as we would want to be treated.

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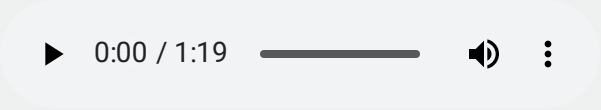
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10.9: Fallacies List

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In this chapter we have discussed logical problems according to categories, but we can also list the traditional terms for these fallacies or illegitimate argumentative strategies. Here each fallacy term links to the section about the logical problem it represents.

- Equivocation
- False dilemma or false choice
- Loaded question
- Circular reasoning or begging the question
- Hasty generalization
- Appeal to ignorance
- Non sequitur
- Red herring
- False analogy
- Slippery slope
- Doubtful cause or false cause or *post hoc ergo propter hoc*
- Straw man
- Euphemism
- Bandwagon or appeal to popularity
- Ad hominem
- Abusive attacks
- Guilt by association
- Circumstantial attacks
- Tu quoque
- Poisoning the well

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10.10: Common Assessment Phrases

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Here are the common phrases discussed in Chapter 4 for writing an assessment of the quality of an argument. Each heading links to the relevant section of the text.

Clarity

Lack of clarity

- What exactly does X mean by _____?
- He seems to imply that _____, but leaves ambiguous whether or not that means_____.
- They fail to clarify what exactly _____ refers to.
- He does not define what he means by _____.
- She explores _____, but fails to articulate a clear message.
- X leaves open the question of _____.
- The argument never specifies whether _____ or _____.
- Readers will wonder if they mean_____ or _____.
- Readers may be confused by the shifting meaning of the term "_____."
- Many will interpret _____ to mean _____, but some might also take it to mean _____.

Praise for clarity

- This piece clearly articulates the case that _____.
- The argument lays bare the assumptions on which the whole case for _____ is based.
- X has clarified the reasoning that underpins the common opinion that _____.

Exceptions

- The argument is based on the idea that _____, but this is not entirely true because _____.
- The reason given is that _____, but the author has not considered the possibility that, in fact, _____.
- The author does not acknowledge that _____ might be the case.
- The argument presents only two possibilities,_____ and _____, when in fact it could be the case that _____
- The question _____ assumes that _____, when, in fact, it could be that_____.

Evidence

Praise

- She convincingly supports this claim by _____.
- They give many examples of _____ to support the idea that _____.
- His evidence of _____ ranges from anecdotes to large-scale academic studies to expert testimonials.
- X refers to credible academic studies of _____ to bolster their argument that _____.
- X refers to a number of credible experts to establish that, in general, _____.

Critique

- X asserts that _____ but does not offer any evidence.
- The argument builds on the premise that _____, but fails to support that premise.

- X offers scant evidence for the claim that _____.
- The argument gives an example to support the claim that _____, but gives no evidence that this example is typical.
- _____ is not enough to show that _____.
- The essay offers only _____ as evidence when it should also point to _____ and _____.
- The argument presents _____ as a reason to believe _____, but this supposed reason is just a rewording of the claim.
- The writer provides no real justification for the idea that _____; to convince us they just repeat that idea with different phrasing.

Assumptions

Critique

- The argument claims that _____ will inevitably lead to _____, but this is far from certain.
- They assume that _____ will set off a chain reaction leading to _____; however this is unlikely because _____.
- _____relies on the idea that _____; however, _____.
- The argument assumes that _____ without providing evidence.
- _____takes for granted that _____, but we may wonder whether this is a justified assumption because_____.
- _____depends on the assumption that_____. Is this always the case? Some might say that _____.
- _____ depends on a belief in _____, which may not be shared by all readers because _____.
- The underlying idea here is that _____; however we must ask ourselves whether _____.
- The implicit assumption is that _____ but some may question whether, in fact, _____.

Praise

- X is correct in their assumption that _____ because _____.
- X rightly assumes that _____.

Counterarguments

Praise

- The author effectively counters the common view that _____ by arguing that, in fact, _____.
- The writer acknowledges that _____ but explains that this is because _____.
- The argument responds to the _____ critique of their position by noting that _____.

Critique

- The argument fails to mention the opposing view that _____.
- The author attempts to respond to critics by claiming that _____, but this response is not convincing because _____.

Strengths

Praise a subsection

- Although the argument does not succeed in proving that _____, it does help us understand _____.
- Though the evidence X presents does not prove _____, it does provide rich material for further discussion.
- X's conclusion that _____ doesn't seem fully justified, but the evidence does show that _____.
- X makes an important point when they note that _____.
- X's insight into _____ sheds new light on _____.
- X clearly outlines the problem of _____, even though their solution leaves much to be desired.
- This piece does clarify the nature of _____ even though it does not _____.

Praise for bringing attention

- X brings much-needed attention to the issue of _____, which is helpful because_____.
- The essay drives home the need for more focus on _____.
- This piece highlights the urgent situation of _____.

Praise the framing

- X's discussion of _____ provides a new way to think about _____.
- The argument's biggest contribution lies in its framing of _____ as _____.

Praise for raising a question

- X's focus on _____ helps clarify an important question for further exploration: _____?
- The argument points toward the need for further study of _____ to determine _____.
- X's analysis reveals the gaps in our understanding of _____.

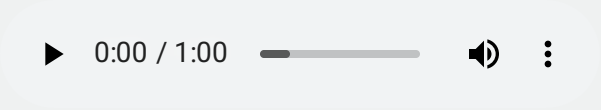
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10.11: Sample Assessment Essays

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (1 min):



1. In "Spread Feminism, Not Germs," student Gizem Gur summarizes and assesses the *Atlantic Magazine* article "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism." Annotations point out how Gur structures the summary and assessment.

    - Sample assessment "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" in PDF with margin notes
    - Sample assessment "Spread Feminism, Not Germs" accessible version with notes in parentheses

2. In "Typography and Identity," Saramanda Swigart summarizes and assesses 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 summary and assessment.

    - Sample assessment "Typography and Identity" in PDF with margin notes
    - Sample assessment "Typography and Identity" accessible version with notes in parentheses

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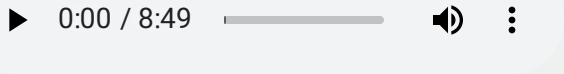
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10.11.1: Sample Assessment- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

Media Alternative

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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

Eng 1A

Anna Mills

Final Summary and Response Essay

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 follow-up 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 an 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 both children and elders. As Lewis mentions, the "looking after" duty is on women's shoulders. 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.)

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10.11.2: Sample Assessment- "Typography and Identity"

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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.

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...gtype=Homepage

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: 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.

11.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

11.2: "Maybe. We need to know_____"- Call for More Information

11.3: "Yes, if…"- Suggest a way to limit the argument

11.4: "Yes, and…"- Suggest a way to add to the argument

11.5: "Instead, I would argue _____"- Suggest a change to the argument

11.6: Common Response Phrases

11.7: Sample Response Essays

11.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

11.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

11.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing



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11.1: The Beauty of Response Writing

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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.


A woman with a cup of coffee in front of a laptop, gazing into space thoughtfully.

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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.



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11.2: “Maybe. We need to know_____”- Call for More Information

Media Alternative

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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 _____.



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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 11.2.1

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.

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11.3: “Yes, if…”- Suggest a way to limit the argument

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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 11.3.1

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.

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11.4: “Yes, and…”- Suggest a way to add to the argument

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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 _____?



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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 _____.



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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 _____.



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Exercise 11.4.1

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.

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11.5: “Instead, I would argue _____”- Suggest a change to the argument

Media Alternative

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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, _____.



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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 _____.



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Exercise 11.5.1

Let's suppose we have come up with the following overall **assessment** of an argument about the pay gap between men and women: "Chang spends too much time blaming employers for the pay gap. She ignores the fact that women often earn less because they are drawn away from their careers by family obligations."

Which of the following **recommendations** would build on this assessment?

- ☐ Maybe she blames employers because of her history as a labor organizer.
- ☐ Rather than blaming employers, we should focus on free public childcare and eldercare programs so that women can focus more on their careers.
- ☐ She should at least acknowledge that many other factors besides employer bias are involved.

Check

Exercise 11.5.2

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.

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11.6: 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 _____.

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11.7: Sample Response Essays

Media Alternative

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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

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11.7.1: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Spread Feminism, Not Germs"

Media Alternative

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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.)

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11.7.2: Annotated Sample Response Essay- "Typography and Identity"

Media Alternative

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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

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11.8: Brainstorming Tool for Response Writing

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12: How Arguments Appeal to Emotion (Pathos)

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the value of emotional appeals in written academic argument
- Identify the ways in which a given argument appeals to emotion through word choice, tone, or powerful examples
- Assess the likely effectiveness of an emotional appeal for a particular audience
- Distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate emotional appeals
- Use legitimate emotional appeals to support their own written arguments.

12.1: The Place of Emotion in Argument

12.2: Word Choice and Connotation

12.3: Powerful Examples

12.4: Tone

12.5: Varying the Emotions

12.6: Fitting the Emotions to the Audience

12.7: Legitimate and Illegitimate Emotional Appeals

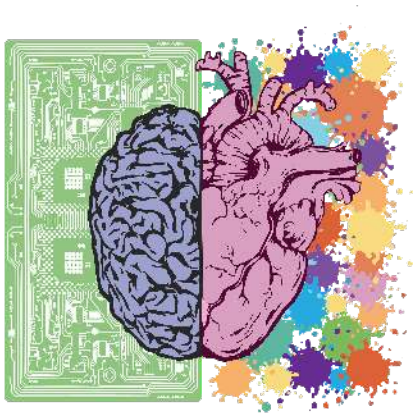


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12.1: The Place of Emotion in Argument

Media Alternative

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We have spent the bulk of this book analyzing arguments' logical structure. We have mapped out arguments and assessed their reasoning, evidence, and assumptions without referring to our feelings about them. And yet we all know that arguments are not won and lost solely on the merits of the ideas. Humans are not robots. As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it in *A Rhetoric of Argument*, emotions are "powerful incentives to belief and action." Philosophers and laypeople have long asked what role emotions should have in shaping our ideas. Is it right for arguments to appeal to emotion, or is it a cheap trick? Should we guard against feeling what an argument asks us to feel? Or should we let emotions play a role in helping us decide whether we agree or not?



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In one oversimplified view, logic is a good way to decide things and listening to emotions is a bad way. We might make this assumption if we tell ourselves or others, "Stop and think. You're getting too emotional." According to this view, no one reasons well under the influence of emotion. Pure ideas are king, and feelings only distort them.

Of course, sometimes emotions do lead us astray. But emotions and logic can work together. Consider Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech. Was it illegitimate for him to ask listeners to feel deeply moved to support racial equality? He famously proclaimed, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." Should listeners have guarded themselves against feeling sympathy for those four children? If we care about things that matter and an argument is about something that matters, then we will and should have feelings about it. King intertwines his logical argument against racism with an appeal to our empathy, tenderness, and sense of justice.

Not all arguments are as intense as that one. Many, such as scientific journal articles, are calm and dispassionate. But all arguments must call on emotion, broadly defined, because they must motivate readers to stay engaged. Even a captive audience could potentially tune out. Every argument needs a reason to exist, a reason why it is important or relevant or just worth reading. It needs to keep us interested, or, failing that, to keep us convinced that reading on will be worthwhile. This reason to exist is sometimes called **exigence**. An argument can create exigence and motivate readers in many ways, but all these ways depend on emotion.

Besides the basic human emotions we might recognize on a toddler's face--anger, joy, sadness, fear, disgust, desire, and surprise--each one with many options for levels of intensity, there are others that we don't always think of as emotion. If we appeal to readers' self-interest, we play on fear and hope and desire for emotional, physical and economic wellbeing. Another kind of emotion is the desire for belonging, for a sense of being seen and validated. We feel pride in a group or sense of identity or social status, so references to that shared identity or status appeal to this sense of belonging. Our motivation to uphold our most precious values is bound up in deep feeling.

Another form of emotion present in the most seemingly objective arguments is curiosity. This is often combined with an appeal to a sense of pride in our intellectual capacity. Academic journal articles and popular newspaper and magazine articles and nonfiction books must all appeal to readers' curiosity about the world and its workings and surprises to encourage them to keep reading. An argument may implicitly invite us to enjoy learning and discovery. It can offer a sense of relief, comfort, and pleasure in ideas laid out clearly in an ordered fashion.



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Arguments can call on emotions in support of claims, but they can also make shaping readers' emotions their primary purpose. An argument may set out to define or change how a reader feels about something. Or, it may set out to reinforce emotions and amplify them. A eulogy, for example, is a speech that praises a person who has passed away, a person usually already known to the audience. It serves to help people feel more intensely what they already believe about the value of the person's life.

In this chapter, we will explore how writers use examples, word choice, and tone to affect readers' feelings. We will look at how writers can vary their emotional appeals in the course of an argument and adapt them to specific audiences. Finally, we will consider how to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate emotional appeals, between those that fit the logic of the argument and those that stray from it.

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12.2: Word Choice and Connotation

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In previous chapters, we considered argument in terms of logic. We have asked ourselves if claims, reasons, and assumptions are correct in what they assert. Now we will look at how writers choose words not only to convey ideas but to shape readers' emotional experience and subconscious reactions.



The dreamy, glowing colored sparkles around the word "dream" express the sense of wonder and vague possibility associated with the word.
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Connotation refers to the emotions, social and cultural implications, and related concepts that most people associate with a word. Some connotations are obvious: anyone would prefer be called "assertive" rather than "pushy" for demanding something they consider to be their right. Other connotations are more subtle. Consider the difference between the feelings associated with the words "change" and "transform." "Transform" has connotations of visionary change for the better. If we hear that "the new college president has transformed the admissions process" we are more likely to feel hopeful, perhaps impressed, without knowing anything at all about the nature of the changes. If we hear simply that "the new college president has changed the admissions process," we will probably feel more skeptical about these changes and what their positive and negative impacts may be.

Consider what different feelings about journalists come across in the following two sentences:

> - *The media were swarming around the pileup on the expressway to capture every conceivable injury for the evening news.*
> - *The journalists were on the scene at the expressway crash to document the incident for the evening news.*

The first sentence gives us a sense of media reporting that is inappropriately aggressive through the words "swarm" and "capture." In the second sentence, on the other hand, "were on the scene" and "document" imply that the journalists are neutral, diligent, and professional.

If something in an argument is likely to set the reader against the argument, the writer can try to soften that reaction by choosing the most positive words available to fit the meaning. If the writer wants to intensify feelings of outrage, tragedy, or absurdity around a phenomenon that readers might otherwise dismiss as ordinary, the writer will need to think of an unfamiliar and dramatic way to describe that phenomenon.

The border argument we analyzed in Chapters 2 and 3 offers many examples of emotional word choice. In the opening paragraph, the author starts out by referring to "illegal immigration," acknowledging the familiar, commonly used phrase in the question "Is illegal immigration actually wrong?" However, she quickly shifts to words with gentler connotations when she reframes the

question as, “Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?” This is the emotional shift she is encouraging readers to make--away from harsh judgment and toward a clear-eyed understanding. As she expands her exploration of the position of the undocumented in the next paragraph, she describes them in sympathetic terms with the following phrases: “people who are driven by need and good intentions,” “raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence,” “under desperate circumstances.” The connotations and emotional appeal are very much the same as those in the poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus, 1883. Lady Liberty talks about immigrants in words full of pathos and hope:

> *Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*
> *Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,*
> *I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*



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Practice Exercise 12.2.1

Write down the connotations of each of the following words used to refer to immigrants:

- undocumented immigrants
- refugees
- asylum-seekers
- Dreamers
- illegal immigrants
- illegal aliens
-

Decide when or if you would use each term in discussions of current U.S. policy.

Practice Exercise 12.2.2

1. Rank the words below from most negative to neutral to most positive. What are the connotations of each one? In what kind of situation would it be appropriate to use each one?
    - riot
    - demonstration
    - protest
    - rally
    - uprising
    - insurrection
    - unrest
    - march
    - revolt

- movement

2. Then, discuss the different feelings and images called up by the following two sentences:
    1. Rioters flooded downtown streets on Monday afternoon.
    2. Protestors marched through the city.
3. Think of a situation in which there were public demonstrations or unrest. Describe what happened, choosing your words to shape readers' feelings and associations.

Practice Exercise 12.2.3

Working in a pair or small group, list the following groups of words from least to most positive, using your knowledge of connotation to guide you. Note where you agree or disagree on a word's connotation. What cultural, socio-economic, or personal factors possibly caused your group's disagreements or lack thereof?

- thin, fit, lanky, skinny, gaunt, slender
- aggressive, assertive, domineering, dynamic, pushy
- shrewd, nerdy, bright, brilliant, cunning, smart, intelligent

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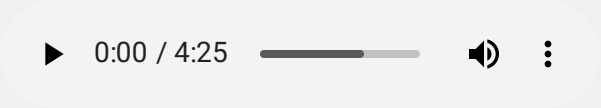
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12.3: Powerful Examples

Media Alternative

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Emotional language can certainly affect readers, but even the most fervent appeals to values and sympathies may feel too abstract without examples. To feel connected to an argument, readers need to be able to imagine what it means in some particular case. Writers can bring an example to life by describing a scene, developing a character, or building suspense and ending with a dramatic resolution.

The sample border argument we have referenced invites readers to imagine a hypothetical example where they themselves are desperately seeking to protect a child and bring them into the United States. The argument could well be expanded by adding the story of a real parent and child. One book, *Solito/Solita: Crossing Borders with Youth Refugees from Central America*, edited by Steven Mayers and Jonathan Freedman, dedicates itself to first-person stories of asylum seekers. One of these is “Rosa, a Salvadoran mother fighting to save her life as well as her daughter’s after death squads threatened her family. Together they trekked through the jungles on the border between Guatemala and Mexico, where masked men assaulted them.” Another is "Adrian, from Guatemala City, whose mother was shot to death before his eyes. He refused to join a gang, rode across Mexico atop cargo trains, crossed the US border as a minor, and was handcuffed and thrown into ICE detention on his eighteenth birthday." The publisher, *Voice of Witness*, sees powerful individual stories as its best tool to affect social change. Its mission statement declares, “Voice of Witness (VOW) advances human rights by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice...Our work is driven by the transformative power of the story, and by a strong belief that an understanding of crucial issues is incomplete without deep listening and learning from people who have experienced injustice firsthand.”

Of course, an argument calling for more controls on immigration would choose a wholly different kind of story. The following excerpt from President Trump’s speech accepting the nomination for the presidency in 2016 focuses on a young woman killed by an immigrant: “They are being released by the tens of thousands into our communities with no regard for the impact on public safety or resources. One such border-crosser was released and made his way to Nebraska. There, he ended the life of an innocent young girl named Sarah Root. She was 21 years old, and was killed the day after graduating from college with a 4.0 Grade Point Average. Her killer was then released a second time, and he is now a fugitive from the law. I’ve met Sarah’s beautiful family. But to [the Obama] Administration, their amazing daughter was just one more American life that wasn’t worth protecting. One more child to sacrifice on the altar of open borders.”

Obviously, there are as many stories to choose from as there are immigrants. If a story serves as an illustration of a general point, we have to ask how representative it is. Is it presented as typical? If so, is there evidence to show its **typicality**? Arguments can complement specific examples with statistics to show typicality.

Even if an example represents a common experience, we need to look carefully at how it is used. Does the story promote harmful stereotypes while neglecting accounts that are just as common or more common and that contradict those stereotypes?

Practice Exercise 12.3.1

Review some local headlines on news sites like NPR, Fox News, ABC, or any other news site you frequently visit, and find an article or video that uses a powerful example to illustrate a point. Then, evaluate the powerful example, addressing the following questions:

- What point does the powerful example illustrate?
- What types of emotions does the example play on? How will these emotions affect the reader's opinion on an issue discussed in the piece?
- Is the powerful example presented as typical? If so, is there evidence to show its typicality?

- Does the powerful example promote harmful stereotypes? How so, or why not?

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12.4: Tone

Media Alternative

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What is tone?

Tone refers to the overall emotional attitude of the argument. We know intuitively what “tone of voice” means when we’re describing a conversation. If we hear a person speaking and ask ourselves the following questions, we will usually be able to describe the tone:

- What emotions do the sound of the voice convey?
- What expression do we see or imagine on the speaker's face as they make the argument?



This performer conveys confidence, friendliness, and humor through her smile and posture.
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When we read, we lack the visual and auditory clues, but we still intuitively sense the writer's attitude. Tone comes across through emotional word choice and choice of examples, as we have seen in 8.2: Word Choice and Connotation and 8.3: Powerful Examples, but also in other ways, both subtle and overt. These include sentence structure, use of questions, emphasis, and direct declarations of feeling. All of these contribute to an overall pattern.

For example, let's look at the border argument we analyzed in Chapters 2 and 3. The third paragraph reads as follows:

> I don’t have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.

In 8.2: Word Choice and Connotation, we noted that words like "driven by need" and "good intentions" evoke feelings of compassion and sympathy. In describing the tone, however, we could go further to talk about the writer's purpose and attitude. Their admissions of uncertainty in the first sentence indicate an attitude of humility and openness, so we could describe the tone as "humble." In the second sentence, the word "surely" suggests urgency and an appeal to common sense. The contrast between the orderly, neutral phrase "regulate the border" and the more aggressive-sounding "criminalizing people" suggests that one option is decent and the other cruel. The feelings of compassion and sympathy evoked by people's "need" and "good intentions" reinforce

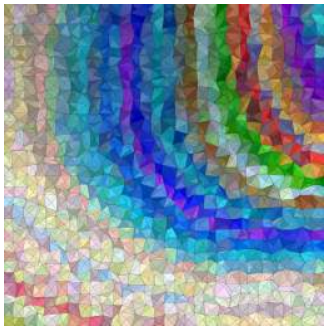
the sense of urgency and appeal to decency. The combination of all of this suggests that the writer cares very much about the ethics of what they are discussing because innocent people's wellbeing is at stake. We could describe the tone, then, as "earnest," "urgent," or "impassioned."

How can we identify a writer's tone?

If we want to describe the tone of an argument, we can ask ourselves these general questions:

- How does the writer feel about the topic of the argument?
- How does the writer feel about their own knowledge of the topic?
- What is the writer's attitude toward the reader?

If we are not sure how to answer or we want more insight, we can consider specific aspects of the writer's attitude, such as the degree of respect, seriousness, or certainty they feel. To describe the tone very precisely, we will need to use multiple words. We can ask ourselves about each of the aspects of tone listed in the table below and consider which of the accompanying tone words best describe the argument we are analyzing. Note that words clustered together are in most cases not synonyms. They convey shades of meaning, so they are worth looking up in an online dictionary to confirm their connotations before using them.



Like colors grouped next to similar colors, related tone words may describe similar but slightly different tones. Image by David Zydd from Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

Words to describe a writer's tone

	Aspect of the writer's attitude	Tone words	Contrasting tone words
.	**Degree of seriousness**	conversational, flippant, glib, childish, frivolous, facetious, humorous, sarcastic, comic, satiric, amused, ironic, mocking, irreverent, casual, lighthearted, playful, cheerful, ridiculous, giddy, dreamy	vs. serious, earnest, solemn, grave, intense, impassioned, prayerful, reverent, idealistic
.	**Degree of respect**	dismissive, patronizing, condescending, arrogant, haughty, chauvinistic, macho, domineering	vs. humble, respectful, reverent, intimidated, obsequious, submissive, complimentary, flattering, simpering
.	**Degree of formality**	irreverent, informal, coarse, vulgar, casual, conversational, improvisational, exploratory	vs. formal, businesslike, professional, professorial, esoteric, clinical
.	**Degree of self-regard**	condescending, arrogant, patronizing, proud, majestic, haughty, obnoxious	vs. modest, humble, self-effacing, self-deprecating, down-to-earth
.	**Degree of goodwill toward others**	benevolent, kind, loving, affectionate, amiable, genial, agreeable, friendly, jovial, encouraging, warm	vs. mean-spirited, mean, malicious, spiteful, cruel, hateful, hating, vengeful
.	**Degree of anxiety**	agitated, excited, sensational, alarmed, nervous, anxious, obsessive, worried, fearful, frightened, paranoid, frantic, frazzled, desperate, dramatic, disturbed, perturbed	vs. calm, tranquil, serene, unworried, contemplative, meditative, reflective, thoughtful
.	**Degree of hesitation**	cautious, hesitating, reticent, evasive	vs. bold, audacious, straightforward, direct, outspoken, authoritative
.	**Degree of certainty**	conflicted, uncertain, reluctant, contradictory, confused, baffled, ambivalent, uneasy, apologetic, regretful, pensive	vs. confident, sure, definite, unapologetic, righteous, self-righteous, determined, persuasive, hypnotic
.	**Degree of interest in the topic**	wondering, curious, inquisitive, fascinated	vs. bored, apathetic, removed, indifferent, wooden, world-weary, dull, bland, banal, blasé
.	**Degree of surprise**	unbelieving, incredulous, surprised, innocent, naive, disbelieving	vs. knowing, jaded, nonplussed, weary
.	**Degree of distance**	intimate, impassioned, passionate, ardent, personal	vs. formal, impersonal, objective, neutral, journalistic, informative, professional, businesslike, intellectual, detached, numb, distant, disinterested
.	**Degree of openness**	open, direct, forthright, candid	vs. secretive, sneaky, cagey, sly
.	**Degree of approval**	elated, enthusiastic, ecstatic, celebratory, euphoric, joyous, jubilant, zestful, exuberant, blissful, happy, delighted, awestruck, appreciative, approving	vs. disapproving, disappointed, concerned, alarmed, critical, caustic, appalled
.	**Degree of warmth toward the audience**	warm, cordial, friendly, flirtatious, seductive	vs. cold, forbidding, aloof, impersonal
.	**Degree of connection to**	concerned, compassionate, tender, consoling,	vs. apathetic, indifferent, detached, aloof,

Aspect of the writer's attitude	Tone words	Contrasting tone words
suffering	comforting, sympathetic, empathetic	callous
Desire to communicate	talkative, eager	vs. laconic, taciturn, reluctant
Pace	abrupt, hurried, hasty	vs. patient, gradual, unhurried, lethargic, languid, pensive, scrupulous
Attitude to the future	despairing, tragic, defeated, discouraged, resigned, overwhelmed, disheartened, dismal, foreboding, dejected, depressed, bitter, bleak, bewildered, pessimistic, distressed, cynical, pathetic, melancholy, nostalgic, saddened, miserable, morbid, morose, mournful, sorrowful, somber, lamenting, grave, grim	vs. hopeful, sanguine, optimistic, content, excited, enthusiastic
Attitude to another's success	envious, jealous	vs. admiring, congratulatory, celebratory, enthusiastic
Attitude to another's failing	critical, annoyed, angry, frustrated, impatient, disappointed, resentful, hurt, aggravated, outraged, appalled, indignant, disgusted, impotent, vindictive, vengeful, furious	vs. forgiving, indulgent, understanding, accepting, tolerant
Attitude to one's own failing	apologetic, remorseful, repentant, disgusted, self-critical	vs. defensive, self-indulgent, complacent
Attitude to powerful forces like spirit, country, religion	patriotic, pious, religious, reverent, mystical, spiritual, obedient	vs. irreverent, scoffing, impious, skeptical



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Phrases for analyzing tone

If the tone is constant

- X takes a _____ tone in this piece.
- X's _____ attitude come across in phrases like "_____."
- The tone of the argument is _____.
- The _____ tone suggests that _____.
- X's choice of words like "_____" to describe _____ suggests their _____ attitude.
- X's _____ tone reflects their attitude to _____.

If the tone shifts in the course of the argument

- Early on, X adopts a _____ tone, but later they seem more _____.
- Although at first, the tone is _____, X shifts to a more _____ tone when _____.
- X takes a _____ attitude to _____, but when it comes to _____, X is more _____.
- X's _____ tone in the section on _____ contrasts with their more _____ attitude to _____.

Practice Exercise 12.4.1

Write three one-sentence versions of the same argument, each with a different tone. Label each version with a tone word that describes it precisely.

Practice Exercise 12.4.2

Choose an argument you have read recently and describe its tone. Choose a sample sentence from the argument in which the tone comes across clearly and explain which words expressed that tone.

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12.5: Varying the Emotions

Media Alternative

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As we analyze emotion and tone, we won't always find one description that fits the entirety of the argument. The writer may be shifting tone and emotional appeal in subtle or dramatic ways either to match shifts in the ideas or to create variety. If we think of argument in terms of relationship and intimate conversation, this idea becomes clearer. One style when we talk to another person is to stick with one tone and repeat an emotional appeal over and over. This can be successful in reinforcing the message and perhaps wearing down resistance, but it can also be offputting. It could even seem robotic, unresponsive to the reader's needs. A more flexible, varied tone with moments of greater and lesser intensity can provide contrast and relief and thus seem more sensitive to the audience. Thus, sometimes even in serious, earnest arguments, it can help keep readers from tuning out if the writer lightens the tone or takes a step back.

We think of Shakespearean drama as exalted high culture, but Shakespeare famously wrote scenes of terrible puns, sex jokes, and plenty of slapstick into his most intense tragedies to keep the audience from pelting actors with rotten tomatoes. Similarly, a writer may choose to offer some relief or distraction after an impassioned appeal through a moment of humor or a neutral statement.



Like music, an argument can shift in tone and pacing to engage listeners.
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We can think of variety in emotional appeal as similar to the way music varies in volume and pacing. Sometimes a piece of music keeps the same volume and pace throughout, but more often the composer adds notes to the musician on when to boom or hush, hurry or draw out the notes. Often the music gets faster and louder toward the end, in a crescendo of intensity. This is one traditional way of ending an argument: on what we sometimes call a "ringing note" meant to inspire and fire up readers to agree, remember, or take action.

Practice Exercise 12.5.1

Choose a Ted talk that includes a transcript, such as Jamila Lysicott's "3 ways to speak English." Watch the talk and then read the transcript, making notes on the tone in the margins. Choose one place where the tone shifts and reflect on why the writer chose to shift there.

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12.6: Fitting the Emotions to the Audience

Media Alternative

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An argument's success will depend not just on how well the writer expresses emotion but on how well the writer gauges the reader's likely response. Values, cultural beliefs, and life experiences shape our emotional reactions. While some appeals to our feelings, such as the reference to parents' desire to protect their children, may be more universal, others will be more audience specific. Different readers can have opposite emotional reactions to the same sentence. When the writer misjudges readers' values, assumptions or experiences, an emotional appeal may fall flat or may hurt the argument instead of helping. An obvious example is a racist or sexist comment.



The speaker here seems attentive to the emotional reactions of her audience.
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In the case of the border argument, the intended audience seems to be Americans who are citizens or legal residents. What if the writer knew more about how the person's life experience might relate to the issue of illegal immigration? For example, how might Anna Mills shape the argument and appeal to emotions differently if she knew the reader was one of the following?

- A person whose parents are undocumented
- A person who waited seven years for a visa to come to the U.S.
- A person who has been raised to be afraid of Mexican immigrants

In the case of the person whose parents are undocumented, the writer might actually spend less time encouraging readers to feel empathy. She could choose not to waste time "preaching to the choir" and instead focus on policy suggestions.

In the case of the person who waited for the visa, she might need to find a way to overcome some resentment against people who came to America without waiting so long.

In the case of the person raised to be afraid of Mexican immigrants, she might focus on specific immigrant stories so the reader would begin to have some vivid, moving stories of real people in their minds rather than racist stereotypes.

Practice Exercise 12.6.1

For each argument, consider how you would persuade the two different audiences without misleading them.

Here's a sample claim: "Police should wear body cameras."

We could write this version for an audience of police: "Body cameras seem unnecessary, and they make moving around more difficult, but hard-working police should relish the opportunity to make their actions viewable. It shows integrity and honesty."

In contrast, Black Lives Matter protesters would likely respond better to the following version: "Body cameras will finally hold police accountable for their cruel, untenable actions against innocent civilians; these cameras will bring us justice!"

1. Argument: We should lower the drinking age to sixteen.
    a. Young adults who want to party.
    b. Parents of teenagers.
2. Argument: The U.S. should ban fossil fuels in favor of green renewable energy.
    a. Coal miners from Kentucky.
    b. Liberal artists from New York City.

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12.7: Legitimate and Illegitimate Emotional Appeals

Media Alternative

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We made the case at the beginning of this chapter that emotion is a legitimate part of argument. But there is a reason emotional appeals have a dubious reputation: they are often abused. If a writer knows there is a problem with the logic, they may use an emotional appeal to distract from the problem. Or, a writer may create a problem with the logic, knowingly or unknowingly, because they cannot resist including a particular strong emotional appeal. In Chapter 4, we looked at fallacies, or problems with arguments' logic. Many of the fallacies we have already looked at are so common because the illogical form of the argument makes a powerful appeal. The writer chose the faulty reasoning because they thought it would affect readers emotionally. Arguments that focus on a "red herring," for example, distract from the real issue to focus on something juicier. A straw man argument offers a distorted version of the other side to make the other side seem frighteningly extreme.

To be legitimate, emotional appeals need to be associated with logical reasoning. Otherwise, they are an unfair tactic. The emotions should be attached to ideas that logically support the argument. Writers are responsible for thinking through their intuitive appeals to emotion to make sure that they are consistent with their claims.



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Emotional appeals should not mislead readers about the true nature or the true gravity of an issue. If an argument uses a mild word to describe something horrific, that means the argument can't connect its emotional appeal to any logical justification. A **euphemism** is a substitute neutral-sounding word used to forestall negative reactions. For example, calling a Nazi concentration camp like Auschwitz a "detention center" would certainly be an unjustifiable euphemism**.** Given the amount of evidence about what went on at Auschwitz, using the phrase "Death Camp" would be a legitimate emotional appeal.

A more controversial question is what to call the places where people are detained if they are caught trying to cross the U.S. border without permission. An argument calling U.S. Customs and Border Patrol detention centers to "concentration camps" would need to justify its comparison by arguing for significant similarities. Otherwise, critics would claim that the comparison was a cheap shot intended to make people horrified by detention centers without good reason. Even if the argument simply called the centers "camps," the word would still bring to mind Nazi concentration camps and also the Japanese internment camps created by our own government during World War II. The word "camp," when referring to a place where people are held against their will, has inevitable overtones of racism and genocide. An argument should only choose a word with connotations that it can stand by and explain.

A question like this about whether an emotional appeal is legitimate or not often is often at the heart of any disagreement or productive discussion of the argument. If we agree that the comparison to concentration camps is legitimate, we will certainly agree that the detention centers, as they are currently organized, should be done away with.

Practice Exercise 12.7.1

Read each argument below and describe the emotional appeal it makes. Do you think this appeal is legitimate or illegitimate in relation to the argument? Why? Do you personally find it compelling?

1. “Please, even if you don’t feel sick, you may be transmitting this disease,” he said. “Please, please, practice common sense, common decency. Protect yourself, but also protect others. … What more evidence do we need?”-- California Governer Gavin Newsom at a press conference, June 26, 2020
2. “Refusing to wear a mask is no more a “personal choice” than is drinking all evening and then stumbling into your car and heading down the road. In a time of plague, shunning a face mask is like driving drunk, putting everyone in your path in danger.” -- “Refusing to wear a mask is like driving drunk” by Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times* Op-Ed, July 1, 2020
3. “The irony is that these men think they're manifesting the ideal of the rugged, individualistic American, when their refusal [to wear a mask] really traces in part to a fear of what other people will think about them. Drunk on a toxic brew of self-interest and that masculine ideology, they mistake their refusal to protect themselves and others as a mark of character when instead, it's a mark on their characters.”-- “The condoms of the face: why some men refuse to wear masks” by Emily Willingham, *Scientific American*, June 29, 2020
4. “While mask mandates provide a comfort level that is needed to get people back to work and resume economic activity, they may also induce a false sense of security. In early April, as the Trump administration was debating whether to change its guidance on masks, Deborah Birx of the White House virus task force warned that “we don’t want people to get an artificial sense of protection because they’re behind a mask” or “send a signal that we think a mask is equivalent” to social distancing and good hygiene...Masks have benefits, but moralism can be harmful to public health.” -Allysia Finley, “The Hidden Danger of Masks,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2020
5. ““The face-covering directive is the definition of government overreach,” said Aaron Withe, national director of the Freedom Foundation, a national public policy organization based in Olympia, Wash. “If people choose to wear a mask, that’s their choice. But Inslee is going after otherwise law-abiding citizens when there are rioters destroying Washington cities such as Seattle with no punishment in sight.” The Washingtonians represented by the Freedom Foundation argue that by requiring them to wear face masks the state is essentially compelling them to support junk science in violation of their freedom of conscience, which is prohibited by the state constitution.” --Freedom Foundation press release, July 7, 2020
6. “Think of it like the push for condom use during the AIDS epidemic, when public service announcements noted that when you have sex with someone, you’re having sex with every person that person has slept with. It’s the same idea, though transmission of the coronavirus is far easier. If you’re unprotected (mask-less) around someone, you’re effectively around anyone that person has been near. You have to assume the worst….Please put on a mask. Practice safe living. Anything less is selfish. Anything less should be straight-up embarrassing.” -- “Not wearing a mask is as dumb as not wearing a condom” by Rex Huppke, *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 2020

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: How Arguments Establish Trust and Connection (Ethos)

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the value of building trust and connection in a written academic argument
- Evaluate the effectiveness and legitimacy of an argument's appeals to trust and connection
- Use effective, legitimate strategies for building trust and connection in written arguments.

13.1: An Argument Implies a Relationship

13.2: Authority

13.3: Distance and Intimacy

13.4: Shared Sense of Identity

13.5: Respect and Goodwill

13.6: Moral Character

13.7: Combining Different Approaches to Trust and Connection

13.8: Reaching a Hostile Audience (Rogerian Argument)

13.9: Faulty Appeals to Trust



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13.1: An Argument Implies a Relationship

Media Alternative

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As we saw in Chapter 8, arguments attempt to affect our emotions, but their success depends on how well writers have gauged their readers' values and cultural associations. Now we can back up and look at readers' responses through a different lens: that of trust. Trust provides an underlying foundation for the success of emotional and logical appeals. If we don't have a certain degree of trust in the writer, we will be less willing to let an argument affect us. We may not allow even a skillfully worded emotional appeal to move us, and we may not be ready to agree even with a well-supported claim.



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How does a writer build trust if they never come face to face with the reader? This chapter will look at various approaches to creating trust in written argument, including establishing the writer's authority on the subject, convincing readers of the writer's moral character, showing respect and goodwill, and creating a sense of closeness or shared identity. To understand each of these approaches to trust, it will help to think of an argument not as words blared through a loudspeaker into the void, but as an offering within the context of a relationship. Even as the writer explains their ideas, they are also consciously or unconsciously implying a particular relation between reader and writer.

What do I mean by relationship here? Each relationship implies expected ways people interact, and it often involves a shared identity, whether a family connection, an ethnic similarity, a job they need to complete together, or a situation they are concerned in. A relationship can be casual or formal, intimate or distanced. The writer draws the reader close, beckons the reader to their side, or holds the reader at arm's length. They choose a style typical of the role they imagine, whether of a friend, confidante, preacher, doctor, or expert. The way they address us affects how we warm to their words. When we analyze an argument, we can ask ourselves what kind of roles and interactions the words imply. Is the writer talking to us as if we were buddies? As if we were students in a lecture hall? As if we were spiritual followers? As if we were professional colleagues working together? Or as if we were the jury at a trial?



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Focusing on trust and relationship allows us to see how nuanced argument can be and how varied its effects on different readers. An argument is not an equation. Not only does it affect our emotions, but, like a movie, a song, a novel, or a poem, it invites us into a lived experience. If we accept, we grapple with ideas in an imagined encounter with another human being.

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13.2: Authority

Media Alternative

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One kind of relationship of trust is between a person who is an authority on the subject and a person who is less of an authority. The writer relates to us as a teacher and we defer to their greater knowledge. So the most common and ready way to establish trust is to make sure readers know what makes the writer an authority on the subject at hand. Here are some messages that writers send, either explicitly or implicitly, to readers about why they should be regarded as authorities. This kind of trust depends on the qualifications of the writer rather than on the style of writing. It is sometimes called **extrinsic ethos**.

"I am a recognized expert"

How can a writer convince us that they are an expert on a topic? In general, they need to show that experts in their field have recognized some level of competence or leadership in them. Different topics require different forms of expertise. If the topic fits within a particular academic field, the writer can refer to their degree and to the college, university, or think tank where they do research. The reputation of the institution they are affiliated with will affect their reputation as an expert. Readers will expect a higher level of expertise from a Yale professor, for example, then from a state college professor. Sometimes specific departments develop reputations for excellence, however. For example, those familiar with the field will know that the University of Michigan has a top sociology department.

Any work the person has produced can also serve as evidence. Publishing a book on a topic lends credibility, but if the writer can point to positive reviews of the book, robust sales, and examples where other experts have cited the book, so much the better. Newspaper and magazine articles will gain credibility from the reputation of the newspaper or magazine. We can assume that the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have high standards and make sure that their articles represent expert knowledge.

If the topic requires professional expertise, the writer will want to point to job experience, title, role in any professional associations, and any professional awards or certifications. For example, a lawyer must pass a bar examination to be allowed to practice law, so identifying a person as a lawyer implies a certain level of expertise. If the lawyer works for a firm that is well known in its specific area of law, naming that firm will boost the lawyer's credibility further. Of course, a partner at a prestigious firm will have much more credibility than an intern.



"Eastern Sociological Association 2020 Philadelphia" by Beverly Yuen Thompson on Flickr is licensed CC BY-NC 2.0.

If the writer has a public reputation as an expert above and beyond the items that could be listed on a resume, they can provide evidence of that reputation in the form of praise from other experts, number of times their work has been cited, radio or television shows where they have been interviewed, or any other sign of public recognition of expertise.

If we want to prove or assess the level of expertise of a writer, we may want to review the following list:

- Degrees earned

- Degrees earned
- Institutional affiliation
- Job title
- Job rank
- Job experience
- Awards
- Publications
- Public reputation

To be relevant, of course, all of these need to be related to the topic of the argument at hand. Dr. Phil McGraw, for example, has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has focused his career on mental health. He is not medically trained. Readers should only appeal to him as an expert on psychological matters.

"I have personal experience"

We are all authorities on our own experiences, feelings, and values. If something in our experience is relevant to our topic, we can speak with authority even without expertise. Using "I," also called speaking in the first person, can allow a writer to speak honestly and with conviction to further an argument. Maybe a story from our lives illustrates a larger point we want to make. Or maybe an emotional reaction to something becomes part of our argument. The sample argument about immigration which we analyzed earlier describes what the writer herself would do if she were in a desperate situation in another country and needed to flee in order to protect her children. Even though she has no experience of immigration, she can be considered an authority on her own sense of morality. Thus, the claim that she would feel justified in crossing illegally is hard to refute. From this starting point, she launches into a broader argument, claiming that others would feel the same way and that therefore, Americans need to rethink how they criminalize undocumented immigrants.

Sometimes the authority of personal experience is combined with the authority of power. This allows the CEO of a company or the director of a nonprofit or the president of a country to use the pronoun "we" to speak for their group. Thus, David Drummond, Google's senior vice-president for corporate development and chief legal officer, can title an opinion piece, "Google: We will bring books back to life." In the same *Guardian* opinion piece published in February, 2010, he supports a legal settlement to make copyrighted books available online, arguing that, "We at Google could make that wealth of knowledge available at a click. And authors would earn too."

“I’ve done my research”

When a writer has no particular qualification in relation to the subject, they can still establish a certain degree of authority by citing authoritative sources. The essence of a journalist or a science writer's job, for example, is to find and present authoritative sources. In academic research papers, we want readers to see that we have done due diligence and can represent a range of authorities on the subject. We can build credibility by describing for readers what kind of expertise each source has. MLA and APA in-text citations and Works Cited pages are designed to help us showcase our authoritative sources and allow readers to check up on them.

Practice Exercise 13.2.1

Use a popular search engine like Google to find an article about a controversial topic. Then, investigate the source of the information, such as the author, organization, or institution that published it. Consider the following questions:

- Is the source of information an authority in the topic they discuss?
- Where does the source gain their authority (i.e. by being recognized experts, by having relevant personal experience, or by doing research)?

Practice Exercise 13.2.2

Do a quick brainstorm about your life’s experiences, education, and personal interests. Then, with a pair or small group, describe some areas you have authority in, and explain if you got that authority by being a recognized expert, by having relevant personal experience, or by doing research.

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13.3: Distance and Intimacy

Media Alternative

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Trust through Distance and Formality

Often when we think of an "authoritative style," we think of someone who speaks impersonally and with confidence, describing how some aspect of reality works without involving their own or the reader with "I," "you" or "we." This approach to earning the reader's trust is all about setting aside the personal to pursue objective, neutral, unbiased pronouncements. It requires the writer to step back from their own personality and feelings to ally their speech with impersonal truth.

A formal style indicates that the writer takes seriously the institution they are speaking for and the rigorous expectations of argument. Traditionally, academic writing is expected to be relatively formal and distanced.

Think of a judge in black robes presiding over a courtroom. The judge is there as an official, not a private individual, and what they say is understood to represent the rule of law, not their personal opinion. When they speak, they use formal language and usually describe events impersonally. As a representative of the law, they represent the government and the interests of the people as a whole.



"Hennepin County Judge Tanya Bransford" by Tony Webster on Flickr, licensed CC BY-NC 2.0.

Think also of a professor asked to speak on a news program about their area of expertise. Despite a climate scientist's degrees and institutional affiliation, we may not trust their personal musings about the future of humanity while flying over melting Greenland ice. Their impersonal style of speech and their focus on facts about climate, reassure us that what they tell us is unbiased, objective, neutral, and vested with all the authority of academic rigor. If they use "we" it will be to refer to their academic colleagues, as in "As climate scientists, we look at overall trends rather than specific snowstorms or heat waves." We will expect the scientist to speak in definite, precise language and to speak with a certain dignity and seriousness.

Formality and distance have their disadvantages as well as their advantages. They can make the argument seem objective and solid, but they can also alienate the reader. After all, distance means we are being pushed away. Our trust in a formal argument depends on our trust in the institutions it represents, like the government or academia. The reader may be disillusioned with these institutions or may never have trusted them in the first place. The reader may not believe that the topic calls for neutrality. We may wonder, too, what personal opinions and experiences and feelings the writer is hiding behind a mask of neutrality.

Trust through Intimacy and Informality

Over the last few decades, academia has become less wedded to the idea of objectivity and formality. In the humanities, as we have questioned the history of deferring to the white European male voice and considering it universal, many have questioned whether

any observer can be objective. Even in physics, the discovery of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principal introduced the idea that the observer affects the phenomenon observed and is not separate from it.

An alternate approach to trust involves connection rather than distance. We relate to the writer as to a friend or loved one rather than an authority figure. The writer reveals their humanity and particular responses. A sense that the writer is being open with us and inviting us into an intimate conversation leads to trust.



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An argument could be both intimate and formal, like a marriage vow, but that combination is rare. Usually the more comfortable we are and the more we share about ourselves in an argument, the less formal the style. Conversely, the less formal the style, the friendlier and more connected the argument usually feels. Of course, for this approach to work, the writer has to make the intimate conversation seem appealing and convince us they are genuine in their openness. The writer's approach and knowledge of how the reader will likely respond are key here. An informal and intimate approach can backfire if it comes across as presumptuous or invasive. The reader may be uncomfortable with the degree of closeness presumed.

So how does a writer create a sense of intimacy with a reader they will probably never meet? The more the argument can follow the style of a close conversation, the more readers may consciously or unconsciously go along with that feeling. Using an informal style will often help. That might look like casual language, the use of humor, some simpler or abbreviated sentence structure or occasional questions interjected. The most direct and obvious way to create the feeling of a conversation, however, is to declare it to the reader by using the "I," the "we" or the "you" instead of an impersonal voice.

The "I" of personal experience

Many of us have heard the advice that academic arguments should never use “I.” In fact, many arguments in academic journals nowadays do use “I” on occasion, especially in introductions and conclusions. They use it judiciously when the personal experience of the writer is relevant to the argument. In addition to offering an emotional connection, personal anecdotes give readers a sense that the author is a person who is reaching out to us as people.

The ordinary 'I'

Using the first person "I" to talk about an experience that many people share can create a folksy sense of the author as a humble, ordinary person we can relate to. We might think that drawing attention to the writer's ordinariness would undermine credibility. Of course, if we are looking to find out how black holes work, we know we need to turn to an expert. But if the topic is less technical and closer to everyday life, we may trust someone down to earth and easy to relate to more than we trust a distant authority figure.

The attention-getting “you”

When we use 'you' we are demanding the reader's attention. We can think of it as taking the reader by the hand, tapping them on the shoulder, or grabbing their collar, depending on how forceful the tone is. Papers written for college classes can use “you” on occasion, especially to command the reader’s attention in an introduction or a conclusion.

The 'we' that unites reader and writer

A writer may use 'we' to convey that they are not only in conversation with the reader other but on the same side or in the same boat. This approach is often combined with a reference to a shared identity, an appeal we will explore in the next section. It can also

be used, however, to speak more generally about the writer and readers as fellow humans, as in the sentence, "We often forget that our parents were ever new to parenting."

Practice Exercise 13.3.1

Read the two student paragraphs below and reflect on the following questions:

- What parts help you to relate to the writer as a friend?
- What words or phrases show that the writer is being open with you?
- What words or phrases make this feel like a conversation?
- Which of these two paragraphs creates more trust through intimacy overall?

Rewrite one or more sentences in each paragraph to help create more trust through intimacy.

Paragraph 1:
Due to a recent pandemic, the whole world is experiencing something that has never been experienced in all of history. In order to prevent the spread of a very contagious disease, the whole world decided to go on lockdown. Now a worldwide lockdown has never happened before, and it has led to an interesting experience that is greatly changing a lot of lives. This virus causes many interesting results when studying human behavior. However, these results are also negative, which scares people when thinking of the possible economic recession. This paper will mainly cover how this pandemic affects crime rates. With everyone locked inside, it could lead to an increase in crime with fewer witnesses out. However, with fewer people to mug and not being able to go outside for no reason, this pandemic could also lead to a decrease in the current crime rate. In order to see how crime has been affected by the pandemic, it is necessary to analyze crime before and after the lockdown.

Paragraph 2:
We generate so much hate in this world. We seem to show more hate than love to each other. We put others down. We discriminate. We judge. We persecute. We hurt those who we see differently. We act before we think. Why do we hate? Hate is such a powerful word. We have all seen or experienced acts of hate occur within our lives. Whether it's the terrorism we see on the news, or the bullying in our schools, it is extremely prevalent in every sector of our lives. The world would be a much better place if we had more empathy towards each other. Although hate and empathy can be very broad subjects, I want to focus on how giving to others can lead to less unhappiness and instead more empathy.To figure this out, we need to define what empathy truly means. We need to find the motives behind empathetic people, and then compare them with those who are hateful. We can study their respective motives and learn how to shift them.

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13.4: Shared Sense of Identity

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One way to create sense of connection and trust is to point to an identity that writer and reader share. If emotions are bound up in that identity, this can be a powerful way to gain trust and to encourage readers to care about the argument. As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it in *A Rhetoric of Argument*, "Audience members find themselves looking into a mirror, hearing their own interests and beliefs expressed powerfully--or perhaps they hear interests and beliefs they did not know they had until they heard them expressed by their representative."



Photo by Chona Kasinger for Disabled and Here is licensed CC BY 4.0.

To signal this appeal to a shared identity, writers simply name the group, as in the phrase "My fellow Americans." They may switch to an accent or specific vocabulary used by the group, a practice called "code switching." Listeners, of course, will be deciding for themselves whether the switch feels authentic. In April 2019, Representative Alejandra Ocasio-Cortez was accused of using "verbal blackface" because of the way she switched style at a dinner for the National Action Network led by prominent black leader Reverend Al Sharpton. As *The Atlantic* put it, she "sprinkled some elements of Black English into her speech." The *Atlantic* describes it thus: “I’m proud to be a bartender. Ain’t nothing wrong with that,” she said, also stretching “wrong” out a bit and intoning in a way sometimes referred to as a “drawl,” but which is also part of the Black English tool kit." *The Atlantic* defended her speech as authentic. They explained that "since the 1950s, long-term and intense contact between black and Latino people in urban neighborhoods has created a large overlap between Black English and, for example, “Nuyorican” English, the dialect of New York’s Puerto Rican community. To a considerable extent, Latinos now speak “Ebonics” just as black people do, using the same slang and constructions."

Even if the group identity in question is not an emotionally charged one, referring to it can help readers feel connected to the writer and the argument. For example, an argument might begin, "Those of us who drink fluoridated water every day reap many health benefits, whether we know it or not." Such a reference brings the particular identity to the forefront of the reader’s mind.

Sometimes writers feel that the most powerful thing they have in common with readers is opposition to a group rather than membership in a group. They can try to get readers on their side by focusing on a group they presume the reader does not or will

not want to belong to. Defining that group negatively becomes the basis for unity and trust between writer and reader.

Of course, any negative characterization of a group raises ethical questions. Is the negative assessment justifiable? Is it expressed in a disrespectful or dehumanizing way? Does its use inflame divisions within society in a way that has harmful side effects? Apart from the question of whether or not referring to another group is right in a specific case, writers should also be aware of ways in which negative references can undermine trust, especially if the audience ends up being broader than the writer initially envisioned. Sometimes putting the opposition in a group can backfire and hurt an argument more than it help. Here are two controversial examples:

- In 2016 when Hillary Clinton referred to some Donald Trump supporters as "a basket of deplorables," she was not just criticizing their ideas but trying to make them seem other, a group no one would want to belong to. She used the phrase in a speech at an LGBT fundraising event, but news of it quickly went viral. In response, Trump declared to his supporters, "While my opponent slanders you as deplorable and irredeemable, I call you hardworking American patriots who love your country." His campaign printed shirts that read "Proud to be a deplorable." Clinton apologized for her remark soon after, but many considered that she had done irretrievable damage. In her 2017 book *What Happened*, she reflected that the comment probably contributed to her loss in the election.
- The phrase "OK Boomer," used to express Generation Z's frustration with baby boomers who seem stuck in their thinking, has been criticized as dismissive. The *New York Times* declared in October 2019 that "'OK Boomer' Marks the End of Friendly Generational Relations."

Practice Exercise 13.4.1

Look up a recent speech by a politician you admire or detest. (Try a search on "Biden speech" or "Trump speech.") What appeals to shared identity does the speech make? What assumptions about the audience does it reveal?

Practice Exercise 13.4.2

1. In a small group, find an identity unrelated to school that you share with your group members. You might consider the following questions:
   - Do you all have a sports team you like or sport you all enjoy?
   - Do you share a culture, ethnicity, country of origin, or place you grew up?
   - Do you have a language in common in addition to English?
   - What kinds of additional responsibilities do you have besides school?

   Now, come up with an argument that you can aim specifically at members of the group you all belong to. See the example below.

   Sample shared identity: musician

   Sample controversial topic: free college

   Shared identity paragraph: My fellow drummers, bassists, pianists, guitarists, and anyone else who loves to create new and exciting sounds, I am addressing you today to bring up the topic of free college, which we are totally for. Free college is better than playing the main stage at The House of Blues, and let me tell you why: it benefits the economy and provides support for low-income students. How many of us want to spend money on college instead of new guitar strings? Yeah, that's what I thought. Not to mention we are rarely paid for our work, so free college is the best way to get a new career; you know, in case this whole rockstar thing doesn't work out.

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13.5: Respect and Goodwill

Media Alternative

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We don’t tend to trust people who don’t respect us and don’t wish us well. Regardless of how formal or informal or how intimate or distanced the argument is, if the reader feels the writer is disrespectful and doesn’t care about the reader’s perspective or experience, the reader will lose trust.

Conversely, if the reader feels that the writer understands the reader's perspective and uses that understanding to make the experience of reading the argument as straightforward and intellectually pleasant as possible, the reader will trust the writer more. Goodwill and respect distinguish a good argument from a rant which gives vent to the arguer’s feelings while ignoring what readers might need.



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Here are a few concrete actions writers can take to show goodwill and respect toward readers:

- Express ideas in a clear and straightforward way. Making things clear often takes a lot of mental sweat. Readers generally do not appreciate having to do the work of sorting out unnecessarily convoluted sentences.
- Guide readers through the ideas with clear transitions. Showing how each part of the essay relates to the next also takes mental sweat on the part of the writer. Readers will appreciate not being left dangling at the end of one paragraph, trying to figure out why the writer switches topics in the next and how the two topics are connected.
- Tell the reader what to expect from the structure of the argument. If there will be several parts to the argument, readers may feel supported when the writer offers a clear map of what is coming. An example might be "I will first describe how neurons carry messages from the brain to other parts of the body before I explain how those messaging pathways can be disrupted in neurological disorders." Telling the readers what the writer plans to do in first person is also called the **“I” of method** because the "I" is used not to describe personal experience but to describe the writer's methods in the text itself. If there is more than one writer, as in scientific papers, of course, this would become the "we" of method. Of course, too much description of what the writer is planning to do can become boring and can get in the way of the momentum of the argument.

- Anticipate and answer likely questions. This shows respect because the writer is giving the reader credit in advance for intelligence, curiosity, and critical thinking. One way to do this is to refer to the reader directly as “you,” as in “you may well ask.” It can also be done in third person, as in the phrases "some will wonder" and "this raises the question of...."
- Correct misconceptions respectfully. If a writer is frustrated with popular misconceptions on a topic, they should give the reader the benefit of the doubt and politely assume that such daft misconceptions belong to others. We can refer to those who hold the misconception in the third person in a phrase like "some may assume that" rather than targeting the reader with a "you may be assuming that..."

Practice Exercise 13.5.1

1. Read the paragraphs below and reflect on the strategies the writer used to show respect and goodwill.
   - Are there parts that are expressed clearly? Are there others that can be revised for clarity?
   - Are there enough transitions to guide you?
   - Are there any questions that show that the author gives the reader credit for intelligence, curiosity, or critical thinking? Is there a question that they could add?
2. Revise one of the paragraphs to show more respect and goodwill.

Paragraph 1

There have been many theories about the idea of nature in mental health. Many researchers have begun to investigate certain theories that focus on the correlation between our cognitive processes and the natural world. The most recognized theories are the Attention Restoration Theory (ART), the Stress Reduction Theory (SRT), and specific preferences for nature. The Attention Restoration Theory (ART), developed and popularized by Stephen and Rachel Kaplan, professors of psychology at the University of Michigan, proposes that exposure to nature can help us improve our ability to concentrate as well as reduce the stress through the automatic generation of physiologic responses. This can be attributed to the more relaxed sensation people may have when exposed to a natural environment. Stephen and Rachel Kaplan also proposed that there are four cognitive states on the way to restoration, which include a clearer head/concentration, mental fatigue recovery, soft fascination/interest, and reflection and restoration. In the first stage, thoughts, worries, and concerns are passed through the mind and are simply flowing through the mind naturally. During the second stage, restoration begins as the directed attention recovers and is restored. The third stage is focused on distracting the individual as they become engaged in low restoring activities, giving them time and space to calm down. Lastly, as a result of spending time in this environment, the individual can feel like they can relax and reflect on themselves and their goals. This is the most essential part of the restorative stage.

Paragraph 2

One factor that social media primarily affects are sleep patterns. A study concluded that 37% of 268 young adolescents confirmed that increased internet use is associated with shorter sleep duration, later bedtimes and rise times, longer sleep latencies, and increased daytime tiredness (Woods 1). Sleep in a teenager’s life is one of the utmost important factors to healthy development. According to Better Health, sleep deprivation can cause an unhealthy mental state that can lead to depression, aggression, low self-esteem, reduced physical and academic performance, and poor decision making. This leads to a vicious cycle: the cell phone causes sleep deprivation, which then causes mental health issues, which are confronted with more cell phone use. This is problematic because they distract themselves with their devices and don’t realize they need professional help.

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13.6: Moral Character

Media Alternative

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A part of our trust in a writer or in another person in any relationship is based on our perception of their moral character. Do they share the values we find most important? The word "character" has connotations of both firmness and fairness. A person with character stands up for their beliefs and is principled rather than self-interested. Note that there is some overlap between the trust appeal discussed in Section 9.5: Respect and Goodwill and a trust appeal through good moral character. A basic element of good moral character is wishing others well, not ill.



Just as people signal their moral character in how we present ourselves, writers can signal moral character through their writing choices.
Photo by Liza Summer from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Famous basketball coach John Wooden declared that “The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching.” Still, as humans, we constantly watch each other and assess each other's character. A writer can seek to gain the reader's trust by drawing attention to their moral character either directly or indirectly. In a direct appeal, a writer might describe their values, tell stories that illustrate their past moral actions, mention their reputation for good character, or refer readers to others who can vouch for them.

If a writer anticipates that some will question their character, they can present **disclaimers**, or rejections of others' likely misconceptions. Imagine an argument that starts by asking how Robin Hood might be a relevant hero for today's America. The writer would quickly need to clarify that they are not condoning stealing: "I would never argue that we should actually steal from the rich as Robin Hood did." Such a disclaimer is usually followed by a clarification of their position which highlights their good character: "I do think that the character of Robin Hood is an inspiration for today's advocates of a wealth tax to fund education and combat rising inequality."

Direct references to a writer's moral character run the risk of coming across as arrogant or presumptuous. More common and arguably more effective are indirect attempts to demonstrate moral character in the way a writer makes their argument. As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor write in *A Rhetoric of Argument*, "We all know that character shows in what we say and do. It is equally obvious in what we write." Honesty and reasonableness are two aspects of character that are especially crucial to demonstrate in argument.

Honesty

Abraham Lincoln was known in his day and after as "Honest Abe." His reputation as such, along with his accomplishments, formed the core of his image as an American hero. Probably nothing is more important to establishing trust than truthfulness and openness.

Even lies of omission can undermine trust. As readers, we want to believe that the writer is giving us a fair overview of what they know. If a writer fails to mention something relevant that makes them look bad, readers may well hear it from an opponent and consider the writer to have wrongly concealed it. Acknowledging points that actually hurt the writer's argument can help to demonstrate openness and honesty. This includes a writer's motivations, even those that involve self-interest. This may involve a disclaimer like the following: "It is true that I have an interest in maintaining high enrollment at our community college, since my job depends on it. But I do not think that is my main motivation for supporting the push to expand our offerings. I believe that the community will benefit when we have greater community participation in adult education."

Another aspect of honesty is emotional honesty--the writer's sincerity about the values and feelings expressed. If the writer has made an emotional appeal or an appeal to shared values, we as readers need to believe that the appeal represents the writer's authentic feelings and values. If we feel we are being **manipulated**, we will likely recoil and resist both the emotions and the logic of the argument. How can we tell if a writer is sincere or not? There is no formula for this, just as there is no formula when we meet someone or listen to a speech and decide if the person is sincere. Readers' intuitions will be shaped by subtleties of word choice and cultural expectations. One highly dramatic emotional appeal or declaration of values may come across as exaggerated, and another may come across as an earnest expression of the writer's strong convictions. In my own opinion, the best way for writers to create an impression of sincerity is to be sincere, not just about their feelings but about the degree of intensity of these feelings.

Reasonableness

It is our reason that allows us to make and evaluate arguments, so it comes as no surprise that writers want to come across as reasonable. Of course, as we have seen in earlier chapters, writers must actually make reasoned arguments or readers will notice their logical flaws and lose some trust in them. But to trust a writer, readers also need to have the impression that the writer is reasonable as a character trait.

Here are some ways writers show themselves to be reasonable:

- Responding to alternate perspectives with **respect.** Even when you do not see any merit in the opposing argument, As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it, "Without conceding to the opposition, you can show your audience that you treat other positions with respect, understanding, and even kindness." We can show empathy for the motivations or perspectives of others even if we ultimately judge them to be misguided.
- Showing **fairness** toward alternate perspectives. We see reasonableness in the ways in which writers deal with challenges to their ideas. Do they summarize the challenge accurately without distorting it to make it seem worse or weaker than it is?
- Showing **openness** to possibilities that may challenge the writer's expectations. There is some overlap here with honesty as discussed above.
- Making **concessions** when they see some validity to an opposing point.
- Showing **moderation.** A writer can send the message that they are not an extremist by pointing out and disavowing more extreme positions.
- Admitting **uncertainty**. As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it "When you honestly find yourself somewhat uncertain on an issue, even after thinking through some arguments, you can shift into a lower gear by admitting your own uncertainty, the tentative nature of some of your conclusions, your openness to new ideas."

Note that too much moderation can come across as wishy-washy. Good moral character also requires **conviction** and backbone. A writer must balance being open and self-critical with being willing to take a stand and defend it.

Practice Exercise 13.6.1

Find a speech by a president, former president, or presidential candidate and reflect on how the speaker attempts to establish good moral character in the speech. Which of the strategies listed above do they employ? How well do these strategies work to convince you of the speaker's character?

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13.7: Combining Different Approaches to Trust and Connection

Media Alternative

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Just as arguments can change tone and emotional appeal, they can appeal to trust differently and create different imagined relationships with the reader at different moments. Arguments don't need to choose one point of view and stick with it; many arguments move between "I," "we," "you" and the impersonal, shifting from sentence to sentence. Too many shifts could be jarring for the reader, but some variety can be refreshing. Thus, a single argument can offer different ways for the reader to relate to the ideas at hand.

For example, the sample border argument we have analyzed starts with a personal declaration, but if it stayed with "I" throughout it would never be able to make an argument about policy. Usually, the first person in argument is combined with other approaches so that the argument can be extended beyond the personal. Let's look at how the appeals to trust and connection shift in the last two paragraphs of the border argument:

Argument Excerpt	Notes on the Point of View
If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it.	“I”: The argument starts out with a personal declaration of what the author herself would do. The repeated emphasis on the “I” provides a contrast to most news accounts which refer to undocumented immigrants as “they.” It attempts to reverse a sense that such immigrants are an outgroup. The mention of the word "family" provides the first hint of the appeal to shared values around family loyalty and caring for family members.
I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career.	This focuses on a shared value around parents' obligation to nurture their children with references to children's basic needs.
What parent would sit on their hands and tell themself, “I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don’t have the papers, I guess it would be wrong”?	The paragraph ends with a third-person rhetorical question, implying that all parents would do the same. Saying this in the impersonal third person conveys the idea that it is a neutral, objective fact. The argument imagines and rejects as ridiculous an “I” statement by an imaginary parent. This statement is deliberately exaggerated in its contrast between the powerful emotional phrase "give my child a better life" and the rather mundane "I don't have the papers."
If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act.	The argument switches to "us" and "we," extending the initial personal statement to include the readers in a group united by a sense that their obligation to nurture their children takes priority over the obligation to follow immigration law.
If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice?	The impersonal rhetorical question implies the general claim that walls and detention centers are not right.
We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated--with empathy, respect, and offers of help.	The argument returns to the “we,” ending with a sense that writer and readers are united with a common, urgent moral purpose.

Practice Exercise 13.7.1

Choose a Ted talk that includes a transcript, such as Jamila Lysicott’s “3 ways to speak English.” Watch the talk and then read the transcript, making notes in the margins on the level of intimacy, degree of formality, appeals to authority, and mentions of moral character or shared identity. Choose one place where the writing shifts from one way of connecting to the reader to another and reflect on why the writer chose to shift at that point.

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13.8: Reaching a Hostile Audience (Rogerian Argument)

Media Alternative

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Think of the ongoing cultural wars in America over race and policing, abortion, and immigration. We all probably know an acquaintance or a family member or a politician who we disagree with strongly on one of these topics, and who seems unlikely to ever change their mind.

Rather than giving up on addressing the opposing side at all, we might consider an approach called **Rogerian argument**, pioneered by therapist Carl Rogers. This approach seeks to shift the focus of an argument from conflict to common ground. It involves an emotional and intellectual commitment to move forward together. If a traditional combative argument is like a courtroom debate, Rogerian argument is like mediation. In the courtroom, judge and jury have to decide between the prosecution and the defense. In mediation, both sides are looking for a sweet spot where their needs and opinions intersect.

We start by trying to convince the other side that we are not their enemy. If we describe their ideas and feelings with accuracy, respect and empathy, they may soften. If they feel seen rather than judged, they may be more open to what we have to say. The first step in Rogerian argument, then is to research the other side's beliefs, values, goals, and arguments so we can summarize them in a respectful way.



In Rogerian argument, we seek to find empathy and common ground where there is conflict.
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In Rogerian argument, we also change our end goal. We accept that we will not be able to bring the audience over entirely to our way of thinking. Instead, we focus on a more limited claim that both sides can support. The idea is to try to make progress despite deep differences. To get there, we must find beliefs, goals, or values we genuinely share.

Let's take the example of the writer who wants the U.S. to help undocumented migrants rather than criminalize them. In Chapters 2 and 3, we analyze an argument where she tries to create empathy by asking readers to put themselves in the place of a desperate migrant and imagine what they would do. This might work with an undecided audience, but what if she wants to address a group of die-hard activists who want a crackdown on illegal immigration? Let's imagine that this group of activists feels strongly that the physical safety of Americans should be our priority. They are afraid that undocumented immigrants will commit violent crimes.

One approach would be to try to convince them that their fears are unfounded. However, given the lack of trust between writer and audience, such an attempt might fail. Another approach would be to argue that we must take into account the need of all people to be protected from violence, including refugees who face violence in their countries of origin. This might clash with the activists' nationalist belief that American policy should always prioritize the safety of Americans.

If the writer were to try a Rogerian approach, she would stop trying to show the activists that they are wrong. She would instead spend some time reading about their organization and possibly watching videos of people explaining their ideas. She might even interview one of them to find out what values and experiences led them to their opinions.

Then she would reflect on what goals and values she could sympathize with or even endorse. In her original argument, she called for "regulation" at the border; she too is concerned for the safety of Americans and believes that open immigration could involve some dangers that we should address in our policies. The question is, can she shift the focus of her argument to a claim that will both increase public safety and improve the treatment of the undocumented?

She might decide to argue for a border that does a better job of checking each person who is attempting to enter the country. Her policy would turn back more people with criminal backgrounds while also allowing more people to enter legally as economic refugees. In the process of forming this argument, she might actually become more sympathetic to the other side and her position might shift toward the center. She might realize that she does want to "secure the border" and that she is grateful to ICE efforts to combat weapons smuggling, drug cartel operations, and human trafficking. She might also decide that she would support deportation of documented violent criminals. She could use those points to try to reassure her audience that she makes public safety a priority.

Will this argument actually work to further her original goal? Would the audience become more willing to allow in desperate undocumented immigrants if reassured that law enforcement would catch more of the dangerous elements? As a separate question, the author needs to ask herself whether the new argument still represents a message she earnestly wants to send. Does she miss the impassioned plea for empathy and legitimacy for desperate undocumented immigrants? Has she strayed too far from the raw expression of her deep beliefs?

Questions of how confrontational and how collaborative argument should be arise constantly in everyday life and in the practice of democracy. Regardless of whether we personally tend toward conflict or compromise, it's worth learning the Rogerian process. Then when we run into a breakdown in trust, we can at least try out a collaborative approach as a thought experiment and decide whether it is worthwhile.

Practice Exercise 13.8.1

Choose a topic on which you hold a strong opinion and read about the opposing side on the website ProCon.org. In a paragraph, summarize respectfully what you can learn about the beliefs, values, and viewpoints of the other side. Does this research suggest any goal you might share with those who disagree with you? Can you come up with a claim that both might agree on? Do you think it would be worth pursuing this middle ground, or does it seem more important to you to fight for your precise position?

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13.9: Faulty Appeals to Trust

Media Alternative

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Just as we saw with appeals to emotion, appeals to trust and connection may or may not work. But apart from the question of whether or not they work is the question of whether or not they are legitimate. Here are three questions to ask about the legitimacy of any appeal to trust:

- Does the attempt to get the reader to trust suggest an idea that is not logical or not true?
- To what extent is the appeal to trust really relevant to the trustworthiness of the argument?
- Is the argument asking for more trust than is really warranted? Even if the attempt to gain our trust is logical and relevant, we should ask whether its importance has been exaggerated. Our decision to trust should be based on many different factors. Often appeals to trust imply that we should accept or reject a claim outright when in reality more caution is called for.

We will see answers to the above questions in each of the following faulty appeals to trust:

Insincere appeals to shared identity or values

Obviously, lying about who we are or what we believe in is not a valid way to build trust. An appeal to a shared identity that is not really shared or an appeal to a shared value that the writer does not really hold is certainly a breach of trust.



An insincere appeal to trust often comes across as creepy.
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However, referring to an identity that the writer doesn't share can be a legitimate gesture of goodwill, as long as the writer doesn't misrepresent their own background. A white politician who interjects Spanish words into a speech to a largely Latinx audience is signaling that they want to appear friendly and empathetic to a Latinx identity. Of course, the politician's accent may undermine this to some extent by reminding the audience of their different background. Will the audience be glad that the politician is trying? Will they be put off by a sense that the politician is presuming too much or encroaching on an identity that doesn't belong to them? Writers will often try to signal respect and familiarity if they do refer to another group's identity, as in "I know from talking to transgender friends that using a single-gender restroom can feel stressful and dangerous."

Appeal to popularity (bandwagon)

An extremely common technique is to suggest that a claim is true because it is widely accepted. Of course, we do legitimately need to refer to other people's opinions as guides to our own at times. An idea's popularity may be a legitimate reason to investigate it further. It might be a reason to consider it influential and thus important to address in a discussion. But it's popularity does not prove its validity. Popularity may be due to the correctness of the idea but it may be due to many other reasons as well.



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Appeals to popularity encourage readers to base their decisions too much on their underlying desire to fit in, to be hip to what everybody else is doing, not to be considered crazy. Imagine that a talk show host introduces a guest as the author of a #1 *New York Times* bestseller about climate change and the coming apocalypse. But this is a fallacy. We've all known it's a fallacy since we were little kids, the first time we did something wrong because all of our friends were doing it, too, and our mom or dad asked us, "If all of your friends jumped off a bridge, would you do that too?"

Personal attacks

We commit this fallacy when, instead of attacking an opponent's views, we attack the opponent. What makes this a fallacy is the disconnect between the reason and the claim. Logicians call this an **ad hominem** fallacy, which means "to the person." The opponent may have bad qualities, but these qualities do not make their argument incorrect. They may give legitimate reason to trust the argument less, but they do not invalidate it.



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This fallacy comes in various forms; there are a lot of different ways to attack a person while ignoring (or downplaying) their actual arguments. **Abusive attacks** are the most straightforward. The simplest version is simply calling your opponent names instead of debating them. Donald Trump has mastered this technique. During the 2016 Republican presidential primary, he came up with catchy nicknames for his opponents, which he used just about every time he referred to them: "Lyin' Ted" Cruz, "Little Marco" Rubio, "Low-Energy Jeb" Bush. If you pepper your descriptions of your opponent with tendentious, unflattering, politically charged language, you can get a rhetorical leg-up.

Another abusive attack is **guilt by association**. Here, you tarnish your opponent by associating them or his views with someone or something that your audience despises. Consider the following:

> Former Vice President Dick Cheney was an advocate of a strong version of the so-called Unitary Executive interpretation of the Constitution, according to which the president's control over the executive branch of government is quite firm and far-reaching. The effect of this is to concentrate a tremendous amount of power in the Chief Executive, such that those powers arguably eclipse those of the supposedly co-equal Legislative and Judicial branches of government. You know who else was in favor of a very strong, powerful Chief Executive? That's right, Hitler.

The argument just compared Dick Cheney to Hitler with only the tiniest shred of evidence. That evidence is not sufficient to make a legitimate comparison: if it were, then any person who favored giving most government power to one leader could be compared to Hitler. Clearly, consolidating power was not the most significant thing Hitler did, nor, in itself, is it the reason we have such negative associations with his name. Those powerful negative associations make comparisons to Hitler and the Nazis a powerful

rhetorical strategy which is often used when it isn't justified. There is even a fake-Latin term for the tactic: Argumentum ad Nazium (cf. the real Latin phrase, ad nauseum—to the point of nausea.

A **circumstantial attack** is not as blunt an instrument as its abusive counterpart. It also involves attacking one's opponent, focusing on some aspect of their person—their circumstances—as the core of the criticism. This version of the fallacy comes in many different forms, and some of the circumstantial criticisms involved raise legitimate concerns about the relationship between the arguer and his argument. They only become fallacies when these criticisms are taken to be definitive refutations, which, on their own, they cannot be.

To see what we're talking about, consider the circumstantial attack that points out one's opponent's self-interest in making the argument they do. Consider:

> A recent study from scientists at the University of Minnesota claims to show that glyphosate—the main active ingredient in the widely used herbicide Roundup—is safe for humans to use. But guess whose business school just got a huge donation from Monsanto, the company that produces Roundup? That's right, the University of Minnesota. Ever hear of conflict of interest? This study is junk, just like the product it's defending.

This argument is flawed. It doesn't follow from the fact that the University received a grant from Monsanto that scientists working at that school faked the results of a study. But the fact of the grant does raise a red flag. There may be some conflict of interest at play. Such things have happened in the past (e.g., studies funded by Big Tobacco showing that smoking is harmless). But raising the possibility of a conflict is not enough, on its own, to show that the study in question can be dismissed out of hand. It may be appropriate to subject it to heightened scrutiny, but we cannot shirk our duty to assess its arguments on their merits.

A similar thing happens when we point to the hypocrisy of someone making a certain argument—when their actions are inconsistent with the conclusion they're trying to convince us of. Consider the following:

> The head of the local branch of the American Federation of Teachers union wrote an op-ed yesterday in which she defended public school teachers from criticism and made the case that public schools' quality has never been higher. But guess what? She sends her own kids to private schools out in the suburbs! What a hypocrite. The public school system is a wreck and we need more accountability for teachers.

This passage makes a strong point, but then commits a fallacy. It would appear that, indeed, the AFT leader is hypocritical; her choice to send her kids to private schools suggests (but doesn't necessarily prove) that she doesn't believe her own assertions about the quality of public schools. Again, this raises a red flag about her arguments; it's a reason to subject them to heightened scrutiny. But it is not a sufficient reason to reject them out of hand, and to accept the opposite of her conclusions. That's committing a fallacy. She may have perfectly good reasons, having nothing to do with the allegedly low quality of public schools, for sending her kids to the private school in the suburbs. Or she may not. She may secretly think, deep down, that her kids would be better off not going to public schools. But none of this means her arguments in the op-ed should be dismissed; it's beside the point. Do her reasons back up her conclusion? Are her reasons true? Even if the person arguing is hypocritical, they may still be making a sound argument. We still need to decide whether their reasoning is valid before rejecting the argument.

A very specific version of the circumstantial attack, one that involves pointing out one's opponent's hypocrisy, is worth highlighting, since it happens so frequently. It has its own Latin name: **tu quoque**, which translates roughly as "you, too." This is the "I know you are but what am I?" fallacy; the "pot calling the kettle black"; "look who's talking". It's a technique used in very specific circumstances: your opponent accuses you of doing or advocating something that's wrong, and, instead of making an argument to defend the rightness of your actions, you simply throw the accusation back in your opponent's face—they did it too. But that doesn't make it right.

The final variant of the circumstantial attack is perhaps the most egregious. It's certainly the most ambitious: it's a preemptive attack on one's opponent to the effect that, because of the type of person they are, nothing they say on a particular topic can be taken seriously; they are excluded entirely from debate. It's called **poisoning the well**. We poison the well when we exclude someone from a debate because of who they are. Imagine an English person saying, "It seems to me that you Americans should reform your healthcare system. Costs over here are much higher than they are in England. And you have millions of people who don't even have access to healthcare. In the UK, medical care is a basic right of every citizen." Suppose an American responded by

saying, “What you know about it? Go back to England.” That would be poisoning the well. The English person is excluded from debating American healthcare just because of who they are.

Practice Exercise 13.9.1

The following short critique mentions something about the author of the argument they critique. Do you think there is a legitimate reason to make this personal reference? Does it convincingly undermine the argument that "women can have it all"?

> The legendary Cosmo Girl, Helen Gurley Brown, died and with her, one hopes, a not-so-fabulous legacy. This would be the demonstrably ridiculous notion women can have it all. … The most telling line from all the tributes written about her might provide a clue. Brown said she never had children because ‘I didn't want to give up the time, the love, the money.
>
> --Kathleen Parker, “Death of a Salesgirl,” Index-Journal 94 No. 110 (18 Aug. 2012).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

14: 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.

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14.2: What's Different about Academic Research?
14.3: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment
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14.14.1: How to Summarize- An Overview
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14.14.3: When to Quote, When to Paraphrase
14.14.4: How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process
14.14.5: Plagiarism and the Internet
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14.1: The Ultimate Tool for Thinking and Sharing Our Thoughts

Media Alternative

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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.

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14.2: What's Different about Academic Research?

The reasons academics and scholars conduct research are essentially the same as the reasons someone does research on the right computer to buy: to find information and answers to questions with a method that has a greater chance of being accurate than a guess or a "gut feeling." College professors in a history department, physicians at a medical school, graduate students studying physics, college juniors in a literature class, students in an introductory research writing class—all of these people are members of the academic community, and they all use research to find answers to their questions that have a greater chance of being "right" than making guesses or betting on feelings.

Students in an introductory research writing course are "academics," the same as college professors? **Generally speaking, yes.** You might not think of yourself as being a part of the same group as college professors or graduate students, but when you enter a college classroom, you are joining the academic community in the sense that you are expected to use your research to support your ideas and you are agreeing to the conventions of research within your discipline. Another way of looking at it: first-year college students and college professors more or less follow the same "rules" when it comes to making points supported by research and evidence.

A Student Profile: Daniel Marvins, New to Academic Research

Daniel Marvins is a first year college student at a large public university in the Midwest. While he certainly wrote plenty of essays when he was in high school, Marvins thought that the kind of research writing his teacher was asking him to do for his writing class was different.

"In high school, we wrote more about stories and poems and newspaper articles we read," Marvins said. "We didn't do a lot of research, other than looking things up on the web."

Marvins was ready for the challenge of tackling the thinking and research that would be expected of him in college. But he still wasn't sure about being "an academic." "I never thought of it that way, because I didn't really see how the stuff I had to write for school made me anything like my teachers. But I guess I'm starting to see the connection."

Read Marvins' "Working Thesis Essay" in Chapter 5.

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14.3: Approaching a Research Paper Assignment

Media Alternative

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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?



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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.

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14.4: Choosing a Focused Topic

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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.

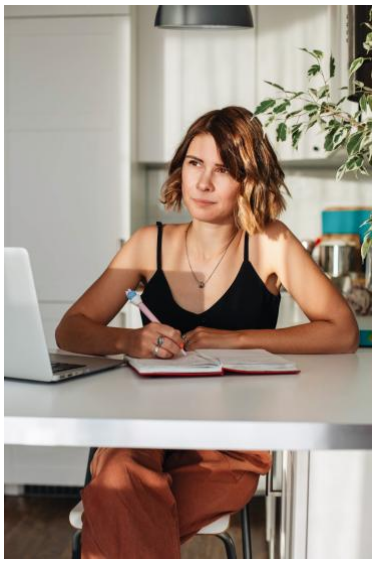


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Developing a research question

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 14.4.1

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.

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14.5: Find the Conversation That Interests You

Media Alternative

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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.



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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 14.5.1

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.

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14.6: Types of Sources

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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 14.6.1

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?

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14.7: Sources that are Both Scholarly and Non-Scholarly?

While these differences between scholarly and non-scholarly sources might seem straight-forward, many publications are somewhere in between scholarly and non-scholarly. A journal like *College English* is clearly an academic source and a magazine like *People* is clearly a popular source. But categorizing magazines like *Ms.*, *Harper's*,or *The Atlantic* is more difficult since these publications tend to publish articles that are in many ways similar to the articles published in more academic sources.

Another difficult to categorize source is corporate or "trade" journals. Most professions and industries have highly specialized publications about that particular business. For example, *Human Resource Executive* is targeted to professionals who work in Human Resources departments, *Accounting Today* is for and about the accounting business, and *Advertising Age* focuses on the advertising industry. While most of the writers and editors of trade journals do not have scholarly backgrounds, they tend to be highly focused and knowledgeable about their business. An article about hiring trends in *Human Resource Executive* will probably have more in common with an academic source than it will with a popular source.

A third "in between" type of research resource is newspapers. On the one hand, most newspapers would seem to share the characteristics of non-scholarly or popular sources: they are written for a general audience by writers who are not necessarily experts, they include many photographs and graphics, and so on. However, a number of publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are quite different from most newspapers because they are written for a specialized audience, like college and community college teachers and administrators. Further, newspapers tend to be used by a wide variety of readers and writers--including scholars-- as a source of basic and reliable information about day-to-day events.

In research writing courses, teachers will often insist students use only or mostly scholarly sources in their research projects because, as is discussed in some detail in the next section in this chapter, **scholarly sources tend to be more credible and reliable than non-scholarly sources.** This is not to say that popular sources aren't credible or reliable; clearly, most of them are, and in many cases, specialized popular sources can be very useful in academic research. A research project about computer crime may very well include relevant information from a popular source like *WIRED* or a trade publication written for people who work in the computer industry.

However, scholarly sources are generally considered *more* credible and reliable than popular sources. They tend to publish articles that go into more detail about their subjects, they are written for a more knowledgeable audience, and they are written by experts.

Exercise 1.3

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, consider the following questions:

- What sorts of scholarly sources are you and your classmates already familiar with? What sorts of non-scholarly sources of evidence are you already familiar with that might be useful for your research process?
- Think about the kind of topics you are interested in researching and writing about. Are you aware of any scholarly sources where you are likely to find research on your topic? What about popular or non-scholarly publications?
- If you are not yet familiar with specific titles of scholarly or popular sources that might be relevant for your topic, what kind of research would you conduct to find these sources?

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14.8: Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

Media Alternative

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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.

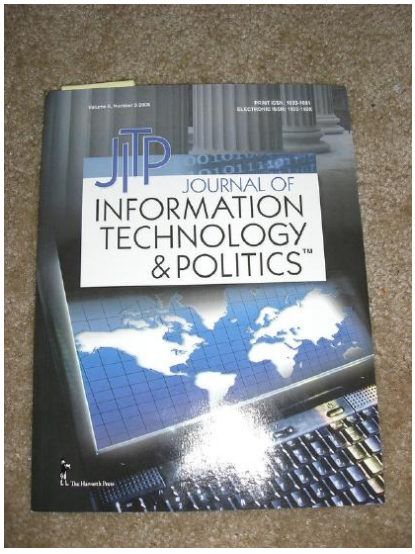


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Academic papers are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Thus, in a lot of fields they often have a structure reminiscent 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 14.8.1

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.

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14.9: Searching Databases of Academic Journal Articles

Media Alternative

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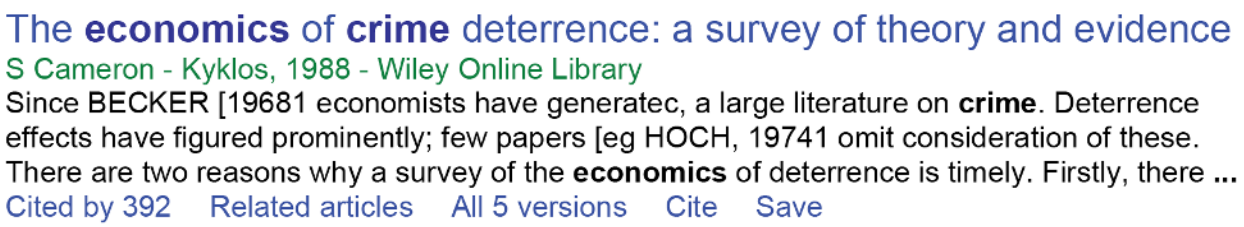
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Your campus library pays big money to subscribe to databases for Tier 1 articles. Some are general-purpose databases that include the most prominent journals across disciplines, such as Academic Search Premier (by EBSCO), Academic Search Complete (by 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*:



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 14.9.1

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.

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14.10: Strategies for Each Phase of the Research Process

Media Alternative

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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
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 14.10.1

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

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14.11: Evaluating the Quality and Credibility of Your Research

Finding evidence that answers a question is only the first part of the research process. You also have to evaluate the quality and credibility of your research. Inevitably, as we've already seen in this chapter, you do this as you consider the origins of your research—primary versus secondary research, scholarly versus popular sources, the Internet, and so forth. But evaluating the quality and credibility of your research is more subtle and complicated than just determining the source of the evidence. Consider again the example from the beginning of this chapter about deciding which computer to buy. One of the things you would have to weigh is the credibility of the information you received from your friends compared to the information you received from a salesperson at the computer store. You can probably count on your friends to be trustworthy and honest, but they might not know much about computers. Conversely, while a salesperson might know a lot about computers, you may be uncertain to what extent you can trust him to give you the best advice. The salesperson wants to sell you a computer, which means that his motivations might be consciously or unconsciously influencing the information he is providing you.

Who should you trust? We have all been in situations like this, and there is no easy way to answer that question. Chances are, you'll make your computer decision based on your interpretation of the evidence and based on what you perceive to be the reliability and credibility of your different sources. If someone else were faced with the same computer decision and the same evidence, they might make a different choice. That is why there are different kinds of computers on the market and that is why different people can do the same sort of research about "the best" computer and why they can arrive at different conclusions.

Academic research is not much different in the sense that different researchers, considering the same or similar evidence, often arrive at different conclusions. Academic research rarely provides clear answers in the sense of definitively knowing the "rights" and "wrongs" about some issue. Not all academics think that computer hacking is wrong (or right), that the solution to commercial over-fishing is strict international control, or that F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* depicts the connection between material goods and the American dream. Rather, there are debates about these issues, differences of interpretation and opinion that result from different researchers looking at the same evidence.

Furthermore, the debates about differences of opinion on how to interpret evidence are good and healthy because these discussions further our understanding of complex issues. If we all agreed that something was true, then there would be no point in conducting research and writing about it. Indeed, if we all agreed about everything and had all of our questions answered as well as we thought possible, there would be no point to education at all!

Ultimately, there is no easy formula for evaluating the credibility and reliability of research. But there are some basic questions you should ask about your all of your evidence to ensure it is reliable and credible:

- Who wrote it?
- What do you think motivated the writer?
- Where was it published?
- When was it written?

Who wrote or said it?

Is there an author named with the evidence?

If your evidence does not name the author, it might still be reliable, especially if you have confidence about where the evidence was published. However, most credible and reliable publications tell readers who wrote the articles they contain.

On Web pages and other Internet-based sources, it can sometimes be tricky to find the name of the Web page's author. Many web sites don't name an author, which, given the nature of the Web, should send up red flags for you as a researcher regarding the credibility of the evidence. But like print publications, more credible Web pages will include the name of the page's writer. Be sure to look for the writer's name throughout the particular page (including the bottom) and related pages within the Web site.

What are the qualifications of the author?

Does he or she seem to be an expert in the field?

Have he or she written about this topic before?

Are there other experiences that seem to uniquely qualify him or her as a reliable and credible source on this topic?

Many academic publications will give a lot of detail about their authors, including their degrees and academic training, the institution where they work (if they are a college professor or instructor), and other publications they have had in the past. Popular sources tend to include less information about their writers, though they too will often indicate in a byline (where the writer's name is listed in a magazine or newspaper article) if the writer is a reporter, contributing editor, or editor for a particular subject.

Credible web sources will also describe the qualifications of the source's author or authors. If you can find an author's name on a Web site but you can't find anything about their qualifications on their research subject, you should be suspicious about what that research has to say.

Have you come across the writer based on some of the other research you have done?

After you have conducted a bit of research on your topic, you might find yourself coming across the same authors writing similar articles in different publications. You might also find different publications referring to the author or her work, which would suggest that the author is indeed reliable and credible in her field. After all, if other articles and writers refer positively to a particular writer or her articles again and again, then it seems likely that the often-referred-to writer is credible.

Understanding and trusting the expertise of the author of your evidence is probably the most crucial test of credibility and reliability of that evidence.

> *Simply put, academics find evidence that comes from an author who is a credible expert to be much more persuasive than evidence that does not come from an expert.*

For example, while my mom is a reliable source of information regarding many different topics, it would do you little good for me to interview her for an academic research project about the problems of over-fishing. Mind you, I value my mom's thoughts and wisdom, and she might have some things to say about the effects of decreased catches of fish that I find insightful. However, because my mom doesn't have any expertise about commercial fishing and because she doesn't know anything more (or less) about it than most people, most of the readers of my research project won't be persuaded by what she has to say.

On the other hand, my mother was a hospice work for many years, working with terminally ill patients and their families. If I were conducting research about the advantages and disadvantages of hospice care for terminally ill patients, my mom might be a very interesting and credible source.

What do you think motivated the writer?

Is the writer identified with a particular organization or group that might have a specific interest in the subject of the writing?

This can often be the source of conscious or unconscious bias. An obvious example: a writer who is identified as a member of the National Riflemen's Association, which represents a variety of Americans particularly interested in protecting the right to own guns, will certainly have a different view on gun ownership than a member of The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, an organization working to enact gun control legislation.

You need to be particularly careful with Web-based sources of research when considering the writer's affiliation with different groups or organizations. There have been numerous incidents where Web page writers falsely claimed their Web pages were affiliated with particular groups or causes.

Does the writer identify himself or herself with an explicit political group or party?

Considering a writer's politics is particularly important when thinking about the credibility of a Web site. Besides the ease with which a writer can misrepresent themselves or others, the low cost and wide reach of the Web has also made it an attractive forum for hate groups, terrorists, and other "fringe" political movements. This doesn't automatically mean the information you find on reactionary or radical Web sites is wrong; however, writers with particularly strong and extreme politics frequently present information that is biased to the point of inaccuracy.

Of course, while it is important to consider why a writer wrote about her subject and to think about how her motivations impact how she wrote about his or her subject, having a particular bias or motivation doesn't automatically lead to a lack of credibility or reliability.

Where was it published?

Was the piece of writing published in an academic or non-academic source? A book, a journal, a magazine, etc.? I've already discussed this a great deal in this chapter; generally speaking, academic sources are considered more credible than non-academic sources, and print-based sources are generally considered more credible than web-based sources.

But there are some more subtle tests of credibility and reliability concerning where a piece of research was published. For example, single-authored or co-authored scholarly books on a particular subject might be more regarded as more credible than a scholarly journal article because books go into much greater detail on topics than journal articles.

Are you familiar with the publication? If you are a new researcher to a particular field of study this can be a difficult question to answer since you might not have heard of some of the more well-known and credible publications known in that field. But once you get to know the field better (which will inevitably be the case as you conduct more research on your topic), chances are you will begin to realize certain publications are seen by experts in the field as more credible than others.

When was it written?

Last, but far from least, the date of publication can dramatically effect the credibility of your research. Obviously, this is especially important for date-sensitive research topics. If you were writing a research project about the Internet and the World Wide Web, chances are any research older than about 1990 or so would be of limited use since the Web literally did not exist before 1990.

But other potentially less obvious topics of research have date sensitive components to them. For example, if you were doing research on cigarette smoking or drunk driving, you would have to be careful about evaluating the credibility of research from the 1970s or 1960s or earlier since cultural "norms" in the United States for both smoking and drinking have changed a great deal.

Knowing (or rather, *not* knowing) the date of publication of a piece of research is yet another thing to be worried about when evaluating the credibility of Web-based sources. Many Web sites do not include any information about the date of publication or the date when the page was last updated. This means that you have no way of knowing when the information on that dateless page was published.

The date of publication is a key piece of information, the sort of thing that is always included in more print sources. Again, just because the date of publication or update is missing from a Web site does not automatically discount it as a credible source; however, it should make you suspicious.

Exercise 1.5

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, consider a variety of different types of research—articles from scholarly and non-scholarly sources, newspaper articles, books, web sites, and other types of evidence. Using the criteria discussed here, how would you rate the quality and credibility of your research? Which of your sources seems the most reliable? Are there any pieces of evidence that, upon closer examination, do not seem credible or reliable?

Evidence Quality and Credibility Checklist

Who wrote or said it?

- The writer's name
- Qualifications
- Expertise in the field
- Previous publications on the topic
- Unique experiences of the writer

Why did the source write or say it?

- Association with an organization or group
- The writer's stated or implied politics

Where (what source) was it published?

- Academic/scholarly source versus non-academic/popular source
- Prior knowledge of publication

When was it published or said?

And when it comes to evidence from the 'net and World Wide Web…

- It's still important to know **who** wrote it, **why** you think they wrote it, **where** you found it online, and **when** was it published.
- If you **don't know** the answers to the who/why/where/when questions, you should be skeptical of the evidence.
- Don't be fooled by Web sites that "look" real, because…
- **Anybody can publish information on the Web, no matter what that information is.** Unlike most scholarly and many non-scholarly publications, Web writers don't have to have the work reviewed by editors and publishers to reach an audience.
- **The Internet and the World Wide Web are still good places to find research.** You just have to be a bit more careful with them.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

14.12: Disinformation

14.12.1: Information Disorder, Truth, and Trust

14.12.2: Web Evaluation Skills- A “Bleak” Track Record

14.12.3: Information Cynicism

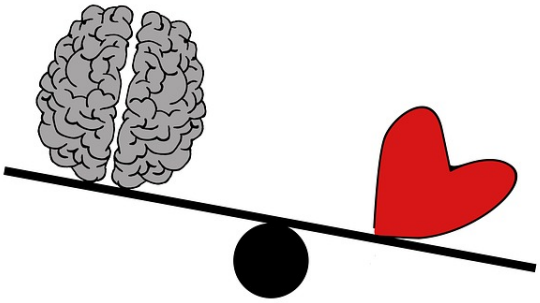
14.12.4: College Students and Cynicism

14.12.5: Information Hygiene and Info-Environmentalism

14.12.6: Conclusion

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14.12.1: Information Disorder, Truth, and Trust



> "We tend to think that we have rational relationships to information, but we don't. **We have emotional relationships to information**, which is why the most effective disinformation draws on our underlying fears and worldviews….We're less likely to be critical of information that reinforces our worldview or taps into our deep-seated emotional responses" (Wardle, qtd. in Vongkiatkajorn; emphasis added).

Background

In an information environment shaped by pervasive algorithms, the attention economy, engagement, and polarization, how do we determine truth? How do we know which sources of information to trust? These questions are becoming increasingly difficult to answer, and even more so as "disinformation that is designed to provoke an emotional reaction can flourish in these spaces" (Wardle).



Indeed, in 2016, Oxford Dictionaries selected post-truth as the Word of the Year, defining this as: "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

Trust

A 2020 study from Project Information Literacy confirms that the way information is delivered today—with opinion and propaganda mingled with traditional news sources, and with algorithms highlighting sources based on engagement rather than quality—has left many college students concerned about the trustworthiness of online content. Students reported that it was difficult to know where to place their trust when credible sources are buried by a deluge of poorer-quality content and misinformation. One student noted that "it's not that we're lacking credible information. It's that we're drowning in like a sea of all these different points out there" (Head et al. 20).

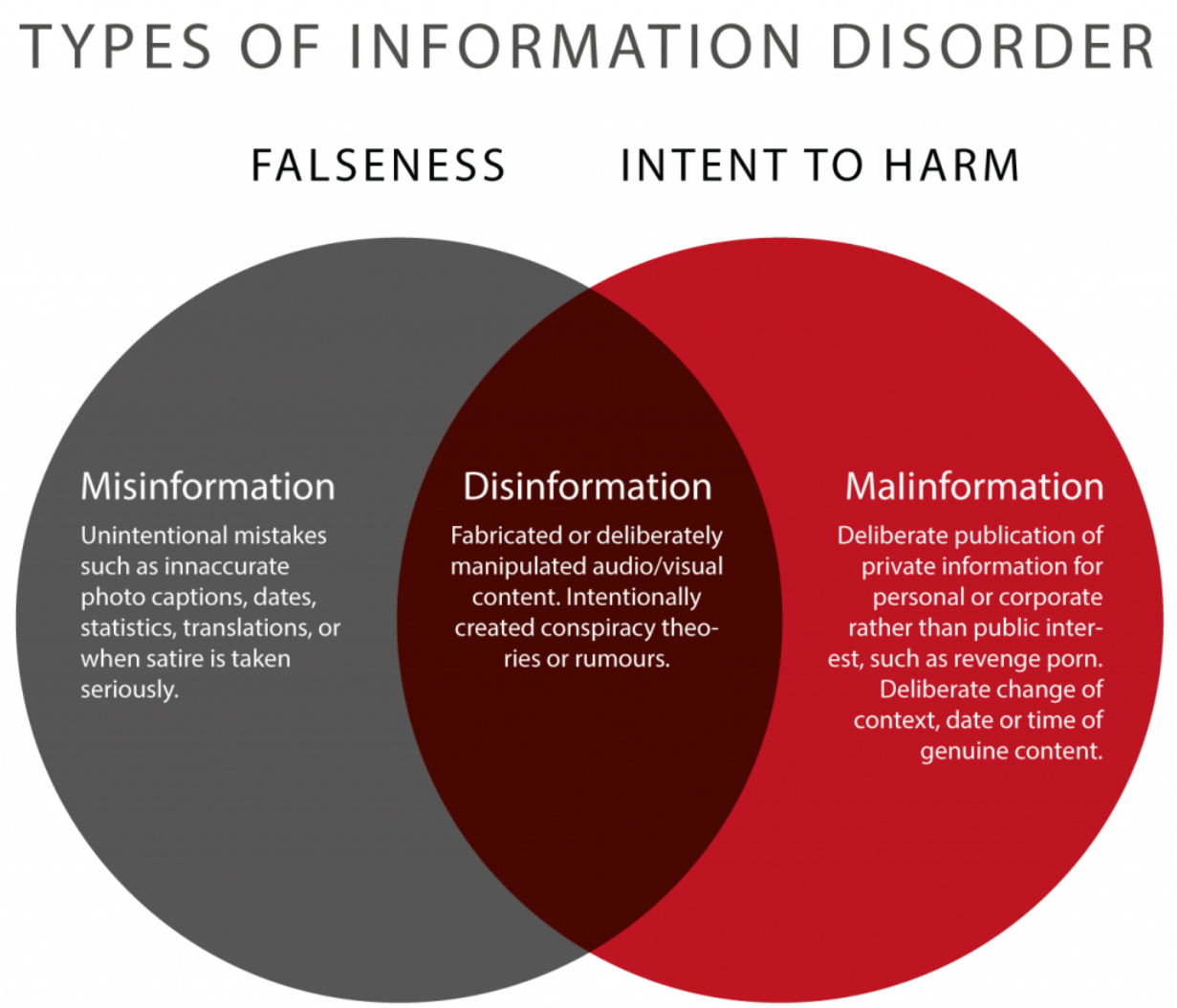
> "This is happening at a time when falsehoods proliferate and trust in truth-seeking institutions is being undermined. Even the very existence of truth itself has come into question….People no longer know what to believe or on what grounds we can determine what is true" (Head et al. 11, 36).

Essential Definitions

First, it is important to establish a shared vocabulary and terminology so that we can better understand and discuss these concepts. Claire Wardle, a world-renowned expert in this field, has used "information disorder" as an umbrella term for the various types of

false, misleading, manipulated, or deceptive information we have seen flourish in recent years. She also created an **essential glossary for information disorder,** with definitions for related words and phrases. For example, you will find helpful definitions for terms like algorithm, bots, data mining, deepfakes, doxing, sock puppet, and trolling.

The graphic below illustrates the scale and range of intent behind false information, from unintentionally inaccurate to deliberately deceptive and harmful. For a much more detailed explanation of each form of information disorder, from "satire" to "fabricated content" to "false context," see **First Draft's Essential Guide to Understanding Information Disorder.**



Text version of this Venn diagram

Sources

"First Draft's Essential Guide to Understanding Information Disorder" by Claire Wardle is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Head, Alison J., Barbara Fister, and Margy MacMillan. "Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms." *Project Information Literacy*, 15 Jan. 2020. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Image: "3 Types of Information Disorder" graphic by Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakshan is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Image: "Cognition and Emotion" by ElisaRiva on Pixabay

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14.12.2: Web Evaluation Skills- A “Bleak” Track Record

> “At present, we worry that democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish” (Wineberg et al., “Evaluating Information”).

How are we doing when it comes to recognizing disinformation and navigating the information disorder landscape?

Web Evaluation Skills: Students



In 2016, a few months before the U.S. Presidential election, an influential study on Web literacy was completed by the Stanford History Education Group. Their report—titled “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning”—was concerned with the spread of disinformation online, and how this might threaten our democracy. The study asked nearly 8,000 students (in middle school, high school, and college) to perform five Web evaluation tasks. The results were quite shocking:

- **80%** of students couldn’t distinguish “sponsored content” from news articles on websites
- **67%** of students failed to recognize potential bias in online information
- **65%** of students took online images at face value
- Almost **all** struggled to evaluate information on social media.

In 2019, as yet another U.S. Presidential election approached, the Stanford History Education Group conducted a similar study of civic online reasoning, this time with a sample of 3,446 high school students. The results?

- **52%** of students believed a grainy video shot in Russia constituted “strong evidence” of voter fraud (ballot stuffing) in the U.S.
- **Two-thirds** of students couldn’t tell the difference between news stories and ads (“Sponsored Content”)
- **96%** of students did not consider how bias impacts website credibility (for example, ties between a climate change website and the fossil fuel industry).

These studies conclude by describing student’s ability to reason about the information as either “bleak” or “troubling” (Wineberg et al., “Evaluating Information”; Breakstone et al.).

However, as we will see below, this trouble is **not** just limited to students.

Web Evaluation Skills: “Experts”



In 2017, the Stanford History Education Group conducted a study, “Lateral Reading: Reading Less and Learning More When Evaluating Digital Information.” Here, they assessed the Web evaluation skills of presumed **experts**: Stanford undergraduates, History professors, and professional fact-checkers. This fascinating study confirmed that even Stanford students and professors with PhDs in History struggled to identify credible sources on the Web.

For example, in one task, the participants were presented with two websites that provided information on bullying, and they were given up to ten minutes to determine which was the more reliable site. One of the websites (American Academy of Pediatrics) was

from the largest professional organization of pediatricians in the world, while the other site (American College of Pediatricians) had been labeled a hate group because of its virulently anti-gay stance. The result?

- Only **50%** of the historians identified the reliable website
- Only **20%** of the undergrads identified the reliable website
- **100%** of the fact-checkers were able to quickly identify the reliable website (Note: For effective strategies, see the chapter on Fact-Checking)

Sources

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Image: "College Student" by Gan Khoon Lay, adapted by Aloha Sargent, is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Image: "Users" by Wilson Joseph, adapted by Aloha Sargent, is licensed under CC BY 4.0

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14.12.3: Information Cynicism



Skepticism vs. Cynicism

> "While skepticism is healthy, cynicism—real cynicism—is toxic" ("Astroturfing: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver").

As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary:

- **Skeptical**: Not easily convinced; having doubts or reservations
- **Cynical**: Believing that people are motivated purely by self-interest; distrustful of human sincerity or integrity

When it comes to information you encounter in your personal, professional, or academic research, a skeptical approach can be productive. For example, information skeptics might take a moment to fact-check, verify, or investigate a source before using or sharing it.

However, when skepticism turns to cynicism and deep distrust, research can become unproductive. Information cynics may feel powerless to identify reliable and useful sources. That is, while learning to question **everything**, they have begun to believe **nothing**—even highly-credible sources of information.

> "Without feeling empowered to sort fiction on the web, a lot of students are merely cynical and believe they can't trust **anything"** (Caulfield, qtd. in Young; emphasis added).

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Image: "Painting on wall of girl blowing question marks" by Matthew Paul Argall is licensed under CC BY 2.0

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14.12.4: College Students and Cynicism

> "It is really hard to know what is real in today's society; there are a lot of news sources and it is difficult to trust any of them" (Anonymous student qtd. in Head et al., "How Students Engage With News," 14).

Project Information Literacy, a nonprofit research institute that studies what it is like to be a student in the digital age, has published a number of influential reports that illustrate the rise in information cynicism among college students.

An "Increasing Avalanche" of Information



In 2018, they conducted a study of almost 6,000 students at 11 U.S. colleges (Head et al., "How Students Engage With News"), finding that:

- 82% of students said that news is necessary in a democracy
- 72% get news from social media on a daily basis
- 68% said the sheer amount of news available to them was overwhelming
- 45% found it difficult to tell real news from "fake news"
- 36% said "fake news" had made them distrust the credibility of any news
- "Deep political polarization" had made students "suspicious of biased reporting"
- Students were highly critical of an "increasing avalanche" of news that "appeals to emotions rather than conveying credible facts."

"Super Cynical:" A Lack of Trust

Information cynicism was explored more deeply in their 2020 report based on student focus groups and faculty interviews at eight U.S. colleges (Head et al., "Information Literacy"). This study found that:



- Students were cynical almost to the point of believing their concerns and actions had little meaning, and that it was not possible to change things
- An important theme was that "no news source could be trusted at face value" and there was a pervasive belief among students that they should "rely on themselves" to decide what to believe
- Many students felt they had been taught to be critical of everything they encountered, which even extended to the authority of their teachers. One student noted: "We're all super cynical and untrusting of information to the point that we want to find it out ourselves, so if a teacher says, 'There's five rows,' then we actually look, and, yep, there's five rows."

Interestingly, the study found that as a whole, this lack of trust in traditional authority figures meant that trust was placed in Google as the arbiter of truth—a dangerous conclusion, given the nature of algorithms. One student who was also a parent described how

he had tried to explain to his child that the bogeyman was not real, but his child had not believed him until a Google search confirmed it!

Sources

Head, Alison J., Barbara Fister, and Margy MacMillan. "Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms." *Project Information Literacy*, 15 Jan. 2020. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

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Image: "Avalanche" by Lorenzo Stella, adapted by Aloha Sargent, is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Image: "Suspicious" by Freepik, adapted by Aloha Sargent, from Flaticon.com

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14.12.5: Information Hygiene and Info-Environmentalism



Information Hygiene

The term **information hygiene** refers to the "metaphorical handwashing you engage in to prevent the spread of misinformation" (Caulfield, "It Can Take").

This idea has gained prominence in recent years, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as we have witnessed a massive outbreak of misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, and conspiracies surrounding this coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other experts have even referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as an "**infodemic**"—an epidemic of information. In their February 2020 Novel Coronavirus Situation Report, the WHO noted that the COVID-19 outbreak and response "has been accompanied by a massive 'infodemic'—an over-abundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it."

This is a stark example of the real-world impact that our online information can have. In this case, false information that we view, "like," and share can actually help to shape the public perceptions about the pandemic, as well as our responses and decisions about how to behave. Can you think of any other recent examples that demonstrate the **real-world impact** of disinformation?



So, the message here is that, in addition to actual hygiene, we also need to focus on information hygiene and "flattening the curve of dangerous falsehoods online by taking proactive steps to reduce their spread" ("Practice Information Hygiene"). Fact-checking, which we will discuss in the next chapter, is an example of good information hygiene. Much like hand sanitizer or hand washing, it isn't a cure, but rather a prevention for the spread of misinformation (Caulfield, "Misinformation").

Info-Environmentalism

The idea behind "info-environmentalism" is that if our information environment is polluted, we shouldn't abandon it—instead, we should help to clean it up. That is, if we are frustrated with the content posted on platforms like Facebook or YouTube or with low-quality Google search results, why not clean it up by posting as much reliable information as we can?

Of course, a big part of this movement will involve putting pressure on the platforms themselves to act responsibly. But because the Web is a collectively-maintained and produced environment, we, as consumers and creators, can also participate in the process through direct action. Here are some examples of actions you might take to improve the information environment (Caulfield, "Info-Environmentalism"):



- Minimize your own “misinformation footprint” by being more thoughtful about what you post and share on social media. Do a quick fact-check first.
- Shift your focus from arguing points to explaining things to others.
- Edit and improve Wikipedia articles.
- Create explanatory YouTube videos.
- Post pages on blogs or wikis that provide helpful guidance on important issues.
- Post better answers on question-and-answer websites like Quora or StackExchange.
- When you do share information, use evidence and cite your sources.

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Image: “Hand Sanitizer” by Freepik, adapted by Aloha Sargent, from Flaticon.com

Image: “Recycle” by Freepik, adapted by Aloha Sargent, from Flaticon.com

Image: “Wash Your Hands” by United Nations COVID-19 Response is in the Public Domain, CC0

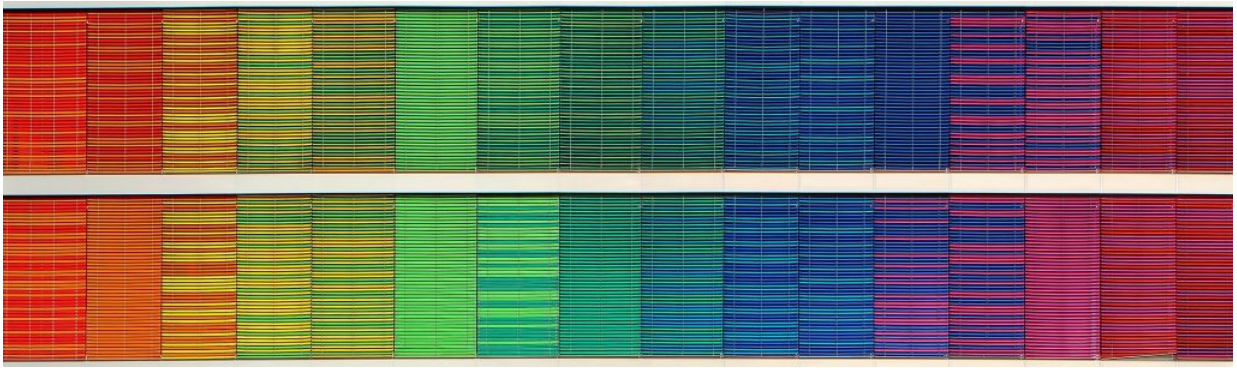
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14.12.6: Conclusion



This chapter covered information disorder, information cynicism, information hygiene, info-environmentalism, and the broad psychological, physiological, and sociological effects of disinformation. A common thread runs through all of these concepts in that they focus on the behaviors and actions that we should take not only when consuming but also when sharing information.

In other words, our goal should be to:

1. Minimize our own exposure to information disorders like misinformation and disinformation, **and**
2. Avoid spreading those information disorders to others.

Sources

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SECTION OVERVIEW

14.13: Fact-Checking

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14.13.2: The SIFT Method

14.13.3: Using Wikipedia Effectively

14.13.4: Fact-Checking Images and Memes

14.13.5: Conclusion

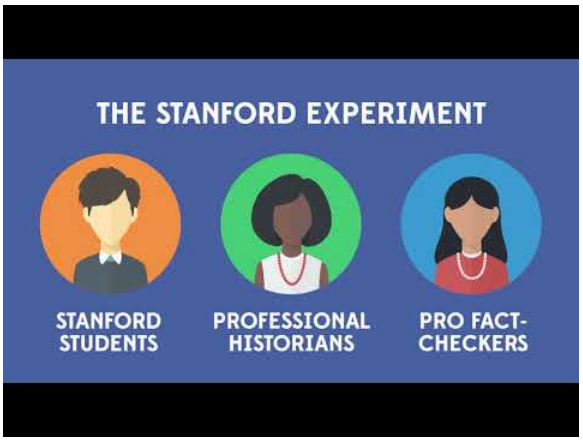
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14.13.1: Why Fact-Checking?

Introduction

When you find a source of information, how do you know if it's true? How can you be sure that it is a reliable, trustworthy, and effective piece of evidence for your research? This chapter will introduce you to a set of strategies to quickly and effectively verify your sources, based on the approach taken by professional fact-checkers. Fact-checking is a form of information hygiene—it can minimize your own susceptibility to misinformation and disinformation, and help you to avoid spreading it to others.

As an introduction, please watch the following video [3:13], which discusses the results of a very interesting study of Stanford students, historians, and professional fact-checkers (Wineburg and McGrew). Which group do you think did the best job of identifying reliable sources?



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Note: Turn on closed captions with the "CC" button or use the text transcript if you prefer to read.

Sources

"Online Verification Skills – Video 1: Introductory Video." *YouTube*, uploaded by CTRL-F, 29 June 2018.

Wineburg, Sam, and Sarah McGrew. "Lateral Reading: Reading Less and Learning More When Evaluating Digital Information." *Stanford History Education Group Working Paper No. 2017-A1*, 6 Oct. 2017, dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3048994.

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14.13.2: The SIFT Method

Mike Caulfield, Washington State University digital literacy expert, has helpfully condensed key fact-checking strategies into a short list of four moves, or **things to do** to quickly make a decision about whether or not a source is **worthy of your attention**. It is referred to as the "SIFT" method:



Stop



When you initially encounter a source of information and start to read it—**stop**. Ask yourself whether you know and trust the author, publisher, publication, or website. If you don't, use the other fact-checking moves that follow, to get a better sense of what you're looking at. In other words, don't read, share, or use the source in your research until you know what it is, and you can verify it is reliable.

This is a particularly important step, considering what we know about the attention economy—social media, news organizations, and other digital platforms purposely promote sensational, divisive, and outrage-inducing content that emotionally hijacks our attention in order to keep us "engaged" with their sites (clicking, liking, commenting, sharing). Stop and check your emotions before engaging!

Investigate the Source



You don't have to do a three-hour investigation into a source before you engage with it. But if you're reading a piece on economics, and the author is a Nobel prize-winning economist, that would be useful information. Likewise, if you're watching a video on the many benefits of milk consumption, you would want to be aware if the video was produced by the dairy industry. This doesn't mean the Nobel economist will always be right and that the dairy industry can't ever be trusted. But knowing the expertise and agenda of the person who created the source is **crucial** to your interpretation of the information provided.

When investigating a source, **fact-checkers read "laterally"** across many websites, rather than digging deep (reading "vertically") into the one source they are evaluating. That is, they don't spend much time on the source itself, but instead they quickly **get off the page** and see what others have said about the source. They open up many tabs in their browser, piecing together different bits of information from across the web to get a better picture of the source they're investigating.

Please watch the following short video [2:44] for a demonstration of this strategy. Pay particular attention to how Wikipedia can be used to quickly get useful information about publications, organizations, and authors.



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Find Better Coverage



What if the source you find is low-quality, or you can't determine if it is reliable or not? Perhaps you don't really care about the source—you care about the **claim that source is making**. You want to know if it is true or false. You want to know if it represents a consensus viewpoint, or if it is the subject of much disagreement. A common example of this is a meme you might encounter on social media. The random person or group who posted the meme may be less important than the quote or claim the meme makes.

Your best strategy in this case might actually be to find a **better source altogether**, to look for **other coverage** that includes trusted reporting or analysis on that same claim. Rather than relying on the source that you initially found, you can trade up for a higher quality source.

The point is that you're not wedded to using that initial source. We have the internet! You can go out and find a better source, and invest your time there. Please watch this video [4:10] that demonstrates this strategy and notes how fact-checkers build a library of trusted sources they can rely on to provide better coverage.



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Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context

Much of what we find on the internet has been stripped of context. Maybe there's a video of a fight between two people with Person A as the aggressor. But what happened before that? What was clipped out of the video and what stayed in? Maybe there's a picture that seems real but the caption could be misleading. Maybe a claim is made about a new medical treatment based on a research finding—but you're not certain if the cited research paper actually said that. The people who re-report these stories either get things wrong by mistake, or, in some cases, they are intentionally misleading us.

In these cases you will want to trace the claim, quote, or media back to the source, so you can see it in its original context and get a sense of whether the version you saw was accurately presented. Please watch the following video [1:33] that discusses re-reporting vs. original reporting and demonstrates a quick tip: going "upstream" to find the original reporting source.



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Sources

"Online Verification Skills – Video 2: Investigate the Source." *YouTube*, uploaded by CTRL-F, 29 June 2018.

"Online Verification Skills – Video 3: Find the Original Source." *YouTube*, uploaded by CTRL-F, 25 May 2018.

"Online Verification Skills – Video 4: Look for Trusted Work." *YouTube*, uploaded by CTRL-F, 25 May 2018.

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14.13.3: Using Wikipedia Effectively

> "To tell students not to use Wikipedia is to deprive them of one of the most useful tools on the Internet. Instead of teaching them to avoid it, we should be teaching students how to use Wikipedia wisely" ("How to Use Wikipedia Wisely").

Misconceptions & Benefits

Wikipedia—the world's largest reference website—is broadly misunderstood. Because it is written by thousands of anonymous volunteers around the world, Wikipedia generates uncertainty or skepticism in many. If just *anyone* can change Wikipedia, won't there be inaccuracies? Won't people potentially abuse that power?

The open, collaborative approach of Wikipedia means that it is susceptible to vandalism, unverified information, or subtle viewpoint promotion. However, that same open approach also *increases* the chances that factual errors and misleading statements will be quickly corrected, and that articles will be consistently improved and updated. Indeed, an often-cited 2005 study (Giles), as well as a follow-up study in 2012 (Casebourne et al.), found no significant differences in accuracy between Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica articles.



Additionally, the Wikipedia community has strict rules about providing citations or references for facts and claims, and authors must adopt a neutral point of view. Because of this, Wikipedia articles are often the **best available introduction to a subject**. If you are researching a complex question, starting with the resources and summaries provided by Wikipedia can give you a substantial **running start** on an issue. For more information about this, see the section on Background Reading. The requirement for Wikipedia authors to cite their sources has another beneficial effect. If you can find a claim expressed in a Wikipedia article, you can almost always follow the footnotes to reliable sources for further research and evidence.

Areas for Caution

Not all Wikipedia articles are useful. Some articles are incomplete or contain "citation needed" warnings. You may find very short "stub" articles that are awaiting either further expansion, or deletion. You should avoid using these types of articles for your research.

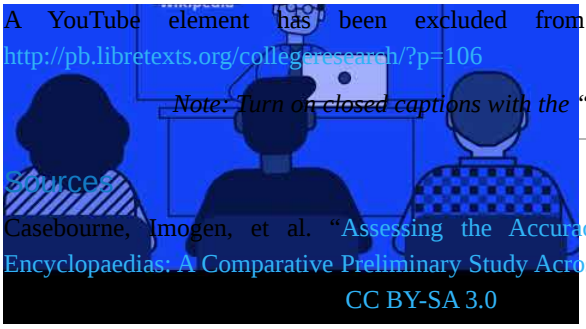
Another known concern is systemic bias in Wikipedia, including gender and racial bias. For example, of the over 130,000 active editors of Wikipedia, only 8.5% to 16% are female; of the over 1.5 million biographies on Wikipedia, only 18% are about women (Kantor). Wikipedia has launched numerous initiatives to encourage more women to become editors and to improve their coverage of women; even so, the gender gap persists. With Wikipedia as well as other, more traditional forms of publishing, we must be aware of who creates the information we consume, and understand how that impacts our knowledge about research topics and the world around us. For more on bias, see the page on Information Sources: Bias.

Using Wikipedia Wisely

With an awareness of these benefits and concerns, you can more effectively use Wikipedia for fact-checking and to find background information on a topic. Please watch the following video [2:41] that addresses some of the common misconceptions about Wikipedia and demonstrates how you can **use this tool wisely, as professional fact-checkers often do**.



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Note: Turn on closed captions with the "CC" button or use the text transcript if you prefer to read.

Sources

Casebourne, Imogen, et al. "Assessing the Accuracy and Quality of Wikipedia Entries Compared to Popular Online Encyclopaedias: A Comparative Preliminary Study Across Disciplines in English, Spanish and Arabic." *Wikimedia*, Epic and Univ.

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Image: "Run" by Alex Podolsky, adapted by Aloha Sargent, is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Kantor, Jessica. "Wikipedia Still Hasn't Fixed Its Colossal Gender Gap." *Fast Company*, 13 Nov. 2019.

Misconceptions and Benefits section adapted from "Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers" by Mike Caulfield, licensed under CC BY 4.0 and "Teaching with Wikipedia: A High Impact Open Educational Practice" by TJ Bliss, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

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14.13.4: Fact-Checking Images and Memes

Find Trusted Coverage

Often, claims or stories will come to you in the form of images and memes. How do you know if images have been digitally altered (Photoshopped) or if they are being shared out of context (misrepresented)?

If you want to find trusted coverage of the issue, claim, or photo, you have two options:

1. You can search the relevant text from the image
2. You can use “reverse image search”

Reverse Image Search Using Google

On your Computer

Using Chrome as your browser, right-click the image and select “Search Google for image.” Note: On a Mac, use Control-click. On a Chromebook, use Alt-click.

In the example below, we can do a reverse image search on this meme that suggests space lasers were responsible for the California wildfires.



This is a screenshot of a meme claiming that the California wildfires were caused by “powerful lasers.” We can try to check this claim with a reverse image search.

On your Phone

Using Chrome (app), touch and hold the image, then select “Search Google for This Image” Note: You may first have to click a menu option to “Open in Chrome”

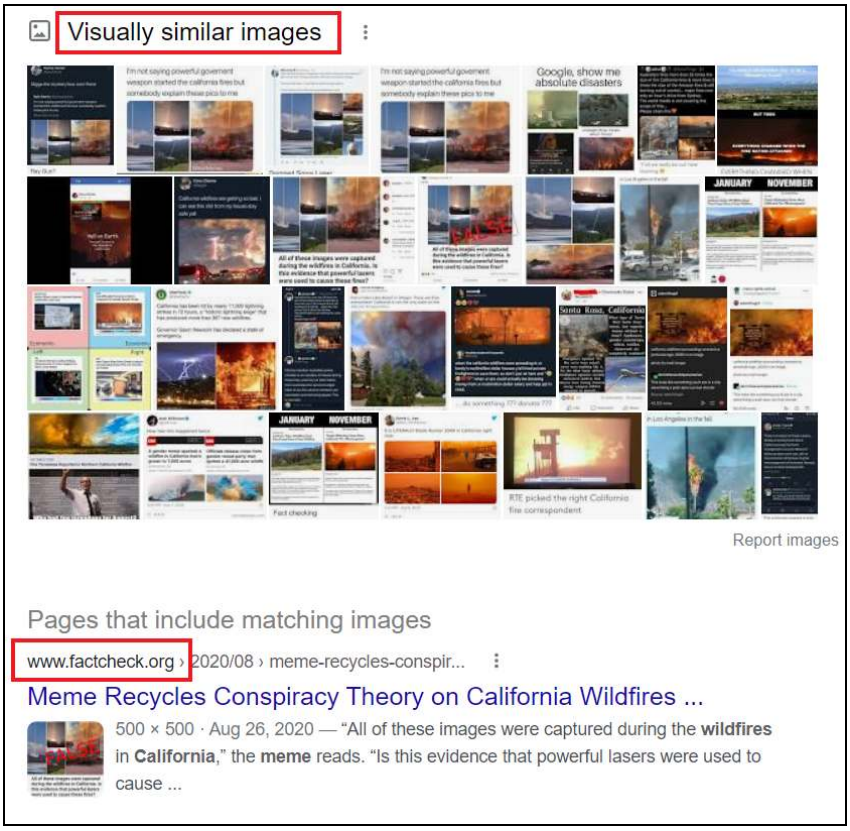


Although it is a bit more difficult, you can also conduct a reverse image search on your phone.

The Results

You will get a list of any other websites where the image has been used, including previous fact-checks of the image, and perhaps even a link to the real version of the photo.

In our example, we see that this meme has appeared in many other places, and that it has already been shown to be false by a reputable fact-checking organization.



Our reverse image search results show that factcheck.org has already found this conspiracy theory meme to be false.

The results of this fact-checking led to some of the actual images, in context. In the screenshot below from the Twitter account for SpaceX, we see that the first image from the meme was actually an image of a SpaceX rocket launch, not a laser beam hitting California.



A Tweet from the official Twitter account for SpaceX shows the origin of one of the supposed "laser" images.

Sources

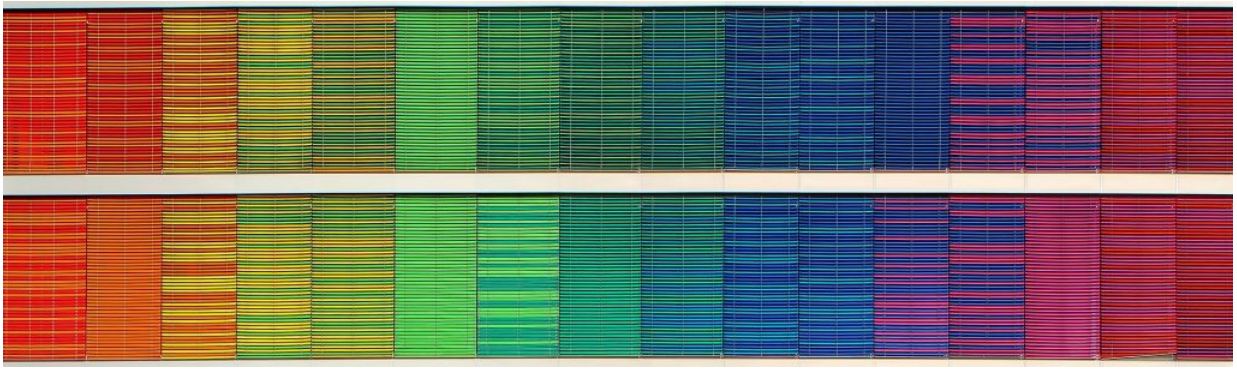
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14.13.5: Conclusion



There's a theme that runs through all of these fact-checking moves: They are about reconstructing the necessary context to verify, understand, and interpret sources of information that we may encounter in academic, professional, and personal research.

One piece of context is the author or publisher. What's their expertise? What's their agenda? This will require investigating the source.

When it comes to claims, a key piece of context includes whether they are accepted or contested. By scanning for other coverage, you can see what the consensus is on a claim and perhaps find a better source.

Finally, when evidence is presented through a certain lens—whether a quote or an image or a scientific finding—sometimes it helps to reconstruct the original context in which the evidence was presented.

In some cases these techniques will show you that claims are false, or that sources are misleading or even deceptive. But in the majority of cases they do something just as important: They reestablish the context that the web so often strips away, allowing for more meaningful engagement with information.

Sources

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SECTION OVERVIEW

14.14: Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism

Learning how to effectively quote and paraphrase research can be difficult and it certainly takes practice. Hopefully, your abilities to make good use of your research will improve as you work through the exercises in part two and three of *The Process of Research Writing*, not to mention as you take on other research writing experiences beyond this class. The goal of this chapter is to introduce some basic strategies for summarizing, quoting and paraphrasing research in your writing and to explain how to avoid plagiarizing your research.

14.14.1: How to Summarize- An Overview

14.14.2: How to Quote and Paraphrase- An Overview

14.14.3: When to Quote, When to Paraphrase

14.14.4: How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process

14.14.5: Plagiarism and the Internet

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14.14.1: 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.

Hyperlink: Chapter Six, “The Annotated Bibliography Exercise,” also offers advice on writing effective summaries.

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 quote from what you are summarizing.** 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 your library’s computer 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.

Hyperlink: For more advice on close reading, see the section called “Starting With a Close Reading” in Chapter Seven, “The Critique Writing Exercise.”

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14.14.2: How to Quote and Paraphrase- An Overview

Writers quote and paraphrase from research in order to support their points and to persuade their readers. A quote or a paraphrase 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 "quote" is a direct restatement of the exact words from the original source. The general rule of thumb is any time you use three or more words as they appeared in the original source, you should treat it as a quote. A "paraphrase" is a restatement of the information or point of the original source in your own words.

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.

The method you should follow to properly quote or paraphrase depends on the style guide you are following in your academic writing. The two most common style guides used in academic writing are the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the American Psychological Association (APA). I discuss both of these different style guides in some detail in the Appendix of this book. Your instructor will probably assign one of these styles before you begin working on your project, however, if he/she doesn't mention this, be sure to ask.

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14.14.3: When to Quote, When to Paraphrase

The real "art" to research writing is using quotes and paraphrases from evidence effectively in order to support your point. There are certain "rules," dictated by the rules of style you are following, such as the ones presented by the MLA or the ones presented by the APA. There are certain "guidelines" and suggestions, like the ones I offer in the previous section and the ones you will learn from your teacher and colleagues.

But when all is said and done, 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.

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 a 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.

tip

Introduce your quotes and paraphrases to your reader, especially on first reference.

- **Explain** the significance of the quote or paraphrase to your reader.
- **Cite** your quote or paraphrase 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.
- **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.

Four Examples of Quotes and Paraphrases

Here are four examples of what I mean about properly quoting and paraphrasing evidence in your research essays. In each case, I begin with a **BAD** example, or the way **NOT** to quote or paraphrase.

Quoting in MLA Style

Here's the first **BAD** example, where the writer is trying to follow the rules of MLA style:

Example 14.14.3.1:

There are many positive effects for advertising prescription drugs on television. "African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options" (Wechsler, Internet).

This is a potentially good piece of information to support a research writer's claim, but the researcher hasn't done any of the necessary work to explain where this quote comes from or to explain why it is important for supporting her point. Rather, she has

simply “dropped in” the quote, leaving the interpretation of its significance up to the reader.

Now consider this revised **GOOD** (or at least **BETTER**) example of how this quote might be better introduced into the essay:

Example 14.14.3.2:

In her Pharmaceutical Executive article available through the Wilson Select Internet database, Jill Wechsler writes about one of the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. “African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options.”

In this revision, it’s much more clear what point the writer is trying to make with this evidence and where this evidence comes from.

In this particular example, the passage is from a traditional print journal called *Pharmaceutical Executive*. However, the writer needs to indicate that she actually found and read this article through Wilson Select, an Internet database which reproduces the “full text” of articles from periodicals without any graphics, charts, or page numbers.

When you use a direct quote in your research, you need to the indicate page number of that direct quote or you need to indicate that the evidence has no specific page numbers. While it can be a bit awkward to indicate within the text how the writer found this information if it’s from the Internet, it’s important to do so on the first reference of a piece of evidence in your writing. On references to this piece of evidence after the first reference, you can use just the last name of the writer. For example:

Example 14.14.3.3:

Wechsler also reports on the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. She writes...

Paraphrasing in MLA Style

In this example, the writer is using MLA style to write a research essay for a Literature class. Here is a **BAD** example of a paraphrase:

Example 14.14.3.4:

While Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (Callahan).

There are two problems with this paraphrase. First, if this is the first or only reference to this particular piece of evidence in the research essay, the writer should include more information about the source of this paraphrase in order to properly introduce it. Second, this paraphrase is actually not of the *entire* article but rather of a specific passage. The writer has neglected to note the page number within the parenthetical citation.

A **GOOD** or at least **BETTER** revision of this paraphrase might look like this:

Example 14.14.3.5:

John F. Callahan suggests in his article “F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Evolving American Dream” that while Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (381).

By incorporating the name of the author of the evidence the research writer is referring to here, the source of this paraphrase is now clear to the reader. Furthermore, because there is a page number at the end of this sentence, the reader understands that this passage is a paraphrase of a particular part of Callahan’s essay and *not* a summary of the entire essay. Again, if the research writer had introduced this source to his readers earlier, he could have started with a phrase like “Callahan suggests...” and then continued on with his paraphrase.

If the research writer were offering a brief summary of the entire essay following MLA style, he wouldn’t include a page number in parentheses. For example:

Example 14.14.3.6:

John F. Callahan's article "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream" examines Fitzgerald's fascination with the elusiveness of the American Dream in the novels The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night, and The Last Tycoon.

Quoting in APA Style

Consider this **BAD** example in APA style, of what **NOT** to do when quoting evidence:

Example 14.14.3.7:

"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:

Example 14.14.3.8:

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).

This revision is improved because the research writer has introduced and explained the point of the evidence with the addition of a clarifying sentence. It also follows the rules of APA style. Generally, APA style prefers that the research writer refer to the author only by last name followed immediately by the year of publication. Whenever possible, you should begin your citation with the author's last name and the year of publication, and, in the case of a direct quote like this passage, the page number (including the "p.") in parentheses at the end.

Paraphrasing in MLA Style

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:

Example 14.14.3.9:

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:**

Example 14.14.3.10:

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.

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14.14.4: How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process

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.

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, **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 what I call **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 purposeful and accidental 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.*

To exemplify what I'm getting at, consider the examples below that use quotations and paraphrases from this brief passage:

> *Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties. Rock started out as an Anglo-American phenomenon and has become an industry. Nonetheless, it was able to capture the hopes of young people around the world and provided enjoyment to those of us who listened to or played rock. Sixties pop was the conscience of one or two generations that helped bring the war in Vietnam to a close. Obviously, neither rock nor pop has solved global poverty or hunger. But is this a reason to be "against" them? (ix).*

And just to make it clear that *I'm* not plagiarizing this passage, here is the citation in MLA style:

Lévy, Pierre. Cyberculture. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Here's an obvious example of plagiarism:

Example 14.14.4.1:

Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties.

In this case, the writer has literally taken one of Lévy's sentences and represented it as her own. That's clearly against the rules.

Here's another example of plagiarism, perhaps less obvious:

Example 14.14.4.2:

The same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people.

While these aren't Lévy's exact words, they are certainly close enough to constitute a form of plagiarism. And again, even though you might think that this is a "lesser" form of plagiarism, it's still plagiarism.

Both of these passages can easily be corrected to make them acceptable quotations or paraphrases.

Example 14.14.4.3:

In the introduction of his book Cyberculture, Pierre Lévy observes that "Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties**" (ix).**

Pierre Lévy suggests that the same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people **(ix).**

Note that changing these passages from examples of plagiarism to acceptable examples of a quotation and a paraphrase is extremely easy: properly cite your sources.

This leads to the "golden rule" of avoiding plagiarism:

> *Always cite your sources. If you are unsure as to whether you should or should not cite a particular claim or reference, you should probably cite your source.*

Often, students are unclear as to whether or not they need to cite a piece of evidence because they believe it to be "common knowledge" or because they are not sure about the source of information. When in doubt about whether or not to cite evidence in order to give credit to a source ("common knowledge" or not), you should cite the evidence.

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14.14.5: Plagiarism and the Internet

Sometimes, I think the ease of finding and retrieving information on the World Wide Web makes readers think that this information does not need to be cited. After all, it isn't a traditional source like a book or a journal; it is available for "free." All a research writer needs to do with a web site is "cut and paste" whatever he needs into his essay, right? Wrong!

You need to cite the evidence you find from the Internet or the World Wide Web the same way you cite evidence from other sources. To not do this is plagiarism, or, more bluntly, cheating. Just because the information is "freely" available on the Internet does not mean you can use this information in your academic writing without properly citing it, much in the same way that the information from library journals and books "freely" available to you needs to be cited in order to give credit where credit is due.

It is also not acceptable to simply download graphics from the World Wide Web. Images found on the Internet are protected by copyright laws. Quite literally, taking images from the Web (particularly from commercial sources) is an offense that could lead to legal action. There are places where you can find graphics and clip art that Web publishers have made publicly available for anyone to use, but be sure that the Web site where you find the graphics makes this explicit before you take graphics as your own.

In short, you can use evidence from the Web as long as you don't plagiarize and as long as you properly cite it; don't take graphics from the Web unless you know the images are in the public domain. For more information on citing electronic sources, see Chapter 12, "Citing Your Research with MLA and APA Style."

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14.15: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (8 min, 3 sec):

0:00 / 8:03

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.

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14.16: MLA Essay Format

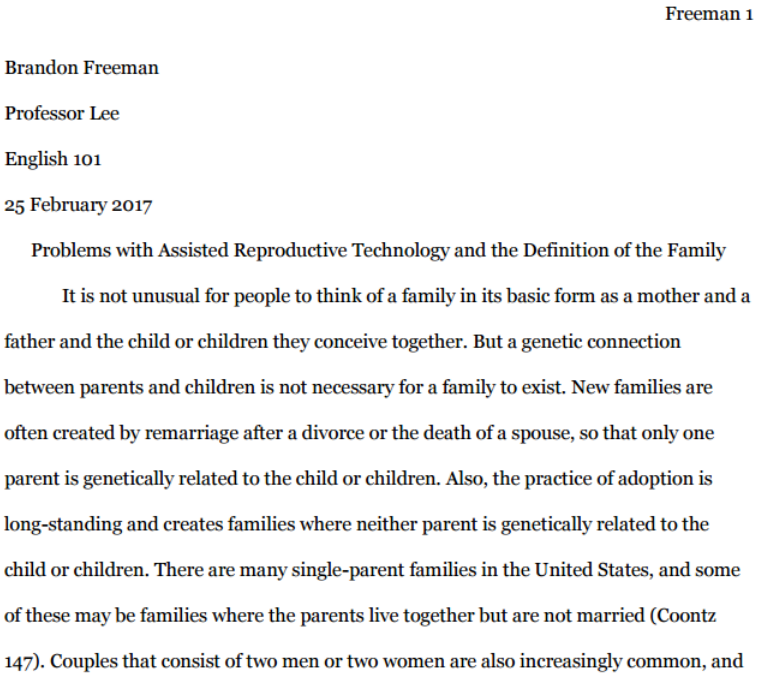
Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 27 sec):

0:00 / 4:27

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.**

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14.17: MLA In-Text Citations

Media Alternative

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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 14.17.1

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 14.17.2

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 14.17.3

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 14.17.4

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

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14.18: 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.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

15: Forming a Research-Based Argument

Learning Outcomes

- Determine the purpose of an argument
- Distinguish between definition, evaluation, causal, and proposal arguments
- Explain what common questions will need to be answered for each of the above argument types.

15.1: Deciding the Purpose of a Research-Based Argument

15.2: Determining Audience

15.2.1: Audience

15.3: Tailoring an Argument to an Audience

15.4: Definition Arguments

15.4.1: Annotated Sample Definition Argument

15.4.2: Sample Definition Outline

15.5: Evaluation Arguments

15.5.1: Sample Evaluation Argument Prompt and Outline

15.5.2: Annotated Sample Evaluation Argument

15.6: Causal Arguments

15.6.1: Annotated Sample Causal Argument

15.7: Proposal Arguments

15.7.1: Annotated Sample Proposal Argument

15.8: Visual Arguments

15.8.1: Photos and Illustrations

15.8.2: Video- Visualizing Data

15.8.3: Visual Elements- Play, Use, and Design



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15.1: Deciding the Purpose of a Research-Based Argument

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (6 min, 6 sec):

0:00 / 6:06

Every argument sets out to convince readers or listeners to believe it, no? In that sense, every argument has the same purpose. However, there are different kinds of beliefs we might want to encourage and different attitudes we might take toward those beliefs. Besides, we may want an argument not just to convince but to lead to action. Sometimes the purpose goes beyond just “Believe me!” For example, when the argument is part of an advertisement, the goal is clear: "Buy me!" The goal of a stump speech is to get listeners to cast their votes in support of a candidate. Sometimes, the purpose is simply to struggle with a topic in order to begin to come up with an informed opinion. Many times, the purpose of a piece of writing is to encourage critical thinking on a subject, and maybe change something wrong in our world in response.



Photo by Magda Ehlers on Pexels, under the Pexels License.

For example, we could set out to write about global warming for different purposes. We might simply aim to make people believe that global warming is real. Alternately, we might try to convince readers to make drastic changes in their lives to combat climate change, or to protest a particular company responsible for climate change. Our purpose will shape the ideas we express, but it will also shape the emotional appeals we make.

Identifying our purpose can help us decide what we need to include to achieve that purpose. Often arguments with a particular kind of purpose will share common features. Below we will describe four kinds of research-based essays, each of which we will explore in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

Purposes for research papers

We can ask ourselves which of the following best describes our purpose:

- We want to describe the nature of something.
- We want to assess how good or bad something is.
- We want to demonstrate that one thing causes or caused another.
- We want to propose some action.

An argument may contain multiple elements from this list, but if we can decide which is ultimately the most important, we can shape the introduction and conclusion with that goal in mind. Each type of argument has particular questions that may be worth addressing, as we will explore in the later sections.

In the following sections, we suggest strategies and components of four different types of arguments, matched to the four purposes mentioned above.

- **Definition** arguments describe the nature of something or identify a pattern or trend. Generally speaking, they answer the question, “What is it?”
- **Evaluation** arguments assess something according to particular criteria. They answer the question, “How good or bad is it?”
- **Causal** arguments attempt to show that one thing leads to or has led to another. They answer the question, “What caused it?”
- **Proposal** arguments present a case for action. They answer the question, “What should we do about it?”

Let’s look at some examples of argument purposes divided into these categories.

Definition argument examples

- We want readers to know what kinds of communication dolphins are capable of.
- We want to clarify which groups of people the term “Latinx” refers to.
- We want to show how Kurdish communities differ in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

Evaluation argument examples

- We want to recommend a gaming device.
- We want to convince readers that the Supreme Court decision to give corporations First Amendment rights to free speech was misguided.
- We want to show that a new Alzheimer’s drug meets the criteria for emergency use authorization.

Causal argument examples

- We want to argue that the attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021 actually made Americans value American democracy more and want to protect it.
- We want to show that parents can’t change a child’s feeling of being male, female, or nonbinary.
- We want to suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase in internet addiction.

Proposal argument examples

- We want readers to take the online Harvard Implicit Association Tests and reflect on what the results suggest about their unconscious biases.
- We want legislators to double the gas tax in order to speed up the transition to clean energy.
- We want to make community college free for all Americans.

Comparing and contrasting for different purposes

It's worth noting that we may want to discuss more than one thing for any of the purposes above. If we are comparing and contrasting two or more things in our essay, we will want to think about essay structure for compare and contrast essays as well as thinking about the elements of the argument according to the overall purpose. See Section 3.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments for more on this.

Practice exercise 15.1.1

For each argument below, select the category that best describes the argument’s purpose. Explain how it fits the category.

1. Muslim women should be allowed to wear full face and body coverings such as burkas in public if they choose.
2. Minecraft play offers many opportunities for creativity and learning.
3. The explosion of mental health content on TikTok has reduced the shame many people feel about their mental health issues.
4. Only apartments where the rent is less than 30% of a minimum wage worker’s income can truly be considered “affordable housing.”
5. Composting food waste can generate energy with a minimum of greenhouse gas emissions.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

15.2: Determining Audience

Topic hierarchy

15.2.1: Audience

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15.2.1: Audience

What this handout is about

This handout will help you understand and write for the appropriate audience when you write an academic essay.

Audience matters

When you're in the process of writing a paper, it's easy to forget that you are actually writing to someone. Whether you've thought about it consciously or not, you always write to an audience: sometimes your audience is a very generalized group of readers, sometimes you know the individuals who compose the audience, and sometimes you write for yourself. Keeping your audience in mind while you write can help you make good decisions about what material to include, how to organize your ideas, and how best to support your argument.

To illustrate the impact of audience, imagine you're writing a letter to your grandmother to tell her about your first month of college. What details and stories might you include? What might you leave out? Now imagine that you're writing on the same topic but your audience is your best friend. Unless you have an extremely cool grandma to whom you're very close, it's likely that your two letters would look quite different in terms of content, structure, and even tone.

Isn't my instructor my audience?

Yes, your instructor or TA is probably the actual audience for your paper. Your instructors read and grade your essays, and you want to keep their needs and perspectives in mind when you write. However, when you write an essay with only your instructor in mind, you might not say as much as you should or say it as clearly as you should, because you assume that the person grading it knows more than you do and will fill in the gaps. This leaves it up to the instructor to decide what you are really saying, and she might decide differently than you expect. For example, she might decide that those gaps show that you don't know and understand the material. Remember that time when you said to yourself, "I don't have to explain communism; my instructor knows more about that than I do" and got back a paper that said something like "Shows no understanding of communism"? That's an example of what can go awry when you think of your instructor as your only audience.

Thinking about your audience differently can improve your writing, especially in terms of how clearly you express your argument. The clearer your points are, the more likely you are to have a strong essay. Your instructor will say, "He really understands communism—he's able to explain it simply and clearly!" By treating your instructor as an intelligent but uninformed audience, you end up addressing her more effectively.

How do I identify my audience and what they want from me?

Before you even begin the process of writing, take some time to consider who your audience is and what they want from you. Use the following questions to help you identify your audience and what you can do to address their wants and needs.

- Who is your audience?
- Might you have more than one audience? If so, how many audiences do you have? List them.
- Does your assignment itself give any clues about your audience? What does your audience need? What do they want? What do they value?
- What is most important to them?
- What are they least likely to care about?
- What kind of organization would best help your audience understand and appreciate your arguments?
- What do you have to say (or what are you doing in your research) that might surprise your audience?
- What do you want your audience to think, learn, or assume about you? What impression do you want your writing or your research to convey?

How much should I explain?

This is the hard part. As we said earlier, you want to show your instructor that you know the material. But different assignments call for varying degrees of information. Different fields also have different expectations. For more about what each field tends to expect from an essay, see the **Writing Center handouts** on writing in specific fields of study. The best place to start figuring out how

much you should say about each part of your paper is in a careful reading of the assignment. We give you some tips for reading assignments and figuring them out in **our handout on how to read an assignment**. The assignment may specify an audience for your paper; sometimes the instructor will ask you to imagine that you are writing to your congressperson, for a professional journal, to a group of specialists in a particular field, or for a group of your peers. If the assignment doesn't specify an audience, you may find it most useful to imagine your classmates reading the paper, rather than your instructor.

Now, knowing your imaginary audience, what other clues can you get from the assignment? If the assignment asks you to summarize something that you have read, then your reader wants you to include more examples from the text than if the assignment asks you to interpret the passage. Most assignments in college focus on argument rather than the repetition of learned information, so your reader probably doesn't want a lengthy, detailed, point-by-point summary of your reading (book reports in some classes and argument reconstructions in philosophy classes are big exceptions to this rule). If your assignment asks you to interpret or analyze the text (or an event or idea), then you want to make sure that your explanation of the material is focused and not so detailed that you end up spending more time on examples than on your analysis. If you are not sure about the difference between explaining something and analyzing it, see our handouts on **reading the assignment** and **argument**.

Once you have a draft, try your level of explanation out on a friend, a classmate, or a Writing Center tutor. Get the person to read your rough draft, and then ask her to talk to you about what she did and didn't understand. (Now is not the time to talk about proofreading stuff, so make sure she ignores 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." Our **handout on paragraph development** can help you find a good balance of examples and explanation.

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?

Putting yourself in the reader's position

Instead of reading your draft as if you wrote it and know what you meant, try reading it as if you have no previous knowledge of the material. Have you explained enough? Are the connections clear? This can be hard to do at first. Consider using one of the following strategies:

- Take a break from your work—go work out, take a nap, take a day off. This is why the Writing Center and your instructors encourage you to start writing more than a day before the paper is due. If you write the paper the night before it's due, you make it almost impossible to read the paper with a fresh eye.
- Try outlining after writing—after you have a draft, look at each paragraph separately. Write down the main point for each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper, in the order you have put them. Then look at your "outline"—does it reflect what you meant to say, in a logical order? Are some paragraphs hard to reduce to one point? Why? This technique will help you find places where you may have confused your reader by straying from your original plan for the paper.
- Read the paper aloud—we do this all the time at the Writing Center, and once you get used to it, you'll see that it helps you slow down and really consider how your reader experiences your text. It will also help you catch a lot of sentence-level errors, such as misspellings and missing words, which can make it difficult for your reader to focus on your argument.

These techniques can help you read your paper in the same way your reader will and make revisions that help your reader understand your argument. Then, when your instructor finally reads your finished draft, he or she won't have to fill in any gaps. The more work you do, the less work your audience will have to do—and the more likely it is that your instructor will follow and understand your argument.

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15.3: Tailoring an Argument to an Audience

Media Alternative

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There is a common misconception about writing that it is a solitary exercise. As such, each time you get stuck on a word or sentence, it may be up to you alone to move past that writer's block. However, that's simply not true. Beyond the support of your instructor, peers, or tutors, you have an audience that you're writing to that can help you generate ideas and stay focused. The more we imagine our audience's likely reactions as part of the writing process, the more likely we are to generate ideas, reach them, and convince them or affect their thinking. Why? Because, as we saw in Section 9.1, an argument implies a relationship. So, read on to find out more about how you can work together with your audience to develop your paper.



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Audience Awareness in the Writing Process

Analyzing your audience affects nearly every stage of your writing, from early drafting to how you revise and get to the final draft. Beyond writing to answer a prompt, at a really basic level, you're writing to be read, by your peers, your professor, or by any audience designated in your prompt. To do this effectively, consider the following questions. Many of these considerations already happen intuitively when we talk with other people. When we're writing we need to be a bit more conscious about imagining the audience.

- What does your audience probably already know about your topic? Depending on how much your audience knows, there may be background information you should include or leave out. For example, if we are writing on global warming in an English Composition class for an audience of an English professor and assorted students, we might need to use more detailed explanations for scientific concepts. However, if we are writing on global warming in an upper-level environmental science class, we can assume that our audience is more well-versed in the basics of climate science. We wouldn't need to explain the details of the greenhouse effect works and could probably use more jargon from the discipline without defining every term.
- How is your audience likely to feel about your topic? A skeptical audience needs more evidence than an open-minded one. Is the audience likely to have a prejudice or misconception that needs to be addressed? Assessing how your audience feels may

also be the key to finding common ground. Refer to 9.8: Reaching a Hostile Audience for more information.

- What new information can you provide? New information about a topic or its purpose can keep the audience engaged in a way rehashing old information cannot.
- What is your relationship to the audience? This can affect your tone and how much of yourself you insert into the paper. For example, addressing an authority figure would require a different approach than addressing a relative peer or a complete stranger.

The Effect of Audience on Style

Like a conversation, in addition to your audience affecting what you say, your audience can sometimes affect how you say that content as well. The following items are some things to consider:

- **Purpose:** What does your audience care about or believe in? What will move your audience to act? It will help your paper if you can align its purpose with something the audience cares about. See 9.6: Moral Character for more information on this.
- **Backing:** What kind of evidence will convince your audience? Remember what looks like strong evidence to you may appear flimsy to your audience.
- **Sentence Type and Length:** Should you use long and complex sentences? Or short ones? The reading level of your paper should match the reading level of your audience.
- **Level of Formality:** Should you use technical jargon? Or slang? Avoid the temptation to 'sound academic' with technical words and phrases unless the situation calls for it.
- **Tone:** Formal or informal? Serious or humorous? Distanced or personal? Hitting the right tone will help your audience take you more seriously. Consider checking out 8.4: Tone or 9.3: Distance and Intimacy for more resources related to this.

Reaching Out to the Audience

Many audiences form an opinion about what they read by the end of the introduction. Take advantage of this information to make sure you make a positive first impression. Try to pick a title that your audience may recognize or resonate with. Work on a hook that is geared towards your audience (as opposed to something that is purely provocative or attention-grabbing). Consider making a direct appeal to your audience in the introduction, and end your introduction with a thesis statement modeled after the values you know your reader will identify with. Check out 7.1: Introductions for more information about this.

Addressing a Diverse Audience



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While the previous points have been geared towards writing to a specific audience, the following items are some good practices to observe for any audience you may encounter.

- **Recognize your cultural filter**: Cultures are formed from a variety of factors like class, gender, generation, religion, and education. Your culture shapes how you view the world and can at times prevent you from understanding different backgrounds. Do your best to understand how your cultural values may be affecting your argument and how they may differ from your audience's.

- **Avoid ethnocentrism**: Assuming that your culture's values, customs, or beliefs are superior to another's is ethnocentrism. It's an attitude that can alienate your audience. Be careful not to assume that all cultural practices are shared. Suspend any judgments or cultural stereotypes.
- **Adopt bias-free language**: Biased language is tricky and has a way of sneaking into writing when you least expect it. While you may think writing "the male lawyer" provides important detail, including the lawyer's gender suggests the law is an inherently male or masculine profession. So, be mindful of any biased, sexist, or stereotypical language that may come from unconscious biases as you're writing and edit accordingly.
- **Acknowledge issues of oppression.** Similar to ethnocentrism, the language we write or speak might convey a negative bias towards individuals or groups. If your message stereotypes a group, even unconsciously, you risk offending your audience. Examples of discriminating language to avoid include:
  - ***Racism*** – Your audience will be diverse. By recognizing that there are many cultural frames of reference, you'll reach each reader or listener effectively. Unless it is necessary, avoid references to ethnicity.
  - ***Heterosexism*** – If your essay or speech depicts a relationship, don't assume that each member of your audience is heterosexual.
  - ***Ageism*** – Many pervasive stereotypes exist with regard to the age of individuals. If you write or speak about an elderly person, challenge discriminating ideas such as "old people are feeble" or "teenagers lack wisdom."
  - ***Sexism*** – Archaic sexist usage assumes one male term for all genders. Now we can use a singular they for this purpose (see 13.7: Pronoun Agreement). Sexism suggests one sex or gender is inferior to another. Avoid sexist stereotypes such as the idea that females are emotional and men are logical. It's also important to avoid assuming that gender is binary or based only on biology.

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15.4: Definition Arguments

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What is a definition argument?

A research-based argument may have as its goal to describe the nature of something, whether it be an abstract concept like justice, a historical event, or an ongoing trend. Definition arguments like this are arguments because they seek to shape our vision of reality. We can think of them as answering the question "What is it?"

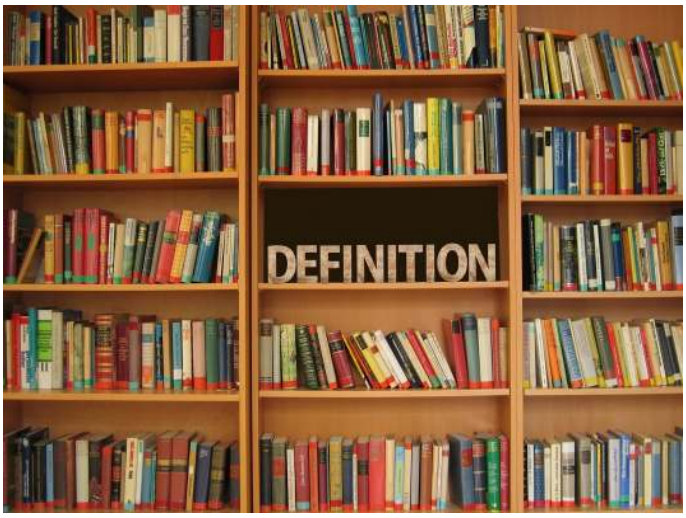


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Definition arguments may attempt to explain what is meant by a particular term. Take the following claim:

> *Organic, in terms of food, means plants and animals raised without additives or artificial growing conditions.*

The argument here hinges upon understanding the definition of the word “organic.” In this case, organic is the subject of the argument. The claim goes on to base the argument on definition criteria. The claim states that two definition criteria of “organic” are “raised without additives” and “raised without artificial growing conditions.” "What do they mean by ‘artificial’?" If you find yourself questioning other terms used in the claim, that might mean your argument will need to dedicate a paragraph or more to defining those terms. An extended argument on organic food would need to explain in detail what distinguishes artificial growing conditions from natural ones. Can greenhouse-grown food be organic? In such a situation, it may benefit the argument to offer the dictionary definition of “organic” as a way to confirm that writer and the readers’ assumptions are the same.

There are a number of online dictionaries that student authors can derive a definition from, but should the writer wish to ensure trust (ethos) with the audience, the source of the dictionary definition might matter. The dictionary.com site offers this definition for “organic”:

> *Organic: pertaining to, involving, or grown with fertilizers or pesticides of animal or vegetable origin, as distinguished from manufactured chemicals” (“organic”).*

Readers who respect the history and legacy of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* might consider its definition more credible. Considered the most definitive and complete dictionary available, the OED offers differentiated definitions of different uses of the

word. In the case of “organic,” we’d need to look at sub-definition 8c to find one that works for our purposes:

> *Organic: of food: produced without the use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides, or other artificial chemicals.*

A definition argument can put a more specific subject into a category based on criteria, as in the following:

> *Though it omits hormones and antibiotics, organic ice cream remains unhealthy because it contains high levels of fat and sugar, while offering little nutritional value.*

Here we have a subject – organic ice cream – and a category – unhealthy. Presumably, unhealthy things often contain similar criteria – high levels of fat and sugar, low nutritional value, and industrial additives. Organic ice cream might not contain industrial additives, but, because it meets the other two criteria, it can still be considered unhealthy. A good way to test your thesis is to try out examples to see if the criteria work to distinguish things that fit the category from things that don't. Are other things we consider unhealthy full of sugar and/or fat, low in nutrition, and made with industrial additives? Yes. Fast food hamburgers are unhealthy because they contain high levels of fat, low nutritional value, and are full of chemical preservatives.

Definition arguments will need to provide evidence for any generalizations they make about a subject. If they use a specific example, how can they show that the example is **typical**? They may also need to justify the choice of **criteria** for the definition. If we argue that the Vietnam War should not be considered a "World War" even though it involved two global superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, we will need to explain why a criterion like the number of deaths should be considered more important than the number or size of the countries involved.

The benefits of definition

Once we understand the value of definition for clarifying terms in an essay, we can start to appreciate the value of definition in shaping an argument, especially one centered around a contentious term. When controversy revolves around an issue, defining terms explicitly and precisely is even more critical. In Section 4.2: Check If the Meaning Is Clear, we saw how mixing different meanings of one term can disguise a problem with the logic of an argument (if this is done intentionally, it is called **equivocation**). A definition argument can help avoid this kind of slippage, and it can clarify where disagreements lie. Even if it doesn't resolve the disagreements, it may at least prevent misunderstandings.

One example lies in the definition of "life" in the abortion debate. Those on the pro-life side argue "life" is defined by the initial meeting of sperm and egg, and the subsequent division of cells. On the other hand, those on the pro-choice side often argue that "life" is determined by autonomy, by the fetus's ability to survive outside the womb, and this, generally, is possible at twenty-four weeks. Prior to that, the fetus is fully dependent for survival upon the security of the woman's womb.

To take another example, let's say the government decides to allow health insurance providers to exclude coverage to individuals with preexisting conditions. The question then arises, what precisely does constitute a preexisting condition? Any diagnosis of cancer, including minor skin cancers? Diabetes? Obesity? Hypertension? Consider how many of our friends and family members have been diagnosed with any of these conditions.

Laws rely on definitions. Many of us are familiar with the purpose of Title IX, which ensured that equal funding should be applied for both male and female athletic programs in schools. However, with the recognition of transgender students and their rights, the U.S. Department of Education offered a statement of clarification to the language of Title IX: “explaining that it will enforce Title IX's prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sex to include: (1) discrimination based on sexual orientation; and (2) discrimination based on gender identity” (“Title IX”). Schools, students, and parents can now point to this language in debates about who is protected by Title IX status, and who can be included in the funding of gender-specific sports teams. Legal definitions often depend upon qualifiers, as in the case of the gun debate. Many on the pro-gun rights argument will not extend the definition of guns to include fully automatic guns; thus, they will often only agree with new gun restrictions that exclude AR 47s from such regulations.

Definitions involve emotional associations as well as descriptions of literal meaning. Public opinion can be swayed by casting a person involved in a very public event as "famous" or "infamous," a term that has decidedly negative connotations. In the case of Trayvon Martin, a young black man who was shot by George Zimmerman, a white man, Martin was defined alternately as a "boy

in a hoodie" or as a "potential thug." And Zimmerman was defined as "a neighborhood watch leader" or "private citizen" by some, and a "vigilante" by others. In each case, the label implies a definition of the person and his behavior, and this extends the impression built in the mind of the audience.

Strategies for definition

Referring to existing definitions

A dictionary definition can be helpful if the term under consideration is new or very unusual or uncommon, words which readers may be unfamiliar with, or whose definitions may have become obscured with modern use. If an argument takes the position that reduced literacy rates in freshman college students makes them less apt to learn from a professor who leans toward sesquipedalian speech, yet, such speech is exactly the challenge these students need to pull them away from their social media feeds and engage them in the vigorous mental workout that academia provides, the author is more likely to earn the trust of the audience if a dictionary definition is provided for this uncommon and archaic word: words that are a foot and a half long (O.E.D.).

Identifying emotional associations (connotations)

Emotional associations offer the various levels of meaning a word may have. For example, love can have several variants, such as platonic love, romantic love, familial love, passionate love, self-love, and even more specific ones, such as spirituality, philanthropy, humanity, nationalism/patriotism, and *agapé*, and each carries its own emotional tone which informs the definition. The essay "What is Poverty" offers multiple connotations of poverty through the numerous illustrations.

Defining a term based on what it's not (negation)

Sometimes complex words are best explained by what they are *not*, specifically by contrasting the word to another term. Needs are often confused with wants, but needs are anything necessary for survival. For example, people often say "I need a vacation," when what they really mean is, "I want a vacation." You may *want* coffee, but you *need* water. You may *want* a new car, but a used one may suit your *needs*. In an article about sexual predators, Andrew Vachss says that when he tells people about the individuals he prosecutes for abuse against children, people often say, "that's sick." But he clarifies that there is a difference between "sick" and "evil." A mother who hears voices in her head telling her to lock her baby in a closet is sick. A man who sells a child to pornographers is evil. "Sickness," he says, "is the absence of choice," while evil is the volition, the awareness of choice, and the intentional choice to commit a sinister act (Vachss).

Creating an original definition (stipulation)

This use of definition asks the reader to accept an alternate definition from the standard or commonly accepted one. This is usually the best way to utilize definition in an essay, as it allows the author the freedom to put his or her own spin on a key term. But the author must do it responsibly, providing supportive examples. For example, many young people believe that true parental love is the willingness to do *anything at all* for a child. However, real love isn't expressed by doormat behavior. A parent who does his child's homework so the child receives all "A" grades isn't demonstrating love {*note the use of negation here*}. Rather, true parental love is the willingness to apply fair rules and limits on behavior in order to raise a child who is a good worker, a good friend, and a good citizen.

Elaborating on a definition (extended definition)

There is no rule about how long a definition argument should be. When a simple one-line definition will not suffice, writers can develop a multi-paragraph, multi-page or multi-chapter definition argument. For example, a newspaper article might explore at length what is meant by the phrase "cancel culture." An entire book each might be needed to explain what is meant by the following terms: "critical race theory," "microagression," "gender identity," "fascism," or "intersectionality." When the concept under examination is complex, contentious, or weighted by historical examples and emotional connotations, an extended definition may be needed.

Sample definition arguments

This sample outline for an essay titled "When Colleges Talk about Diversity, Equity, and Antiracism, What Do They Mean?" shows the structure of one definition argument.

The student essay "Defining Stereotypes" by Imanol Juarez can serve as another example. Annotations on this essay point out how Juarez uses several definition argument strategies.

- Sample definition essay "Defining Stereotypes" in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample definition essay "Defining Stereotypes" accessible version with notes in parentheses.

Practice Exercise 15.4.1

How are attitudes to gender changing in today's society? Come up with a definition argument you think has some validity about a current trend related to gender. What kind of evidence could be gathered to support this claim? How would you convince readers that this evidence is typical? You could choose one of the claims below or invent your own.

- People today still associate femininity with weakness and masculinity with strength.
- Women are still more nurturing than men.
- Teenagers today see gender as a spectrum.
- Cisgender people still fear transgender people.

Practice Exercise 15.4.2

Construct a definition with criteria for one of the following terms, or another term of your choice related to gender. Feel free to research the terms to get ideas. Possible terms: masculine, feminine, androgynous, macho, femme, butch, manly, womanly, machista, metrosexual, genderqueer, third gender, transgender.

Practice Exercise 15.4.3

Choose one of the following articles. Which of the definition strategies listed in this section can you identify in the argument? Can you think of any other strategies the author might have used?

- "The True Meaning of the Word 'Cisgender'" by Dawn Ennis in *The Advocate*
- "The Definition of Terrorism" by Brian Whitaker in *The Guardian*

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15.4.1: Annotated Sample Definition Argument

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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 "Defining Stereotypes."

Imanol Juarez

Professor Peterkin

English 103

May 8, 2020

Defining Stereotypes

What defines you? As people, we often consider ourselves to be multifaceted, complex beings. (Note: The author opens the essay with a personal question, a strategy to get the reader's attention.) Yet in every culture people stereotype others, and oversimplified beliefs about people and cultures have a negative impact every day. (Note: A literal definition of the word "stereotypes.") Even though America's society is exceptional in positive ways, it is also exceptional in its use of stereotypes, which can be seen through the racism that still pervades the U.S. Stereotyping is a form of racism that creates a single depiction of a group of people based on one aspect of their identity. (Note: The thesis defines stereotypes and the criteria the essay will use to explain this definition.)

Most cultures intentionally or unintentionally manipulate the images of a certain group or person, and as a result, stereotypical depictions are a widespread form of racism. (Note: The essay focuses on the connotation of stereotypes and how they function in the U.S.)For example, the Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia can give a dark glimpse into racist depictions of Latinos: "The stereotypical depictions of Mexicans, especially those thought to be in the United States illegally, are harsh and demeaning. The men are portrayed as illiterate criminals. The women are depicted as hypersexual. Both men and women are portrayed as lazy, dirty, physically unattractive menaces" (Ferris State). (Note: Evidence for the assertion that stereotypes are racist.) In extreme cases, racial profiling can be considered a form of stereotyping. Racial profiling is "the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense." One example of racial profiling took place on February 23, 2020, when two white men took the life of a young 26-year-old African American man named Ahmad Marquez Arbery while he was jogging around his neighborhood: "Gregory McMichael told the police that he thought Mr. Arbery looked like a man suspected in several break-ins in the area," demonstrating the most abhorrent outcome of racist stereotypes (*New York Times*).

Some may argue that there is such a thing as a good stereotype, but all stereotypes are inherently racist. (Note: Juarez addresses the counterargument to his definition of stereotypes.) Yes, many cultures have stereotypes that are positive, but are they truly beneficial? Sam Killermann states in "3 Reasons Positive Stereotypes Aren't That Positive," "Positive stereotypes exist for just about every identity and have the capacity to be just as damaging as the negative ones." Take the stereotype that people of Asian descent are good at math. Positive stereotypes not only set standards high but also discourage individuals from performing; good stereotypes can also alienate individuals and make them depressed because they don't have the characteristics everybody believes they have. (Note: The definition argument leads to a causal argument about how positive stereotyping can impact people.) There are many forms of stereotypes, but one thing is for sure: there is never such a thing as a good stereotype.

(Note: The Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class.)

Works Cited

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15.4.2: Sample Definition Outline

Media Alternative

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When Colleges Talk about Diversity, Equity, and Antiracism, What Do They Mean?

I. **Thesis:** Colleges sometimes use the terms "diversity," "equity," and "antiracism" as if they are interchangeable, but they have very different implications.

II. **Background**: Colleges are looking to use inclusive language to show their support for students who are at a disadvantage in their education because of who they are.

   i. Consider the history of academia, largely centered around white, Western European men.

   ii. Social change movements have demanded progress

      a. The Civil Rights Movement lead to access, but no real changes in academic language.

      b. The Equal Rights Amendment increased interest and awareness of Women's Studies.

      c. Chicano Rights Movement lead to the creation of Chicano Studies courses of study and major programs.

   iii. In some cases, mainstream core curriculum maintains a Eurocentric Western male focus; in others, that's no longer true.

III. **"Diversity"** emphasizes inclusion and representation of different identities.

   i. The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of "diverse": "Different in character or quality; not of the same kind; not alike in nature or qualities" (OED).

   ii. "Diverse" doesn't refer to a precise form of identity, but can include race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability

   iii. Such an open definition extends inclusion to all possible groups in an academic setting.

   iv. Note that "Diverse" does not suggest a critique of systems of power that help some people and hurt others.

IV. **"Antiracist"** draws attention to one form of oppression and the need to actively oppose that oppression

   i. How the term became popular

      a. The Black Lives Matter Movement: Social outrage over the murders of unarmed African Americans escalated with each new death: Trayvon Martin (2013), George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery

      b. X. J. Kendi's work, *How to be an Antiracist* introduces the world to the definition of "antiracist."

      c. The national conversation changes to include antiracist; educators take note and respond.

   ii. "Antiracist" doesn't refer to other forms of oppression, such as classism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, ableism, anti-immigrant sentiment or others.

V. **"Equity"** emphasizes providing educational resources to disadvantaged groups according to need.

   i. The Center for Public Education defines equity as "when all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success."

   ii. It suggests trying to compensate for systemic inequalities in how people are able to access their education based on class, race, gender, learning style, ability.

   iii. What equity doesn't mean (negation): Equity doesn't refer to equal opportunity or equal rights.

   iv. Image commonly used to show equity: Three people of varying heights pick apples from a tree. Each stands on a stool just high enough to allow them to reach.



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VI. **Conclusion**: When considering which term to choose or whether to use all three, we can think about whether we want to emphasize inclusion of an infinite range of identities, resistance against racism in particular, or the attempt to compensate for systemic inequalities and get all students what they need to succeed at a high level.

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15.5: Evaluation Arguments

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (3 min, 42 sec):

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What is an evaluation argument?

In college, professional life, politics, and everyday life, we constantly must assess how things measure up. We are faced with questions like the following:

- Does our employer treat us fairly?
- Does our local cafe deserve five stars or four?
- Is the “Free City” program that makes City College of San Francisco tuition free for residents a success?
- Is a particular hillside a good location for a wind farm?
- Does the president deserve their current approval rating?

To answer each of these questions and convince others that our answer is valid, we would need to make an evaluation argument. Most commonly, evaluation arguments rate their subject on a scale from positive to negative. Evaluation arguments make a claim about the quality of something. We can think of them as answering the question "How good or bad is it?"



A convincing evaluation depends on careful thought about the criteria.
Photo by Liza Summer from Pexels under the Pexels License.

Criteria

Evaluation arguments usually need to define and justify the **criteria** they use to make the evaluation. These criteria may consist of moral standards, aesthetic standards, or tests of successful functioning. Depending on how controversial the criteria are, the argument may need to defend and explain why they have been chosen. How can we support our choice of criteria? We may cite precedent or the authoritative sources in the field, or we may discuss the merit of the criteria in themselves by arguing for the good results they lead to and aligning them with values we believe our audience will share.

Judgment

Once we have convinced readers that the criteria for quality are valid, we will need to articulate our **judgment** about the extent to which the subject meets or doesn't meet those criteria.

Evidence

Finally, the argument will need to provide **evidence** of the way in which the subject meets or does not meet the criteria. See 4.4: Decide How Strong the Evidence Is and 12.5: Developing Paragraphs. for ideas on the types of evidence to choose from.

Ranking criteria

In cases where there are multiple valid criteria, the writer may need to **rank** them in order of importance and justify this ranking. For example, an editorial supporting Alyesha Jenkins for mayor would need to explain what the city should be looking for in a mayor at the moment. The editorial might argue that the top priority should be finding someone who has a workable plan to address the homelessness crisis. It might then go on to identify as secondary priority finding someone who has been an effective leader of a large organization. Finally, it might argue that finding a candidate who will focus on ending police brutality in the city should be the third priority. Given these criteria, the argument might praise describe Alyesha Jenkins' concrete, popular plan on homelessness and background as a successful city supervisor and head of a law firm. It might note that her record on police brutality is limited, but we still judge her to be a strong candidate.

Types of criteria

We can classify evaluative arguments by the kind of criteria they use. They may focus on aesthetics, that is the appearance or appeal of something (a movie, a work of art, or a building), or practical concerns about how something functions, or moral judgements based on values.

Aesthetic Criteria

What makes a great film can be an academic question or an everyday debate among friends going to the movies. Film critics and Film Studies classes try to identify clear **aesthetic criteria** for award-worthy movies. Film blogger Tyler Schirado, who writes for the San Diego Film festival, details criteria including acting quality, dialogue, pacing, plot coherence, cinematography, production design, and special effects. Each of those criteria could in turn include sub-criteria. For example, the criteria for the quality of the special effects might include both how innovative and how spectacular they are.

Operational Criteria

Sometimes the criteria that matter are very practical. We use **operational criteria** when we are looking for certain concrete results. What does the subject we are evaluating do? If we want to evaluate a new car's safety features, we will ended to see how it performs under challenging conditions. When the FDA evaluates and tests a new vaccine, they follow an set of procedures to test how the vaccine affects first cells, then animal bodies, and finally human bodies. The FDA considers the results of all these procedures to help it decide whether to approve the vaccine or not. And if the consumer has confidence in the FDA's standards for data collection, they can use the criteria about the vaccine's past record of immune protection and side effects to help them decide whether or not to get vaccinated.

Moral Criteria

An evaluation argument based on **moral criteria** will claim that something is right or wrong. It will need to appeal to shared values or make a case for a particular value that serves as criteria. Some values are nearly universal, such as honesty, reasonableness, and fairness, as we will discuss in 9.6: Moral Character. However, even values that seem universal may be defined differently by different groups. We each grow up in an environment that instills a particular set of family or cultural or religious values. These help to shape our own sense of morality, or personal values and codes that we chose to live by.

Many values may be unconsciously held, but a moral argument will need to articulate them explicitly in order to make its case. Remembering our discussion of assumptions in 4.5: Check the Argument's Assumptions, we recall that each argument is based upon spoken or unspoken beliefs (warrants), such as "free speech is worthy of protection," or "democracy is desirable," or "cheating is wrong." As we saw in 7.2: Tailoring an Argument to an Audience, it can be helpful to recognize our particular audience's values and see where they align with our own. Convincing readers that we share values can enhance the sense of trust between reader and writer, as we will see in Chapter 9: How Arguments Appeal to Trust and Connection (Ethos).

As an example, the Motion Pictures Academy includes some moral criteria as well as aesthetic criteria when it selects winners for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actors. Responding to the #OscarsSoWhite campaign, the Academy of Motion Pictures decided to incorporate the value of inclusiveness into their criteria. In order to emphasize "the inclusion of people in underrepresented groups, including women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people and those with cognitive or physical disabilities," they developed a new set of criteria for nominations for Best Picture. The criteria state that starting in 2024, "To be eligible for best picture, a film must meet at least two standards across four categories: 'Onscreen Representation, Themes and Narratives,'

‘Creative Leadership and Project Team,’ ‘Industry Access and Opportunities’ and ‘Audience Development,’ (Rottenberg). Each of these new criteria responds to the demands for inclusivity and equity, and is evidence that criteria can and should evolve as social morals evolve.

Comparative Evaluation

Many times we will need to evaluate the worth of one subject in relation to another in order to judge which is better. Of course, we will need to decide on the basis for comparison, or the criteria to be used, and make that basis clear. Then we will need to evaluate each subject according to the criteria. In comparisons, ranking the criteria will often be important because one subject may do better on one criterion and worse on another. We'll need to know which criterion is more important in order to decide which comes out ahead overall.

The point-by-point organizational technique described in 3.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments can be helpful in structuring such an essay because it allows us to write about one criterion at a time and see how both subjects compare on that one point before moving on to the next criterion. For example, we might compare the job of being a nanny with the job of being a preschool teacher. In one section, we would compare earnings for each job, and in another section, we would discuss potential for professional growth. If nannies come out ahead on earnings and teachers come out ahead on professional growth opportunities, then we will need to rank these criteria in order of importance to decide which job to recommend.

Sample evaluation arguments

To get a sense of what research-based evaluation arguments look like in college classes, see this sample evaluation argument essay prompt and the sample outline to match it. For a full sample evaluation essay, see "Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States." Annotations on that essay point out how the author uses evaluation argument strategies. We offer it in two formats:

- Sample evaluation essay "Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States" in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample evaluation essay "Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States" accessible version with notes in parentheses

Practice Exercise 15.5.1

Reflect on the following questions to construct your own evaluation argument.

- What makes a person a good role model? Choose your top three criteria.
- How would you rank those criteria in order of importance?
- Choose two prominent public figures from history, pop culture or politics, dead or alive, who would be interesting to compare as role models.
- Evaluate each person according to the three criteria you identified.
- Which figure comes out as the better role model?
- If you ranked the criteria differently, would the other one come out ahead?
- What is most controversial in your evaluation? Is it the choice of criteria, the ranking of the criteria, or the idea that your figure fits certain criteria?

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15.5.1: Sample Evaluation Argument Prompt and Outline

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (4 min, 53 sec):

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Below is a sample essay prompt that calls on students to make a case that a particular environmental focus will meet certain criteria for engaging the public. We offer one sample argument outline to respond to the prompt.

Sample Evaluation Argument Prompt

Background

Environmental groups and journalists choose many different approaches to engaging the public. Clearly, they need to raise awareness about urgent concerns, but they also need to consider what viewers will connect to emotionally. Some issues have direct adverse effects for humans, like toxins in the water we drink. Others have immediate effects on ecosystems, like the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. Others, like endangered species such as elephants and whales, become symbols of human longing, empathy, and reverence.

Assignment

Choose one environmental issue you would recommend such groups to focus on and explain your choice. What makes this issue both scientifically urgent and emotionally appealing? In order to make your case, consider how you will measure urgency (By statistics on health impacts? Species extinction? Economic disruptions?) and how you will gauge the emotional appeal (By the popularity of past memes and documentaries and campaigns on the issue? By its connection to popular leisure activities? By how relatable it is?).

Sample Evaluation Argument Outline



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Title: My Love is as Great as the Ocean: Engaging Citizen Oceanic Stewards

I. Thesis Statement: Because of its scientific importance and its power in the human imagination, the ocean should be a focus of environmental advocacy.

II. Topic Sentence: The ocean has symbolic resonance because in many cultures, it is connected with the birth of life and powerful goddesses and gods.

1. Mami Wata, a West African water goddess, is important to many in the African Diaspora and has her own priests today.
2. In Hindu mythology and classic texts, Samudra and Varuna play key roles as gods of the ocean.
3. In Greek mythology, Eros, or love, gave birth to earth, Gaia, which included the sea.
4. Greek gods like Poseidon and Roman Neptune have figured in western popular culture for many centuries.
5. In the Ancient Summerian text *Enuma Elish*, the goddess Tiamat gives birth to all life by releasing her waters around Earth.

III. Topic Sentence: The ocean also has symbolic resonance because it gave rise to the first life forms.

1. Ancient myths have their parallel in scientific fact.
2. Science has popularized the idea that life likely originated in the oceans over 3 billion years ago.
3. 2021 research into microbe fossils in South African gold mines supports the idea that life first formed in thermal vents on the sea floor.

III. Topic Sentence: Our visceral response to the ocean's presence is even more powerful than its symbolism.

1. Our intuitive sensory and emotional response to the ocean is deep.
2. We love the ocean because it’s powerful; it humbles us with its relentless kinetic energy.
3. It grounds us with its refreshing breeze and rhythmic waves, renewing our spirits.
4. It promotes well-being: water contains negative ions which counter the positive ions that cause bad moods.

III. Topic Sentence: Oceans help heal our planet; they counteract various environmental problems.

1. In addition to fast-disappearing rainforests, oceans provide the majority of our oxygen
2. Recent climate science tells us we’re at the tipping point. Oceans help maintain atmospheric temperatures by absorbing carbon dioxide.

IV. Topic Sentence: Yet oceans are being profoundly damaged by human activities.

1. As oceans absorb carbon dioxide, they get more acidic, which threatens species that depend on hard shells.
2. Millions of tons of plastic enter the ocean every year, creating huge garbage patches.
3. Overfishing has depleted fish stocks: there may be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050 unless trends change.

Conclusion: Perhaps if environmental groups focus more on spreading these ideas, many more people will help protect the ocean and feel their love for it grow.

1. While science is an excellent reason to take action, our basic humanity should be commanding us to protect and cherish the oceans that begat us.
2. Love is the greatest quality humans possess and it can and should guide us to protect our mother ocean.

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15.5.2: Annotated Sample Evaluation Argument

Media Alternative

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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 "Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States."

Anonymous Student

Anonymous Professor

English 101

Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States

The United States is the only modernized Western nation that does not offer publicly funded health care to all its citizens; the costs of health care for the uninsured in the United States are prohibitive, and insurance companies are often more interested in profit margins than providing health care. These conditions are incompatible with U.S. ideals and standards. Universal health care coverage is a better system for all citizens because it is more cost-effective and upholds the value of human life. (Note: The thesis evaluates universal healthcare based on two specific criteria.)

One of the most common arguments against providing universal health care coverage (UHC) is that it will cost too much money, but in fact, UHC is a cheaper option than private insurance if one considers all costs. (Note: This body paragraph addresses the criteria of cost by answering the question, "How cheap is universal healthcare?" The author summarizes a counterargument about cost and then refutes it.) While providing health care for all U.S. citizens would cost a lot of money for every tax-paying citizen, citizens need to examine exactly how much money it would cost, and more importantly, how much money is too much when it comes to opening up health care for all. Those who have health insurance already pay a considerable amount of money, and those without coverage are charged unfathomable amounts. The cost of publicly funded health care versus the cost of current insurance premiums is unclear. In fact, some Americans, especially those in lower income brackets, could stand to pay less than their current premiums.

Under the current system, even patients with coverage must pay for some treatments out of pocket. (Note: This paragraph continues the discussion of cost, introducing a particular case in which the current system means high costs for patients.) Each day an American acquires a form of cancer, and the only effective treatment might be considered experimental by an insurance company and thus is not covered. The costs may be so prohibitive that the patient will either opt for a less effective, but covered, treatment; opt for no treatment at all; or attempt to pay the costs of treatment and experience unimaginable financial consequences. Medical bills in these cases can easily rise into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is enough to force even wealthy families out of their homes and into perpetual debt. Even though each American could someday face this unfortunate situation, many still choose to take the financial risk. Instead of gambling with health and financial welfare, U.S. citizens should press their representatives to set up UHC, where their coverage will be guaranteed and affordable.

A common argument against UHC in the United States is that other comparable national health care systems, like that of England, France, or Canada do not deliver timely patient care. (Note: Introduces a counterargument.) UHC opponents claim that sick patients in these countries often wait in long lines or long wait lists for basic health care. A fair amount of truth lies in these claims, but Americans must remember to put those problems in context with the problems of the current U.S. system as well. (Note: The author admits seeing some merit in the counterargument before they go on to offer a rebuttal.) It is true that people often wait to see a doctor in countries with UHC, but we in the United States wait as well, and we often schedule appointments weeks in advance, only to have onerous waits in the doctor's waiting rooms.

Even if UHC would cost Americans a bit more money each year, we ought to reflect on what type of country we would like to live in, and what types of morals we represent if we are more willing to deny health care to others on the basis of saving a few hundred dollars per year. (Note: This paragraph focuses on the criteria of values.)In a system that privileges capitalism and rugged individualism, little room remains for compassion and love. It is time that Americans realize the amorality of U.S. hospitals forced to turn away the sick and poor. UHC is a health care system that aligns more closely with the core values that so many Americans espouse and respect, and it is time to realize its potential.

Despite the opponents' claims against UHC, a universal system will save lives and encourage the health of all Americans. It is time for Americans to start thinking socially about health in the same ways they think about education and police services: as a right of U.S. citizens.

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15.6: Causal Arguments

Media Alternative

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Causal arguments attempt to make a case that one thing led to another. They answer the question "What caused it?" Causes are often complex and multiple. Before we choose a strategy for a causal argument it can help to identify our purpose. Why do we need to know the cause? How will it help us?

Purposes of causal arguments

To get a complete picture of how and why something happened

In this case, we will want to look for multiple causes, each of which may play a different role. Some might be background conditions, others might spark the event, and others may be influences that sped up the event once it got started. In this case, we often speak of **near causes** that are close in time or space to the event itself, and **remote causes**, that are further away or further in the past. We can also describe a **chain of causes**, with one thing leading to the next, which leads to the next. It may even be the case that we have a **feedback loop** where a first event causes a second event and the second event triggers more of the first, creating an endless circle of causation. For example, as sea ice melts in the arctic, the dark water absorbs more heat, which warms it further, which melts more ice, which makes the water absorb more heat, etc. If the results are bad, this is called a vicious circle.

To decide who is responsible

Sometimes if an event has multiple causes, we may be most concerned with deciding who bears responsibility and how much. In a car accident, the driver might bear responsibility and the car manufacturer might bear some as well. We will have to argue that the responsible party caused the event but we will also have to show that there was a moral obligation not to do what the party did. That implies some degree of choice and knowledge of possible consequences. If the driver was following all good driving regulations and triggered an explosion by activating the turn signal, clearly the driver cannot be held responsible.

In order to determine that someone is responsible, there must be a clearly defined **domain of responsibility** for that person or entity. To convince readers that a certain party is responsible, readers have to agree on what the expectations for that party in their particular role are. For example, if a patient misreads the directions for taking a drug and accidentally overdoses, does the drug manufacturer bear any responsibility? What about the pharmacist? To decide that, we need to agree on how much responsibility the manufacturer has for making the directions foolproof and how much the pharmacist has for making sure the patient understands them. Sometimes a person can be held responsible for something they didn't do if the action omitted fell under their domain of responsibility.

To figure out how to make something happen

In this case we need to zero in on a factor or factors that will push the event forward. Such a factor is sometimes called a **precipitating cause.** The success of this push will depend on circumstances being right for it, so we will likely also need to describe the **conditions** that have to be in place for the precipitating cause to actually precipitate the event. If there are likely factors that could block the event, we need to show that those can be eliminated. For example, if we propose a particular surgery to fix a heart problem, we will also need to show that the patient can get to a hospital that performs the surgery and get an appointment. We will certainly need to show that the patient is likely to tolerate the surgery.

To stop something from happening

In this case, we do not need to describe all possible causes. We want to find a factor that is so necessary to the bad result that if we get rid of that factor, the result cannot occur. Then if we eliminate that factor, we can block the bad result. If we cannot find a single

such factor, we may at least be able to find one that will make the bad result less likely. For example, to reduce wildfire risk in California, we cannot get rid of all fire whatsoever, but we can repair power lines and aging gas and electric infrastructure to reduce the risk that defects in this system will spark a fire. Or we could try to reduce the damage fires cause by focusing on clearing underbrush.

To predict what might happen in future

As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it in *A Rhetoric of Argument*, "When you argue for a prediction, you try to convince your reader that all the causes needed to bring about an event are in place or will fall into place." You also may need to show that nothing will intervene to block the event from happening. One common way to support a prediction is by comparing it to a past event that has already played out. For example, we might argue that humans have survived natural disasters in the past, so we will survive the effects of climate change as well. As Fahnestock and Secor point out, however, "the argument is only as good as the analogy, which sometimes must itself be supported." How comparable are the disasters of the past to the likely effects of climate change? The argument would need to describe both past and possible future events and convince us that they are similar in severity.

Techniques and cautions for causal argument

So how does a writer make a case that one thing causes another? The briefest answer is that the writer needs to convince us that the factor and the event are correlated and also that there is some way in which the factor could plausibly lead to the event. Then the writer will need to convince us that they have done due diligence in considering and eliminating alternate possibilities for the cause and alternate explanations for any correlation between the factor and the event.

Identify possible causes

If other writers have already identified possible causes, an argument simply needs to refer back to those and add in any that have been missed. If not, the writer can put themselves in the role of detective and imagine what might have caused the event.

Determine which factor is most correlated with the event

If we think that a factor may commonly cause an event, the first question to ask is whether they go together. If we are looking for a sole cause, we can ask if the factor is always there when the event happens and always absent when the event doesn't happen. Do the factor and the event follow the same trends? The following methods of arguing for causality were developed by philosopher John Stuart Mill, and are often referred to as "Mill's methods."

- If the event is repeated and every time it happens, a **common factor** is present, that common factor may be the cause.
- If there is a **single difference** between cases where the event takes place and cases where it doesn't.
- If an event and a possible cause are repeated over and over and they happen to varying degrees, we can check whether they always increase and decrease together. This is often best done with a graph so we can visually check whether the lines follow the same pattern.
- Finally, ruling out other possible causes can support a case that the one remaining possible cause did in fact operate.

Explain how that factor could have caused the event

In order to believe that one thing caused another, we usually need to have some idea of how the first thing could cause the second. If we cannot imagine how one would cause another, why should we find it plausible? Any argument about **agency**, or the way in which one thing caused another, depends on assumptions about what makes things happen. If we are talking about human behavior, then we are looking for motivation: love, hate, envy, greed, desire for power, etc. If we are talking about a physical event, then we need to look at physical forces. Scientists have dedicated much research to establishing how carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could effectively trap heat and warm the planet.

If there is enough other evidence to show that one thing caused another but the way it happened is still unknown, the argument can note that and perhaps point toward further studies that would establish the mechanism. The writer may want to qualify their argument with "may" or "might" or "seems to indicate," if they cannot explain how the supposed cause led to the effect.

Eliminate alternate explanations

The catchphrase "**correlation is not causation**" can help us to remember the dangers of the methods above. It's usually easy to show that two things happen at the same time or in the same pattern, but hard to show that one actually causes another. Correlation

can be a good reason to investigate whether something is the cause, and it can provide some evidence of causality, but it is not proof. Sometimes two unrelated things may be correlated, like the number of women in Congress and the price of milk. We can imagine that both might follow an upward trend, one because of the increasing equality of women in society and the other because of inflation. Describing a plausible agency, or way in which one thing led to another, can help show that the correlation is not random. If we find a strong correlation, we can imagine various causal arguments that would explain it and argue that the one we support has the most plausible agency.

Sometimes things vary together because there is a common cause that affects both of them. An argument can explore possible third factors that may have led to both events. For example, students who go to elite colleges tend to make more money than students who go to less elite colleges. Did the elite colleges make the difference? Or are both the college choice and the later earnings due to a third cause, such as family connections? In his book *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, journalist Michael Pollan assesses studies on the effects of supplements like multivitamins and concludes that people who take supplements are also those who have better diet and exercise habits, and that the supplements themselves have no effect on health. He advises, “Be the kind of person who takes supplements -- then skip the supplements.”

If we have two phenomena that are correlated and happen at the same time, it's worth considering whether the second phenomenon could actually have caused the first rather than the other way around. For example, if we find that gun violence and violence within video games are both on the rise, we shouldn't leap to blame video games for the increase in shootings. It may be that people who play video games are being influenced by violence in the games and becoming more likely to go out and shoot people in real life. But could it also be that as gun violence increases in society for other reasons, such violence is a bigger part of people's consciousness, leading video game makers and gamers to incorporate more violence in their games? It might be that causality operates in both directions, creating a feedback loop as we discussed above.

Proving causality is tricky, and often even rigorous academic studies can do little more than suggest that causality is probable or possible. There are a host of laboratory and statistical methods for testing causality. The gold standard for an experiment to determine a cause is a double-blind, randomized control trial in which there are two groups of people randomly assigned. One group gets the drug being studied and one group gets the placebo, but neither the participants nor the researchers know which is which. This kind of study eliminates the effect of unconscious suggestion, but it is often not possible for ethical and logistical reasons.

The ins and outs of causal arguments are worth studying in a statistics course or a philosophy course, but even without such a course we can do a better job of assessing causes if we develop the habit of looking for alternate explanations.

Sample annotated causal argument

The article "Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate" by Jason West, published in *The Conversation*, can serve as an example. Annotations point out how the author uses several causal argument strategies.

- Sample causal essay "Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate" in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample causal essay "Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate" accessible version with notes in parentheses

Practice Exercise 15.6.1

Reflect on the following to construct a causal argument. What would be the best intervention to introduce in society to reduce the rate of violent crime? Below are some possible causes of violent crime. Choose one and describe how it could lead to violent crime. Then think of a way to intervene in that process to stop it. What method from among those described in this section would you use to convince someone that your intervention would work to lower rates of violent crime? Make up an argument using your chosen method and the kind of evidence, either anecdotal or statistical, you would find convincing.

Possible causes of violent crime:

- Homophobia and transphobia
- PTSD
- Testosterone

- Child abuse
- Violence in the media
- Role models who exhibit toxic masculinity
- Depression
- Violent video games
- Systemic racism
- Lack of education on expressing emotions
- Unemployment
- Not enough law enforcement
- Economic inequality
- The availability of guns

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15.6.1: Annotated Sample Causal Argument

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Jason West

From *The Conversation*

September 13, 2019

Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth's Climate

(Note: The title frames the article as a causal argument, a demonstration of how carbon dioxide affects the climate.)

Climate Explained is a collaboration between The Conversation, Stuff and the New Zealand Science Media Centre to answer your questions about climate change.

Question

I heard that carbon dioxide makes up 0.04% of the world's atmosphere. Not 0.4% or 4%, but 0.04%! How can it be so important in global warming if it's such a small percentage?

I am often asked how carbon dioxide can have an important effect on global climate when its concentration is so small – just 0.041% of Earth's atmosphere. And human activities are responsible for just 32% of that amount. (Note: Jason West presents his article as a rebuttal to a counterargument.)

I study the importance of atmospheric gases for air pollution and climate change. (Note: West establishes his credibility as a researcher on the subject.)The key to carbon dioxide's strong influence on climate is its ability to absorb heat emitted from our planet's surface, keeping it from escaping out to space. (Note: West summarizes his causal argument by explaining a mechanism that could account for CO2's surprising effect on temperature.)

Early greenhouse science

The scientists who first identified carbon dioxide's importance for climate in the 1850s were also surprised by its influence. (Note: This bit of history underlines West's sympathy for the surprise expressed in the opening question.)Working separately, John Tyndall in England and Eunice Foote in the United States found that carbon dioxide, water vapor and methane all absorbed heat, while more abundant gases did not.

Scientists had already calculated that the Earth was about 59 degrees Fahrenheit (33 degrees Celsius) warmer than it should be, given the amount of sunlight reaching its surface. The best explanation for that discrepancy was that the atmosphere retained heat to warm the planet.

Tyndall and Foote showed that nitrogen and oxygen, which together account for 99% of the atmosphere, had essentially no influence on Earth's temperature because they did not absorb heat. (Note: West shows how scientists eliminated what seemed like likely causes for the warming effect.) Rather, they found that gases present in much smaller concentrations were entirely responsible for maintaining temperatures that made the Earth habitable, by trapping heat to create a natural greenhouse effect.

A blanket in the atmosphere

(Note: Comparing heat-trapping gases to a blanket helps readers visualize the causal argument.)

Earth constantly receives energy from the sun and radiates it back into space. For the planet's temperature to remain constant, the net heat it receives from the sun must be balanced by outgoing heat that it gives off. (Note: West gives background on what influences the earth's temperature.)

Since the sun is hot, it gives off energy in the form of shortwave radiation at mainly ultraviolet and visible wavelengths. Earth is much cooler, so it emits heat as infrared radiation, which has longer wavelengths.

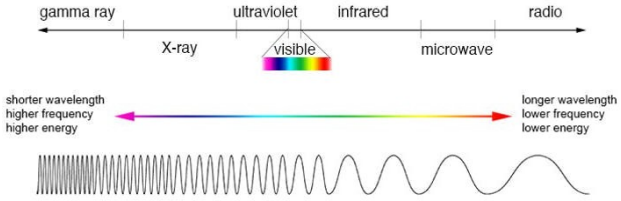


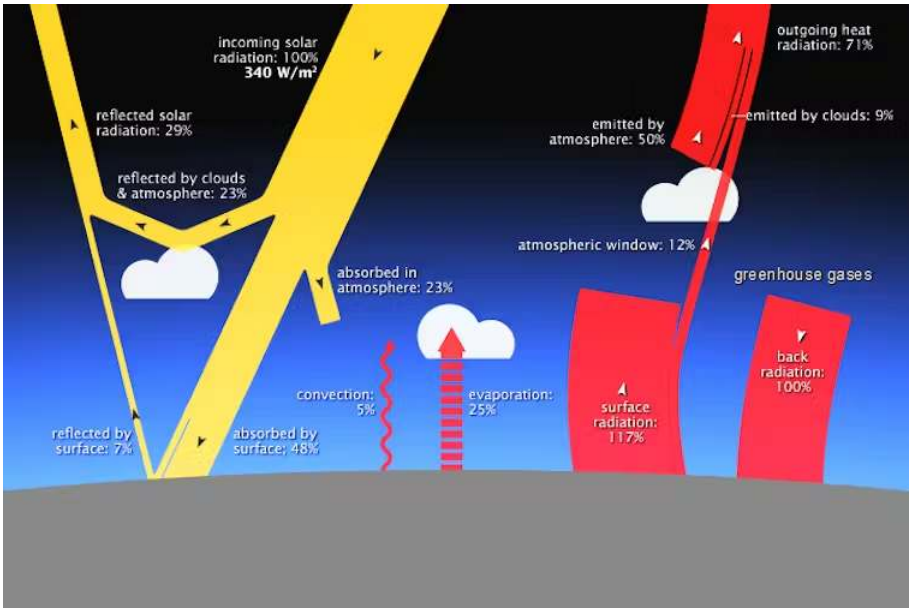
Figure 2: The electromagnetic spectrum is the range of all types of EM radiation – energy that travels and spreads out as it goes. The sun is much hotter than the Earth, so it emits radiation at a higher energy level, which has a shorter wavelength. NASA

Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases have molecular structures that enable them to absorb infrared radiation. The bonds between atoms in a molecule can vibrate in particular ways, like the pitch of a piano string. When the energy of a photon corresponds to the frequency of the molecule, it is absorbed and its energy transfers to the molecule. (Note: This section establishes agency, an explanation for how CO2 could trap heat.)

Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases have three or more atoms and frequencies that correspond to infrared radiation emitted by Earth. Oxygen and nitrogen, with just two atoms in their molecules, do not absorb infrared radiation. (Note: West explains why two other possible causes of warming, oxygen and nitrogen, do not trap heat.)

Most incoming shortwave radiation from the sun passes through the atmosphere without being absorbed. But most outgoing infrared radiation is absorbed by heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere. Then they can release, or re-radiate, that heat. Some returns to Earth's surface, keeping it warmer than it would be otherwise.

Figure 3: Earth receives solar energy from the sun (yellow), and returns energy back to space by reflecting some incoming light and radiating heat (red). Greenhouse gases trap some of that heat and return it to the planet's surface. NASA via Wikimedia. (Note: Figure 3, with the rightmost red stripe pointing back to earth, makes a visual argument that greenhouse gases trap heat.)



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Research on heat transmission

During the Cold War, the absorption of infrared radiation by many different gases was studied extensively. The work was led by the U.S. Air Force, which was developing heat-seeking missiles and needed to understand how to detect heat passing through air.

This research enabled scientists to understand the climate and atmospheric composition of all planets in the solar system by observing their infrared signatures. For example, Venus is about 870 F (470 C) because its thick atmosphere is 96.5% carbon dioxide. (Note: The comparison to Venus shows that a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere correlates with high temperature on another planet.)

It also informed weather forecast and climate models, allowing them to quantify how much infrared radiation is retained in the atmosphere and returned to Earth's surface.

People sometimes ask me why carbon dioxide is important for climate, given that water vapor absorbs more infrared radiation and the two gases absorb at several of the same wavelengths. The reason is that Earth's upper atmosphere controls the radiation that escapes to space. The upper atmosphere is much less dense and contains much less water vapor than near the ground, which means that adding more carbon dioxide significantly influences how much infrared radiation escapes to space. (Note: In this paragraph, West eliminates another possible driver of climate change, heat-trapping water vapor.)

Carbon dioxide levels rise and fall around the world, changing seasonally with plant growth and decay.

Observing the greenhouse effect

Have you ever noticed that deserts are often colder at night than forests, even if their average temperatures are the same? Without much water vapor in the atmosphere over deserts, the radiation they give off escapes readily to space. In more humid regions radiation from the surface is trapped by water vapor in the air. Similarly, cloudy nights tend to be warmer than clear nights because more water vapor is present.

The influence of carbon dioxide can be seen in past changes in climate. Ice cores from over the past million years have shown that carbon dioxide concentrations were high during warm periods – about 0.028%. During ice ages, when the Earth was roughly 7 to 13 F (4-7 C) cooler than in the 20th century, carbon dioxide made up only about 0.018% of the atmosphere. (Note: West gives more evidence from Earth's history to show a correlation between high carbon dioxide concentration and higher temperatures.)

Even though water vapor is more important for the natural greenhouse effect, changes in carbon dioxide have driven past temperature changes. In contrast, water vapor levels in the atmosphere respond to temperature. As Earth becomes warmer, its atmosphere can hold more water vapor, which amplifies the initial warming in a process called the "water vapor feedback." (Note: West describes a feedback loop or vicious circle where warming leads to more warming.) Variations in carbon dioxide have therefore been the controlling influence on past climate changes.

Small change, big effects

It shouldn't be surprising that a small amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can have a big effect. We take pills that are a tiny fraction of our body mass and expect them to affect us. (Note: West supports his causal claim by making a comparison to something more familiar, pills.)

Today the level of carbon dioxide is higher than at any time in human history. Scientists widely agree that Earth's average surface temperature has already increased by about 2 F (1 C) since the 1880s, and that human-caused increases in carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases are extremely likely to be responsible. (Note: West points to a correlation between CO2 and temperature. Here he relies on experts to support the idea of causation.)

Without action to control emissions, carbon dioxide might reach 0.1% of the atmosphere by 2100, more than triple the level before the Industrial Revolution. This would be a faster change than transitions in Earth's past that had huge consequences. Without action, this little sliver of the atmosphere will cause big problems. (Note: West ends with a brief prediction. He compares the potential rise in carbon dioxide with past changes to imply that the consequences of human-induced climate change will be more dramatic than in the past.)

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15.7: Proposal Arguments

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Proposal arguments attempt to push for action of some kind. They answer the question "What should be done about it?"

In order to build up to a proposal, an argument needs to incorporate elements of definition argument, evaluation argument, and causal argument. First, we will need to define a problem or a situation that calls for action. Then we need to make an evaluation argument to convince readers that the problem is bad enough to be worth addressing. This will create a sense of urgency within the argument and inspire the audience to seek and adopt proposed action. In most cases, it will need to make causal arguments about the roots of the problem and the good effects of the proposed solution.

Below are some elements of proposal arguments. Together, these elements can help us create a sense of urgency about the need for action and confidence in your proposal as a solution.

Common elements of proposal arguments

Background on the problem, opportunity, or situation

Often just after the introduction, the background section discusses what has brought about the need for the proposal—what problem, what opportunity exists for improving things, what the basic situation is. For example, management of a chain of daycare centers may need to ensure that all employees know CPR because of new state mandates requiring it, or an owner of pine timberland in eastern Oregon may want to make sure the land can produce saleable timber without destroying the environment.

While the named audience of the proposal may know the problem very well, writing the background section is useful in demonstrating our particular view of the problem. If we cannot assume readers know the problem, we will need to spend more time convincing them that the problem or opportunity exists and that it should be addressed. For a larger audience not familiar with the problem, this section can give detailed context.

Description of the proposed solution

Here we define the nature of what we are proposing so readers can see what is involved in the proposed action. For example, if we write an essay proposing to donate food scraps from restaurants to pig farms, we will need to define what will be considered food scraps. In another example, if we argue that organic produce is inherently healthier for consumers than non-organic produce, and we propose governmental subsidies to reduce the cost of organic produce, we will need to define “organic” and describe how much the government subsidies will be and which products or consumers will be eligible. See 7.2: Definition Arguments for strategies that can help us elaborate on our proposed solution so readers can envision it clearly.

Methods

If we have not already covered the proposal's methods in the description, we may want to add this. How will we go about completing the proposed work? For example, in the above example about food scraps, we would want to describe and how the leftover food will be stored and delivered to the pig farms. Describing the methods shows the audience we have a sound, thoughtful approach to the project. It serves to demonstrate that we have the knowledge of the field to complete the project.

Feasibility of the project

A proposal argument needs to convince readers that the project can actually be accomplished. How can enough time, money, and will be found to make it happen? Have similar proposals been carried out successully in the past? For example, we might observe that according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Rutgers University runs a program that sends a ton of food scraps a

day from its dining halls to a local farm.[1] If we describe how other efforts overcame obstacles, we will persuade readers that if they can succeed, this proposal can as well.

Benefits of the proposal

Most proposals discuss the advantages or benefits that will come from the solution proposed. Describing the benefits helps you win the audience to your side, so readers become more invested in adopting your proposed solution. In the food scraps example, we might emphasize that the Rutgers program, rather than costing more, led to $100,000 a year in savings because the dining halls no longer needed to pay to have the food scraps hauled away. We could calculate the predicted savings for our new proposed program as well.

In order to predict the positive effects of the proposal and show how implementing it will lead to good results, we will want to use causal arguments. The strategies in 7.5: Causal Arguments will be helpful here. This is a good time to refer back to the problem we identified early in the essay and show how the proposal will resolve that original problem.

Sample annotated proposal argument

The sample essay "Why We Should Open Our Borders" by student Laurent Wenjun Jiang can serve as an example. Annotations point out how Jiang uses several proposal argument strategies.

- Sample proposal essay "Why We Should Open Our Borders" in PDF with margin notes
- Sample proposal essay "Why We Should Open Our Borders" accessible version with notes in parentheses

Practice Exercise 15.7.1

Find a proposal argument that you strongly support. Browse news and opinion websites, or try The Conversation. Once you have chosen a proposal, read it closely and look for the elements discussed in this section. Do you find enough discussion of the background, methods, feasibility, and benefits of the proposal? Discuss at least one way in which you think the proposal could be revised to be even more convincing.

Works Cited

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Laurent Wenjun Jiang

Prof. Natalie Peterkin

English 1C

July 25, 2020

Why We Should Open Our Borders

Refugees, inequalities, economic instabilities...the fact that we are bombarded by news on those topics every day is proof that we live in a world with lots of problems, and many of us suffer as a consequence. Nations have tried a variety of solutions, but the reality has not improved. Yet there exists a single easy measure that could solve almost all of the problems mentioned above: an open-border policy. The current border and immigration practices, including border controls and detention centers, are unjustified and counterproductive. (Note: The first body paragraph gives background on the problem, opportunity, or situation.) This paper discusses the refugee problem, the history of open-border policy, the refutations for the current border policies on philosophical and moral grounds, and the arguments why this open-border policy will work economically.

Refugees are a problem of worldwide concern. Recently the biggest wave of refugees came from Syria, which witnessed an eight-year-long civil war. In an interview, a Syrian refugee expresses deep sorrows regarding the loss of her home: “My brothers, sisters, uncles, neighbors, streets, the bread ovens, schools, children going to schools ...we miss all of that, everything in Syria is precious to us” she says, with tears hovering in her eyes (Firpo). She also exposes the terrible living conditions there: “[W]e didn’t run away, Syria has become uninhabitable. Not even animals could live there. No power, no running water, no safety, and no security. You don’t know who to fight...even when you lock yourself away, you’re not safe...I was most scared of seeing my children die right in front of me” (Firpo). (Note: Moving refugee testimonies serve as evidence supporting the claim that their situation is one of great urgency.) As heart-breaking as it sounds, we should also know that this is only the tip of the iceberg: Gerhard Hoffstaedter, an anthropologist at the University of Queensland, states that there are around 70 million displaced people in developing countries, which is the highest recorded number since the 1950s, causing the United Nations to call this world issue “a crisis.” The leading nations in the world do not offer enough support to displaced people living in abject conditions. Refugees at the U.S.-Mexico border and in Southeast Asia and Australia are constantly kept in detention centers. Many nations do not comply with the provisions signed in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the succeeding 1967 Protocol; they treat the refugees only as those in passive need of simply humanitarian aids (Hoffstaedter). In this crisis, it is our common responsibility as members of an international community to help those who are in need.

Historically, the large-scale control of the mobility of people is a relatively new phenomenon worldwide. (Note: This body paragraph starts with a definition argument to show that the current trend is new. This argument later becomes support for the idea that open borders are possible.) In the modern era, border signifies “ever more restrictive immigration policies” at the same time grants “greater freedom of mobility to capital and commodities”, as defined in the editorial “Why No Borders.” This creates a contradictory ideology that could cause potential harm to those who need to migrate (Anderson, et al.). John Maynard Keynes dates the beginning of this process only back to World War I in the early 20th century. However, this trend did not become widespread until after World War II. According to a historical outline created by Christof Van Mol and Helga de Valk, due to the booming in the

industrial production in northwestern Europe in the 1950s, the local workers were increasingly educated and gradually became whitecollar employers, leaving vacancies in blue-collar occupations (Mol and Valk).

Thus, those countries started recruiting immigrants from other parts of Europe and even North Africa: for example, Germany and France started seasonal working programs to attract immigrants (Mol and Valk). Because of the lack of job opportunities in the other parts of Europe and North Africa and the need for workers in the industrializing countries in Northern and Western Europe, “international migration was generally viewed positively because of its economic benefits, from the perspective of both the sending and the receiving countries" (Mol and Valk). This early migration pattern within Europe provides the basic model for the European Union that builds on the fundamental ideology of the free movements of goods and human resources. In recent days, the European Union has become one of the biggest multinational organizations, which can also serve as a successful example of this open-border ideology, at least on a regional scale.

Borders do not satisfy the needs of contemporary societies. From both philosophical and moral perspectives, restrictive border policies are not justified. First of all, borders divide and subjugate people. The editorial “Why No Borders” describes the border as being“thoroughly ideological” (Anderson, et al.). The authors argue that because border policies try to categorize people into “desirable and non-desirable” according to their skills, race, or social status, etc., they thus create an interplay between “subjects and subjectivities,” placing people into “new types of power relationship” (Anderson, et al.). This is what is identified as the ultimate cause of the divisions and inequalities between people.

Some fear that competition from immigrants would cause a reduction in the wages of local workers (Caplan). (Note: In this body paragraph, the author attempts to disprove the counterargument about a downside of open borders for local workers.) This is not an uncalled-for worry, but it is also a misunderstanding of the nature of the open-border policy. Nick Srnicek reasons that this kind of competition has already existed under the current trend of globalization, where workers in developed countries are already competing against those in developing countries that have cheaper labor. He argues, “Workers in rich countries are already losing, as companies eliminate good jobs and move their factories and offices elsewhere” (Srnicek). The border serves companies by making workers in the developing world stay where wages are low. Thus, “companies can freely exploit” cheap labor. In this sense, workers on both sides will be better off under an open-border policy (Srnicek). A recent study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison investigating the economic implications of immigration between rich and poor countries concluded that the benefits of an open-border policy far outweigh the cons and that “the real wage effects are small” (Kennan).

Although an open border could lead to minor reductions in the wages of local workers in developed countries, there is a simple solution. Since the labor market follows the economic law of supply, work supply and wages are inversely related, meaning that the lower the supply of labor, the more wages rise. (Note: This paragraph could be seen as a limit and a rebuttal because the open border would need to be combined with changes to labor laws in order to avoid a possible bad effect.) Nick Srnicek proposes, “a shortening of the workweek...would reduce the amount of work supplied, spread the work out more equally among everyone and give more power to workers ... more free time to everyone” (Srnicek). Thus, although the open-border policy is not perfect, its downside is easy to address. (Note: The author does not investigate how much time, money, and will an open border policy would need; the argument remains mostly theoretical because it doesn’t address feasibility.)

As an expatriate myself, I can truly relate to this type of thinking. Due to a variety of the political, economic, and social limitations that I came across in my home country, I was not able to achieve self-actualization. In pursuit of a better education and a more free living environment, I went abroad and finally arrived in this country a few years ago. It was not until then that I gained a vision of my future. Now I am working in hopes that one day the vision could become reality. Sometimes I cannot help wondering what could happen if I was not so lucky to be where I am today. But at the same time, I am also conscious of the fact that there are also millions of people out there who cannot even conceive of what it is like to actualize their lives. (Note: The conclusion humanizes the possible benefits of the proposed solution.) I am sure that one of the mothers who escaped her war-torn home country with her family has the sole hope to witness her children growing up in a happy and free place, just like any mother in the world. I am sure that there is one little girl whose family fled her country in desperation who once studied so hard in school, dreaming of becoming the greatest scientist in the world. I am also sure that there is a young boy who survived persecutions and wishes to become a politician one day to make the world a better place for the downtrodden. Because of borders, these children can only dream of the things that many of us take for granted every day. We, as human beings, might be losing a great mother, great scientist, great politician, or just a great person who simply wishes for a better world. But everything could be otherwise. Change requires nothing but a minimal effort. With open borders, we can help people achieve their dreams.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

15.8: Visual Arguments

Topic hierarchy

15.8.1: Photos and Illustrations

15.8.2: Video- Visualizing Data

15.8.3: Visual Elements- Play, Use, and Design

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15.8.1: Photos and Illustrations

Photos are used in professional documents as tools for communicating a message that a writer feels can be strengthened through the use of proper imagery. Photographs can do many things to enhance a message, some examples can be seen here:

Illustration Checklist

Planning

- What kinds of illustrations are your audience familiar with?
- Do you have information that could be more easily or quickly communicated to your audience visually or in a combination of words and graphics?
- Do you have definitions that could be displayed visually in whole or in part?
- Do you have any processes or procedures that could be depicted in a flowchart?
- Do you have information on trends or relationships that could be displayed in tables and graphics?
- Do you have masses of statistics that could be summarized in tables?
- Do you need to depict objects? If so, what do you need to display about the objects? Do you need to focus attention on specific aspects of the objects? Do you require the realism of photographs?
- What are the design conventions of your illustrations?
- Are there suitable illustrations you could borrow or adapt? Or will you need to create them yourself?

Revising

- Are you illustrations suited to your purpose and audience?
- Do your illustrations communicate information ethically?
- Are your illustrations effectively located and easy to find?
- Are your illustrations numbered and labeled?
- Do your verbal and visual elements reinforce each other?
- Are your illustrations genuinely informative instead of simply decorative?
- When necessary, have you helped your readers to interpret your illustrations with commentary or annotations?
- Have you acknowledged the sources for borrowed or adapted tables and figures?

How To Perform an Action

Pictures are an effective tool for giving visual representation of how to do something. They can can stand alone or work in conjunction with the given text, and they can enhance a message if used properly.



Figure 15.8.1.1

If you are using pictures in conjunction with text: As in a set of instructions, the imagery increases understanding of the task, in addition to decreasing confusion that may arise from text that stands alone. When using a picture to help portray how to perform a task, it is your responsibility to make sure the picture matches up with the text. You must explain the picture using text, and vice versa, explain the text using a picture. Also, the viewer will accomplish the task more often when the picture looks how it would if they were watching the task, not necessarily if they were experiencing it.

An example would be: if your task was doing a cartwheel, you wouldn't want the pictures at an angle where the person is looking through the eyes of the one doing the cartwheel. You would want the pictures to be from someone watching the event, so that the viewer isn't confused by what they can't see (such as where their feet are when they're looking at their hands). It's the simple

things that make or break a document when using pictures. Think and re-think the pictures you are using and how someone seeing them for the first time will react to them.

How a Finished Product Should Look

When textual information does not capture the essence of what your trying to describe, try putting an actual photo of what your trying to describe in the document. This type of picture enables you to come as close to reality as possible. Make sure your pictures are in color and of high quality. Black and white photos tend to blur easily on paper and lack the detail needed to fully understand a photo. Images cut down on excessive use of describing words. “A picture is worth a thousand words” relates to this situation.

Be sure to use the text wrap abilities of most word processors. A well placed picture with clean text wrapping can make an otherwise overwhelming block of text seem reasonably approachable. Looking at 25 pages of block, justified alignment, plain black text is one of the most boring ways to see a report. A picture can liven up a report, make it more memorable, and help clarify the report all in one motion.

Map Out an Object, Place, or Process

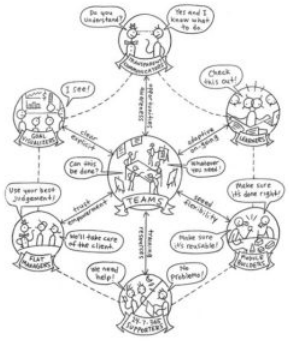


Figure **15.8.1.2**

An example of these types of pictures can be found in an automotive manual or a science textbook. This can be anything from a picture of a machine to an example of how photosynthesis works. Arrows and labels can be used in order to show where everything is and how the process takes place. The picture should include a big enough background so that the reader can locate the area in relation to things around it.
Photographs can also play a major role in connecting with the audience. They are useful in multi-cultural situations when a shared written language may not exist. Pictures can speak louder than words, and usually portray the message quicker. It is very important to keep the first initial reaction in mind when choosing the image you will place within your document. Be sure to avoid photos that may have several meanings, or the true meaning may be unclear. In order to avoid this type of situation, put yourself in the audience that you are writing for and try to be unbiased when you view the image. Better yet, test the image on someone who does not know much about your photo’s topic and ask them what message the photo sends to them. Clarity is essential in conveying your message.

Do not rely too heavily on pictures though. Pictures and text should be used simultaneously in order to give the audience the most accurate direction. Pictures can make a great break in words, but are not always as useful to get a point across as words are.

Software Can Tremendously Increase Photograph Effectiveness

There are a great deal of photo editing programs for computers that can be utilized to bring out the right angle, zoom, view, and color of a photo. Some of the most popular photo editing software includes Photoshop, Corel, and Image Smart. Many computers now come with basic image editing software, which allows one to adjust color, brightness, crop, and other basic edits.

Cropping is an essential key feature that allows you to enlarge the area of the photo you want the reader to see, while omitting the background and obsolete area of the background. Cropping is equivalent to looking at an image under a microscope where you can focus on the areas you want the readers to see the clearest. However, this can decrease image quality and make the image hard to see. When possible, it is best to use images that need little to no editing.

When using imagery make sure it is of high image resolution (300 dpi for print, 72 dpi for screen) and the proper format to be inserting into your document. Typically, sticking with images from original sources, such as a camera or other .jpg or .tif file are best.

If you find your photograph is not using the right coloring, computer programs such as Photoshop, Corel, etc. will allow you to adjust the color balance and light in many different variations. This is an important feature, especially when the photograph was not professionally taken or lacks the appropriate lighting for the setting. Be careful not to over or under expose the photography.

Labeling is also another feature you can do in a computer program. You can insert boxes with text and arrows into a photograph in order to label key details. Labeling your photographs keeps the information you are trying to convey to the reader clear.

These computer programs may take some time to become familiar with how they work. It might be necessary to take a course or tutorial on how to use them to their full advantages, but it's worth it for all the features these programs have. There are some free tutorials available on the internet or through the actual program.

Using Graphics From the Artists, Internet, and Other Misc. Sources

Graphics can be found for just about any topic relatively easily if you know how to search for them and cite the artist properly. Like any written material, pictures are also property of the original artist in many cases. It is important to use good ethics and cite artists when necessary. The internet and your computer's clip art file have countless pictures and graphics as well. Knowing how to use these techniques and tools will make finding and using images easier.

Citing Images

In order to use or manipulate an image or graphic not your own, from either the Internet or any other source, you must obtain permission from whoever created or has rights to that image. Usually some type of arrangement between you and this person or organization will have to be negotiated. This could be anything from paying for the rights to use the image, or citing the image in the way that is expressed by the owner. Sometimes graphics will be considered public domain. Studying the copyright information of an image is one way to determine whether or not it is public domain. Images belonging to a government agency or even to your employer would typically be considered public domain. Even so, these images should still be cited. A quick guide to citing images from books and internet can be found at, [[1]]

Finding Images on the Internet

If you are looking for a high resolution image from the internet, you can select in the Google header bar that you want it only to search for "large images, or extra large images". If you are not finding what you are looking for, there are many stock photography sites out there that allow you to have the image, royalty free for very little of your own money. Some sites to consider would be: Stock.XCHNG (this is a free site, with some restrictions), Stock Xpert, Corbis, Getty, or others, just type in stock photography in the search bar.

Clip Art/Illustrations



Figure 15.8.1.3 - *An example of Clip Art*

Illustrations are a great way to convey information easily and effectively to an audience of all ages. However, when using illustrations be sure that there is relevance from the illustration to the topic your discussing. Illustrations can serve as tangents if they have no relevance to the topic being discussed. Illustrations must be chosen to highlight the topic you are discussing and not to distract readers from it.

Graphics can portray ideas more easily than a picture. They give a different type of quality than text in the document. However, when presenting the ideas to well-educated and technologically savvy professionals, clip art may not present the information efficiently. Illustrations that have a low image resolution can take away from the details you are trying to portray to your audience.If this is the case then photos may be a better choice because they are more clear and may get you point across better.

Headline text

Headline text is used to introduce or even explain graphics. It is expected that you label all of your graphics in one way or another so that when you reference them in you document the reader knows which graphic you are talking about. Headline text can be as simple as a title for a graph or as complex as a short paragraph below a photo explaining the origin and context of the image. Your images and text may seem to go together logically without headlines to you, but your readers will not have your same familiarity.

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15.8.2: Video- Visualizing Data

Below you'll see a link to a TED Talk by David McCandless titled "The Beauty of Data Visualization." TED is a wonderful resource for intelligent, entertaining talks by experts on all kinds of subjects. You can probably find a video relevant to your own research project, if you look: **http://www.ted.com/**

Please watch this 18-minute video, and when finished, respond to this question:

McCandless thinks that information design is really important because "we're all visualizers now; we're all demanding a visual aspect to our information." If we assume it's true, then how has this changed our educational system? Are there particularly good examples of how teachers and schools have responded? Extreme deficits?

Responses should be 1-2 paragraphs long, and reference your own experience with visual learning, either from your personal education or what you've witnessed from a friend or family member's experience.



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15.8.3: Visual Elements- Play, Use, and Design

So far you have examined how primarily written arguments work rhetorically. But visuals (symbols, paintings, photographs, advertisements, cartoons, etc.) also work rhetorically, and their meaning changes from context to context. Here's an example:

Imagine two straight lines intersecting each other at right angles. One line runs from north to south. The other from east to west. Now think about the meanings that this sign evokes.

+

What came to mind as you pondered this sign? Crossroads? A first aid sign? The Swiss flag? Your little brother making a cross sign with his forefingers that signals "step away from the hallowed ground that is my bedroom"?

Now think of a circle around those lines so that the ends of the lines hit, or cross over, the circumference of the circle. What is the image's purpose now?

⊕

What did you come up with? The Celtic cross? A surveyor's target? A pizza cut into really generous sizes?

Did you know that this symbol is also the symbol for our planet Earth? And it's the symbol for the Norse god, Odin. Furthermore, a quick web search will also tell you that John Dalton, a British chemist who lead the way in atomic theory and died in 1844, used this exact same symbol to indicate the element sulfur.17

Recently, however, the symbol became the subject of a fiery political controversy. Former Alaska governor (and former vice-presidential candidate) Sarah Palin's marketing team placed several of these symbols—the lines crossed over the circumference of the circle in this case—on a map of the United States. The symbols indicated where the Republican Party had to concentrate their campaign because these two seemingly innocuous lines encompassed by a circle evoked, in this context, the symbol for crosshairs —which itself invokes a myriad of meanings that range from "focus" to "target."

However, after the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona in January 2011, the symbol, and the image it was mapped onto, sparked a vehement nationwide debate about its connotative meaning. Clearly, the image's rhetorical effectiveness had transformed into something that some considered offensive. Palin's team withdrew the image from her website.18

How we understand symbols rhetorically, and indeed all images, depends on how the symbols work with the words they accompany, and on how we understand and read the image's context, or the social "landscape" within which the image is situated. As you have learned from earlier chapters, much of this contextual knowledge in persuasive situations is tacit, or unspoken.

Like writing, how we use images has real implications in the world. So when we examine visuals in rhetorical circumstances, we need to uncover this tacit knowledge. Even a seemingly innocuous symbol, like the one above, can denote a huge variety of meanings, and these meanings can become culturally loaded. The same is true for more complex images—something we will examine at length below.

In this chapter, then, we will explore how context—as well as purpose, audience, and design—render symbols and images rhetorically effective. The political anecdote above may seem shocking but, nevertheless, it indicates how persuasively potent visuals are, especially when they enhance the meaning of a text's words or vice versa. Our goal for this chapter, then, is to come to terms with the basics of visual analysis, which can encompass the analysis of words working with images or the analysis of images alone. When you compose your own arguments, you can put to use what you discover in this chapter when you select or consider creating visuals to accompany your own work.

Visual Analysis

Let's start with by reviewing what we mean by analysis. Imagine that your old car has broken down and your Uncle Bob has announced that he will fix it for you. The next day, you go to Uncle Bob's garage and find the engine of your car in pieces all over the driveway; you are further greeted with a vision of your hapless uncle greasily jabbing at the radiator with a screwdriver. Uncle Bob (whom you may never speak to again) has broken the car engine down into its component parts to try and figure out how your poor old car works and what is wrong with it.

Happy days are ahead, however. Despite the shock and horror that the scene above inspires, there is a method to Uncle Bob's madness. Amid the wreckage, he finds out how your car works and what is wrong with it so he can fix it and put it back together.

Analyzing, then, entails breaking down a text or an image into component parts (like your engine). And while analyzing doesn't entail *fixing* per se, it does allow you to figure out how a text or image works to convey the message it is trying to communicate. What constitutes the component parts of an image? How might we analyze a visual? What should we be looking for? To a certain extent we can analyze visuals in the same way we analyze written language; we break down a written text into component parts to figure out just *what* the creator's agenda might be and what effect the text might have on its readers.

When we analyze visuals we do take into account the same sorts of things we do when we analyze written texts, with some added features. We thus analyze visuals in terms of the following concepts—concepts that count for our component parts. Some of them you may recognize.

Genre

Genres that use visuals tell us a lot about what we can and can't do with them. Coming to terms with genre is rather like learning a new dance—certain moves, or conventions, are expected that dictate what kind of dance you have to learn. If you're asked to moonwalk, for instance, you know you have to glide backwards across the floor like Michael Jackson. It's sort of the same with visuals and texts; certain moves, or conventions, are expected that dictate what the genre allows and doesn't allow.

Below is a wonderful old bumper sticker from the 1960s 19. A bumper sticker, as we will discover, is a genre that involves specific conventions.



***Figure* 15.8.3.1**

Bumper stickers today look quite a bit different, but the amount of space that a sticker's creator has to work with hasn't really changed. Bumper stickers demand that their creators come up with short phrases that are contextually understandable and accompanied by images that are easily readable—a photograph of an oil painting trying to squeeze itself on a bumper sticker would just be incomprehensible. In short, bumper stickers are an argument in a rush!

A bumper sticker calls for an analysis of images *and* words working together to create an argument. As for their rhetorical content, bumper stickers can demand that we vote a certain way, pay attention to a problem, act as part of a solution, or even recognize the affiliations of the driver of the car the sticker is stuck to. But their very success, given that their content is minimal, depends wholly on our understanding of the words and the symbols that accompany them in context.

Context/The Big Picture

Thinking about context is crucial when we are analyzing visuals, as it is with analyzing writing. We need to understand the political, social, economic, or historical situations from which the visual emerges. Moreover, we have to remember that the meaning of images change as time passes. For instance, what do we have to understand about the context from which the Kennedy sticker emerged in order to grasp its meaning? Furthermore, how has its meaning changed in the past 50 years?

First, to read the bumper sticker at face value, we have to know that a man named Kennedy is running for president. But president of what? Maybe that's obvious, but then again, how many know who the Australian prime minister was 50 years ago, or, for that matter, the leading official in China? Of course, we should know that the face on the bumper sticker belongs to John F. Kennedy, a US Democrat, who ran against the Republican nominee Richard Nixon, and who won the US presidential election in 1960. (We hope you know that anyway.)

Now think how someone seeing this bumper sticker, and the image of Kennedy on it, today would react differently than someone in 1960 would have. Since his election, JFK's status has transformed from American president into an icon of American history. We remember his historic debate with Nixon, the first televised presidential debate. (One wonders how much of a role this event played in his election given that the TV [a visual medium] turned a political underdog into a celebrity.20) We also remember Kennedy for his part in the Cuban missile crisis, his integral role in the Civil Rights Movement and, tragically, we remember his assassination in

1963. In other words, after the passage of 50 years, we might read the face on the bumper sticker quite differently than we did in 1960.

While we examine this "text" from 50 years ago, it reminds us that the images we are surrounded by now change in meaning all the time. For instance, we are all familiar with the Apple logo. The image itself, on its own terms, is simply a silhouette of an apple with a bite taken out of it. But, the visual does not now evoke the nourishment of a Granny Smith or a Golden Delicious. Instead, the logo is globally recognized as an icon of computer technology.

Purpose

Words and images can work together to present a point of view. But, in terms of visuals, that point of view often relies on what isn't explicit—what, as we noted above, is tacit.

The words on the sticker say quite simply "Kennedy For President." We know now that this simple statement reveals that John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960. But what was its rhetorical value back then? What did the bumper sticker want us to *do* with its message? After all, taken literally, it doesn't really tell us to *do* anything.

For now, let's cheat and jump the gun and guess that the bumper sticker's argument in 1960 was "Vote to Elect John F Kennedy for United States President."

Okay. So knowing what we know from history, we can accept that the sticker is urging us to vote for Kennedy. It's trying to persuade us to do something. And the reason we know what we know about it is because we know how to read its genre and we comprehend its social, political, and historical context. But in order to be persuaded by its purpose, we need to know *why* voting for JFK is a good thing. We need to understand that its underlying message, "Vote for JFK," is that to vote for JFK is a good thing for the future of the United States.

So, to be persuaded by the bumper sticker, we must agree with the reasons why voting for JFK is a good thing. But the bumper sticker doesn't give us any. Instead, it relies on what we are supposed to know about why we should vote for Kennedy. (JFK campaigned on a platform of liberal reform as well as increased spending for the military and space travel technology.21); Moreover, we should be aware of the evidence for why we should vote that way.22 Consequently, if we voted for JFK, we accepted the above claim, reasons, and evidence driving the bumper sticker's purpose without being told any of it by the bumper sticker. The claim, reasons and evidence are all tacit.

What about the image itself? How does that further the bumper sticker's purpose? We see that the image of JFK's smiling face is projected on top of the words "Kennedy for President." The image is not placed off to the side; it is right in the middle of the bumper sticker. So for this bumper sticker to be visually persuasive, we need to agree that JFK, here represented by his smiling face, located right in the middle of the bumper sticker, on a backdrop of red, white, and blue, signifies a person we can trust to run the country.

Nowadays, JFK's face on the bumper sticker—or in any other genre for that matter —might underscore a different purpose. It might encompass nostalgia for an era gone by or it might be used as a resemblance argument, in order to compare President Kennedy with President Obama for example.23

Overall then, when we see a visual used for rhetorical purposes, we must first determine the argument (claim, reasons, evidence) from which the visual is situated and then try to grasp why the visual is being used to further its purpose.

Audience and Medium

In their book *Picturing Texts*, Lester Faigley et al24 claim that, when determining the audience for a visual, we must "think about how an author might expect the audience to receive the work" (104). Medium, then, dominates an audience's reception of an image. (So does **modality**. See below.) For instance, Faigley states that readers will most likely accept a photograph in a newspaper as news—unless of course one thinks that pictures in the tabloids of alien babies impersonating Elvis constitute news. Alien babies aside, readers of the news would expect that the picture on the front page of the *New York Times*, for instance, is a "faithful representation of something that actually happened" (105). An audience for a political cartoon in the newspaper, on the other hand, would know that the pictures they see in cartoons are not faithful representations of the news but opinions about current events and their participants, caricatured by a cartoonist. The expectations of the audience in terms of medium, then, determine much about how the visual is received.

As for our bumper sticker then, we might argue that the image of JFK speeding down the highway on the bumper of a spiffy new Ford Falcon would be persuasive to those who put their faith in the efficacy of bumper stickers, as well as the image of the man on the bumper sticker. Moreover, given that the Falcon is speeding by, we might assume that the bumper sticker would mostly appeal to those folks who are already thinking of voting for JFK—otherwise there's a chance that the Falcon's driver would be the recipient of some 1960s-style road rage.

Today, the audience for our bumper sticker has changed considerably. We might find it in a library collection. Indeed, Kansas University has a considerable collection of bumper stickers.25 Or we might find it collecting bids on eBay. Once again, the audience for this example of images and words working together rhetorically depends largely on its contextual landscape.

Design

Design actually involves several factors.

Arrangement

Designers are trained to emphasize certain features of a visual text. And they are also trained to compose images that are balanced and harmonized. Faigley et al suggest that we look at a text that uses images (with or without words) and think about where our eyes are drawn first (34).26 Moreover, in Western cultures, we are trained to read from left to right and top to bottom—a pattern that often has an impact on what text or image is accentuated in a visual arrangement.

Other arrangements that Faigley et al discuss are **closed and open forms** (105).27 A closed-form image means that, like our bumper sticker, everything we need to know about the image is enclosed within its frame. An open form, on the other hand, suggests that the visual's narrative continues outside the frame of the visual. Many sports ads employ open-frame visuals that suggest the dynamic of physical movement.

Another method of arrangement that is well known to designers is the **rule of thirds**. Here's an example of that rule in action28:

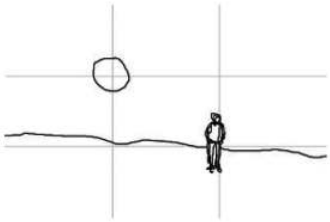


Figure **15.8.3.2**

Note how the illustration above has been cordoned off into 9 sections. The drawings of the sun and the person, as well as the horizon, coincide with those lines. The rule of thirds dictates that this compositional method allows for an interesting and dynamic arrangement as opposed to one that is static. Now, unfortunately, our bumper sticker above doesn't really obey that rule. Nevertheless, our eye is still drawn to the image of JFK's head. Many modern bumper stickers do, however, obey the rule of thirds. Next time you see a bumper sticker on a parked car, check if the artist has paid attention to this rule. Or, seek out some landscape photography. The rule of thirds is the golden rule in landscape art and photography and is more or less a comprehensive way to analyze arrangement in design circles because of its focus on where one's eye is drawn.

Rhetorically speaking, what is accentuated in a visual is the most important thing to remember about arrangement. As far as professional design is concerned, it is never haphazard. Even a great photo, which might be seem to be the result of serendipity, can be cropped to highlight what a newspaper editor, for instance, wants highlighted.

Texts and Image in Play

Is the visual supported by words? *How* do the words support the visual? What is gained by the words and what would be lost if they weren't in accompaniment? What if we were to remove the words "Kennedy for President" from our bumper sticker? Would the sticker have the same rhetorical effect?

Moreover, when examining visual rhetoric, we should pinpoint how font emphasizes language. How does font render things more or less important, for instance? Is the font playful, like Comic Sans MS, or formal, like Arial? Is the font blocked, large, or small?

What difference does the font make to the overall meaning of the visual? Imagine that our JFK bumper sticker was composed with a swirly- curly font. It probably wouldn't send the desired message. Why not, do you think?

Alternately, think about the default font in Microsoft Word. What does it look like and why? What happens to the font if it is bolded or enlarged? Does it maintain a sense of continuity with the rest of the text? If you scroll through the different fonts available to you on your computer, which do you think are most appropriate for essay writing, website design, or the poster you may have to compose?

Lastly, even the use of **white (or negative) space** in relation to text deserves attention in terms of arrangement. The mismanagement of the relation of space to text and/or visual can result in visual overload! For instance, in an essay, double spacing is often advised because it is easier on the reader's eye. In other words, the blank spaces between the lines of text render reading more manageable than would dense bricks of text. Similarly, one might arrange text and image against the blank space to create a balanced arrangement of both.

While in some situations the arrangement of text and visual (or white space) might not seem rhetorical (in an essay, for example), one could make the argument that cluttering one's work is not especially rhetorically effective. After all, if you are trying to persuade your instructor to give you an 'A', making your essay effortlessly readable seems like a good place to start.

Visual Figures

Faigley et al also ask us to consider the use of figures in a visual argument (32). Figurative language is highly rhetorical, as are figurative images. For instance, visual metaphors abound in visual rhetoric, especially advertising (32). A visual metaphor is at play when you encounter an image that signifies something other than its literal meaning. For instance, think of your favorite cereal: which cartoon character on the cereal box makes you salivate in anticipation of breakfast time? Next time, when you see a cartoon gnome and your tummy start to rumble in anticipation of chocolate-covered rice puffs, you'll know that the design folks down at ACME cereals have done their job. Let's hope, however, that you don't want to chow down on the nearest short fat fellow in a red cap that comes your way.

Visual rhetoric also relies on synecdoche, a trope in which a *part* of something represents the *whole*. In England, for instance, a crown is used to represent the British monarchy. The image of JFK's face on the bumper sticker, then, might suggest his competency to *head up* the country.

Color

Colors are loaded with rhetorical meaning, both in terms of the values and emotions associated with them and their contextual background. Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen29 show how the use of color is as contextually bound as writing and images themselves. For instance, they write, "red is for danger, green for hope. In most parts of Europe, black is for mourning, though in northern parts of Portugal, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe as well, brides wear black gowns for their wedding day. In China, and other parts of East Asia, white is the color of mourning; in most of Europe it is the color of purity, worn by the bride at her wedding. Contrasts like these shake our confidence in the security of meaning of colour and colour terms" (343).

So what colors have seemingly unshakeable meaning in the US? How about red, white, and blue? Red and blue are two out of the three primary colors. They evoke a sense of sturdiness. After all, they are the base colors from which others are formed.

The combined colors of the American flag have come to signal patriotism and American values. But even American values, reflected in the appearance of the red, white, and blue, change in different contexts. To prompt further thought, Faigley shows us that the flag has been used to lend different meaning to a variety of magazine covers—from *American Vogue* (fashion) to *Fortune* magazine (money) (91). An image of the red, white and blue on the cover lends a particularly American flavor to each magazine. And this can change the theme of each magazine? For instance, with what would you acquaint a picture of the American flag on the cover of *Bon Appétit* or *Rolling Stone*? Hot dogs and Bruce Springsteen perhaps?

What then does the red, white, and blue lend our bumper sticker? A distinctly patriotic flavor, for sure. Politically patriotic. And that can mean different things for different people. Thus, given that meanings change in a variety of contexts, we can see that the meaning of color can actually be more fluid than we might have originally thought.

Alternately, if our JFK sticker colors were anything other than red, white, and blue, we might read it very differently; indeed, it might seem extremely odd to us.

Modality

Kress and Van Leeuwen ask us to consider the modality in which an image is composed. Very simply, this means, how "real" does the image look? And what does this "realness" contribute to its persuasiveness? They write, "visuals can represent people, places, and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way . . . or as though they do not" (161).30 As noted above in the "Audience and Medium" section, photographs are thus considered a more naturalistic representation of the world than clip art, for instance. We expect photographs to give us a representation of reality. Thus, when a photograph is manipulated to signify something fantastic, like a unicorn or a dinosaur, we marvel at its ability to construct something that looks "real." And when a visual shifts from one modality to another, it takes on additional meaning.

For instance, how might we read a cartoon version of JFK compared to the photograph that we see on our bumper sticker? Would the cartoon render the bumper sticker less formal? Less significant perhaps? Would a cartoon, given its associative meanings, somehow lessen the authenticity of the sticker's purpose? Or the authority of its subject?

Perspective/Point of View

Imagine standing beneath a wind turbine. Intimidating? Impressive Overwhelming? Now envision that you are flying over it in airplane. That very enormous thing seems rather insignificant now—a wind turbine in Toyland.

Now imagine the same proportions depicted in a photograph. One might get the same sense of power if the photo was taken from the bottom of the turbine, the lens pointed heavenward. Then again, an aerial photograph might offer us a different perspective. If the landscape presents us with an endless array of turbines stretching into the distance, we might get a sense that they are infinite—as infinite as wind energy.

Our Kennedy sticker offers neither of the above-described senses of perspective. Coming face to face with Kennedy, we neither feel overwhelmed nor superior. In fact, it's as if Kennedy's gaze is meeting ours at our own level. The artist is still using his powers of perspective; it's just that our gaze meets Kennedy's face to face. Consequently, Kennedy is portrayed as friendly and approachable.

Differently, a photo that artist Shepherd Fairey manipulated into the now iconic "Hope" poster from a 2006 Associated Press photograph of our current president (and got into all sorts of copyright infringement trouble for), makes subtle use of perspective: the visual positions the viewer slightly beneath Obama's gaze. As a result of Fairey's use of perspective, and as Joshuah Bearman puts it, Obama is portrayed with "the distant, upward gaze of a visionary leader."31

Social distance

Kress and Van Leeuwen include **social distance** in the components of design. Social distance accounts for the "psychology of people's use of space" (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 29).32 In short, a visual artist can exploit social distance to create a certain psychological effect between a person in an image and the image's audience.

To illustrate, imagine a photograph of a handsome man, head and shoulders only, smiling straight at you with warm eyes. He advertises chocolate, cigars, expensive cologne. A beautiful woman tosses her hair, smiling seductively at the camera. She looks straight at you. "Look at me," both seem to say, "buy this product; we invite you." Likewise, Kennedy smiles into the camera. "Vote for me," he encourages. "I'm a nice guy." Depicting head and shoulders only, we are given a sense of what Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt call "Close Personal Distance."33 The result is one of intimacy.

Alternately, a visual of several people, or a crowd, would suggest far less intimacy.

Mood and Lighting

Have you ever put a flashlight under your chin and lit your face from underneath? Maybe we aren't all budding scary movie makers, but jump out of the closet on a dark night with all the lights turned off and the flashlight propped under your chin and you're sure to give at least the cat a fright. What you have experimented with is mood and lighting. In short, the lighting as described eerily captures facial features that aren't usually accentuated. It can be quite offputting. Thus the position of the light has created a creepy face; it's created a visual **mood**. And, the mood combines with other elements of the visual to create an effect, which of course is rhetorical.

The next time you watch a movie, note how the filmmaker has played with lighting to create a mood. In the illustration below, we can see how *Film Noir*, for instance, capitalizes on techniques of mood and lighting to create an uncanny effect.34



Figure **15.8.3.3**

Finally

In this chapter, we have introduced the basics of rhetoric and visual analysis. During the course of your semester, and throughout your academic career, you might be asked to use visuals in support of your own writing. For instance, you may be asked to construct a web page, a poster, or a pamphlet.

You may also be asked to represent data with graphs and charts. Lisa Ede offers a selection of visuals (as well as a description of their purpose) that you might need to include in some of your academic compositions. These do not include pictures, but arrange text visually to convey information specifically:

1. A **table** arranges text visually, in columns for example, to compare information.
2. A **pie chart** arranges text within a circle to show relationships of quantity, for instance.
3. A **bar graph** is typically used to show changes in data over a period of time.
4. A **map** calls attention to "spatial relationships and locations."35

Whatever the type of visual you use, whether it is a pie chart or a photograph, it is vital that you interrogate the *genre*, *purpose*, *audience* and *design conventions* suitable to the context within which you are working. Understanding these components will help you select the appropriate visual that works rhetorically in this context. In other words, and as an illustration, if you are working in the sciences and compiling visual data in a line graph, you need to be aware of all of the above in order to meet the expectations of your professor and your academic community. In short, even the most seemingly innocuous choices are rhetorical given the expectations of your audience. The components of the analysis listed above, then, offer a set of guidelines to think about when we are composing with visuals.

To Do

1. Can you think of any bumper stickers you have seen lately that capitalize on your external knowledge of an issue? What do you have to know for instance to be able to read and understand a peace sign on a bumper sticker? Or a picture of a cell phone with the words "Hang Up and Drive" next to it? What cultural, unspoken or tacit knowledge do these symbols demand that you have?
2. Go to your favorite search engine and type in the words "political cartoons." Choose a website and browse through the cartoons. You might notice that some of them you will laugh at, some of them you will grimace at, and for some of them, you may stop and think, "huh?" Pick a cartoon that makes you go "Huh?" In other words, pick a cartoon for which you don't get the punch line. Research the political context to which the cartoon refers. After your research, think about the tacit knowledge the cartoon taps into. Now how do you react? Why?
3. Can you think of how audiences have changed with regards to a particular image—like the Apple image? A further illustration might help: my students and I looked at an ad for a particular brand of jeans recently, and they told me that "no one wore those jeans anymore" and that they "were for old people." I was shocked and amazed (and emptied my closet of those jeans). Recently, the brand has been targeting a teen demographic, which leads me to marvel at the company's rhetorical astuteness—as well as to wonder exactly what jeans one should be wearing nowadays.
4. Find an image using your favorite search engine. Analyze it in terms of the elements of design listed above. How does a corroboration of these elements work in favor of the image's overall effect?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

16: Writing Argument Analysis

Learning Outcomes

- Write an analysis of an argument's appeal to emotion
- Write an analysis of an argument's appeal to trust
- Connect an assessment of an argument's logical structure to an assessment of the effectiveness of its rhetorical appeals
- Give constructive feedback on an argument analysis essay
- Describe how the visual features of an image can reinforce the message of a visual argument.

16.1: How Argument Analysis Essays are Structured

16.2: Analyzing an Argument's Situation (Kairos, or the Rhetorical Situation)

16.3: Generating Ideas for an Argument Analysis Paper

16.4: Reviewing an Argument Analysis Essay

16.5: A Brief Sample Argument Analysis

16.5.1: Annotated Brief Sample Argument Analysis

16.6: A Longer Sample Argument Analysis

16.6.1: Annotated Longer Sample Argument Analysis

16.7: A Sample Visual Argument Analysis

16.7.1: Annotated Sample Visual Argument Analysis



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16.1: How Argument Analysis Essays are Structured

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In some humanities classes in college, you may be asked to write a kind of paper that goes further than a summary, an assessment or a response paper in describing another writer's argument. Such an **argument analysis**, also called a **rhetorical analysis**, asks you to describe what the other writer is up to, not just in terms of ideas but in terms of all the strategies they used to make the argument convincing. You become a kind of detective, piecing together the moves the writer made, the reasons for them, and their likely effects on readers.


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In such an essay, you will need to analyze and evaluate the quality of the logical reasoning, as we learned to do in Chapter 4: Assessing the Strength of an Argument. But you will also need to describe and evaluate how the writer seeks to affect readers' emotions and gain readers' trust. How well are the author's appeals to trust and emotion likely to work? Will readers likely respond as the writer imagines?

The introduction should include the title of the argument you analyze and several sentences that summarize the argument. Imagining an audience unfamiliar with the argument will encourage you to choose your words carefully and offer full explanations. After introducing readers to the content of the argument, you can state your thesis: your assessment of how convincing the argument is and what its weaknesses are, if any.

There is a lot to cover in such a paper since you will need to summarize and analyze the ideas, identify strategies the author has used, and discuss how readers will respond to these strategies. With so many points to discuss, you may wonder how you can create a cohesive thesis. The key is to focus on what you consider to be most important in propelling the argument forward or sinking it. A thesis can pick two or three important aspects of the argument and identify them as strengths or weaknesses. The more you can group several different strategies together under a common theme, the more focused and memorable your thesis becomes. For example, if a writer uses “we” to refer to Latinx people, inserts Spanish phrases, and tells a moving story of a family’s immigration to the U.S. from Mexico, you could refer to all three of those aspects of the argument at once in your thesis by noting that the writer “appeals to readers’ Latinx identity.”

Each body paragraph can focus on just one aspect of the reasoning or on an argumentative strategy. In the above example, you could develop one paragraph about the use of “we” to refer to Latinx people, another paragraph about the use of the Spanish language in the argument, and another about how the writer introduces a Spanish-speaking immigrant story. Your transitions could refer to what these paragraphs have in common--a reference to Latinx identity. To support your ideas in each body paragraph, you can use evidence in the form of quotations and paraphrases from the argument analyzed.

The conclusion should provide some assessment of the overall effectiveness of the argument. You can make a prediction about how most readers will respond in the end. Given the combination of logical strength or weakness and appeals to trust and emotion, how convinced will readers likely be? Are there any lessons we can learn from the successes or failures of this argument?

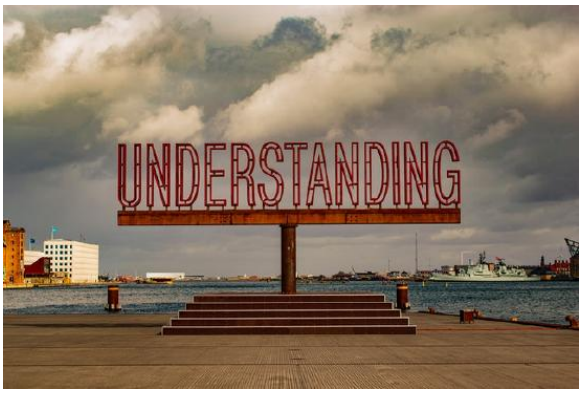


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16.2: Analyzing an Argument's Situation (Kairos, or the Rhetorical Situation)

Media Alternative

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We will often begin our analysis of an argument by "situating" it. This means figuring out who the author is, what kind of text we are dealing with, who it is trying to persuade, and when and where it was written. The **rhetorical situation** (also called **kairos**) is the combination of author, audience, context, purpose, constraints, and genre. It is the situation shaping the text, the situation to which the text responds.

Key Elements of the Rhetorical Situation

To fully understand an argument, experienced readers ask big-picture questions about the **author**, the **audience** they address, the **context**, the **genre** of the text, the **purpose** of the text, and the **constraints** that shape how it is written.

Author

Who is the author? Where are they coming from? When reading a text**,** take a few minutes to research who the author is. Who are they, what kind of writing do they do, what organizations do they belong to, what is their reputation?



Indie Author Day 2017 by BuffaloLibrary on Flickr is licensed CC BY 2.0.

Audience

In 7.2: Tailoring an Argument to an Audience, we discussed how to shape our own arguments with a particular audience in mind. We analyze an argument, we work backward to infer what the intended audience was. From there, we can also infer how the writer's sense of their audience shaped their choices as they wrote.

- Who does it appear the author is trying to reach? How does the author address and imagine the audience?
- Is the text aimed at a particular age, gender, cultural background, class, political orientation, or religion, for example? How is the text shaped to target this audience?
- Does the text also seem to address a secondary audience?
- Figuring out where the text was published, when it was published, what kind of text it is (speech, op-ed, article, song, etc.), and how it addresses readers can help provide clues to audience.
- Who is likely to find the text important, relevant, or useful? Conversely, who is going to be alienated by the text? Reread the first page and consider what readers have to believe, value, or care about to get past it. Who is likely to set it aside based on something they see at the very beginning?
- Consider style, tone, diction, and vocabulary. What do these tell you about the potential audience for the text? Examine the other authors and works referred to in the text (if there are footnotes or a Works Cited page, look at what is listed there. Just as

you can learn a lot about a person by the people around them, you can learn a lot about a text from all the other texts it references). What does the author assume their readers know? What does the author assume about readers' age, education, gender, location, or cultural values?



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Purpose

What is the author trying to achieve? What does the author want us to do, believe, or understand? All writing has a purpose. We write to bring awareness to a problem, make sense of an experience, call people to action, contribute to an area of knowledge, criticize or defend a position, redefine a concept, complain, clarify, challenge, document, create a beautiful story, and entertain (to name just a few purposes for writing).

As we analyze, we can ask ourselves what seems to be the question at issue. Why has the author written this text? What is the problem, dispute, or question being addressed? What motivated them to write, what do they hope to accomplish?

As we saw in 7.1: Deciding the Purpose of a Research-Based Argument, one way to classify arguments is according to the kind of question they set out to answer. If we determine that the argument we are analyzing is a **definition**, **evaluation**, **causal**, or **proposal** argument, we can look for common elements of that type of argument to help us understand the writer's choices and assess their effectiveness.

Argument Purposes

Question the Argument Answers	Argument Purpose
What is the nature of _____?	Definition argument (see 7.3: Definition Arguments)
How good and/or bad is _____?	Evaluation argument (see 7.4: Evaluation Arguments)
What caused _____?	Causal argument (see 7.5: Causal Arguments)
What should be done about _____?	Proposal argument (see 7.6: Proposal Arguments)

Context

Context refers to situational influences that are specific to time, place, and occasion. When and where was the text written, and where is it intended to be read, seen, or heard? In her book *Teaching Arguments*, Jennifer Fletcher writes of "...the immediate social space and situation in which arguments must be made, including what's expected in terms of propriety or fitness for the occasion."

- What is the situation that prompted the writing of this text? What was going on at the time? Can you think of any social, political, or economic conditions that were particularly important?
- What background information on the topic or associations with the topic would a reader of this time period likely have?
- Part of the context is the "conversation" the text is part of. It's unlikely the author is the first person to write on a particular topic. As Graff and Birkenstein point out, writers invariably add their voices to a larger conversation. How does the author respond to other texts? How does she enter the conversation ("Many authors have argued X, but as Smith shows, this position is

flawed, and I will extend Smith's critique by presenting data that shows…") How does the author position herself in relation to other authors?

- How does the knowledge of the text's original context influence our reading of it? How have circumstances changed since it was written?

Let's take an example: say we are analyzing an article on climate change, and we find that it doesn't try to prove that climate change is happening. Is it neglecting to address a counterargument? Is it making a bold choice to ignore likely objections? To answer, we would need to know in what decade the article was written. In the 1990s, when climate change was first widely publicized, many people doubted whether it was real. Now, in the 2020s, the negative effects of climate change are more prominently visible than before, and very few people deny that the earth is warming due to human influence. Global warming isn't talked about like a scary monster that we can warn our children about at bedtime; now, global warming is a very real monster huffing and puffing at our front door. If we were commenting on a dated article on climate change by Glaiza Aquino, we might note something like "Aquino's choice not to address climate deniers' claims is bold for its time. She counts on others to dispel those claims and focuses instead on making an informed case for nuclear energy as the only way out of the crisis."

Genre

Genres are types of communication that have become routine and conventionalized. A poem, meme, lab report, op-ed, and magazine article are all examples of genres. Identifying the text's genre can tell us a lot about audience, purpose, and context. We can ask ourselves, what kind of writing is this? Is this an academic argument? A Ted Talk? Is this a personal narrative essay that explores a momentous moment in the writer's life? Is this a literary analysis? A letter to the editor in a newspaper?

Genres give us clues about how we should read a text, what we can do with the text, and who the audience is. Consider the two images below.



"Kangaroo Sign at Stuart Highway" from Wikimedia Commons is licensed under the CC BY SA 3.0 Unported license.



"Kangaroo Jump" by Heather on Flickr, licensed CC BY-NC 2.0.

The image below does not, by itself, give much guidance on how we should interpret it. But the image above is in a familiar genre – the road sign. Even if we have never seen a sign like this, we have a good idea of its purpose, intended audience, and meaning. Identifying a text's genre will often reveal much about the rhetorical situation.

Attributions

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16.3: Generating Ideas for an Argument Analysis Paper

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Here are some questions to consider each in relation to the argument you are analyzing. Unless your teacher specifically asks you to cover all of these questions, you will eventually want to pick and choose what you discuss in your argument analysis essay. (The essay would likely read like a list rather than a cohesive group of connected paragraphs if you did include everything.) However, it will probably help you to consider each of these before you start your rough draft to see what might be most important or interesting to focus on in your analysis.

Analyzing the Ideas

Chapter 2: Reading to Figure out the Argument describes how to map out the core ideas in the argument you are analyzing in order to write a clear summary as part of your analysis. Here are some specific questions to brainstorm on:

- What are the key claims?
- What are the reasons given for each of these key claims?
- Are the reasons ideas that are generally agreed upon, or do any of these reasons need additional support?
- What kind of evidence does the writer provide, and how convincing is it?
- Does the reader make assumptions that should be questioned or supported?
- What limits does the writer place on the key claims?
- Can we imagine exceptions or limits that the writer has not noted?
- What counterarguments, if any, does the writer refer to?
- Does the writer describe any counterarguments fairly?
- Does the writer miss any important counterarguments?
- How does the writer respond to any counterarguments mentioned?
- Are the responses convincing? Why or why not?
- Are there any places where the writer's meaning is unclear?
- Are there any fallacies or problems with the logic?

Analyzing the Emotional Appeals

Chapter 8: How Arguments Appeal to Emotion describes what to look for. Here are some specific questions:

- How would you describe the tone of the argument? Does the argument change tone at any point, and if so, why?
- How does the argument establish a sense that it is important, urgent, relevant or somehow worth reading?
- Does the argument choose words with particular emotional connotations to further the argument?
- Does the argument use powerful examples to affect readers' emotions?
- Does the argument appeal to readers' self-interest?
- Does the argument appeal to the readers' sense of identity?
- Will different groups of readers likely respond to the argument in different ways?

Analyzing Appeals to Trust and Connection

Chapter 9: How Arguments Establish Trust and Connection describes the many ways an argument might do this. Here are some questions to brainstorm on:

- What makes the writer qualified to make the argument?
- Does the writer have credentials or professional training which make them an authority?

- Does the writer point to relevant personal experience?
- How does the writer show goodwill and respect toward readers?
- How does the writer attempt to convince us of their good moral character?
- Does the argument appeal to any particular shared values to establish trust?
- How does the writer try to create the impression that they are reasonable?
- Do they succeed in appearing reasonable?
- How does the argument seem to imagine the relationship between writer and reader?
- Does the writer take a more formal or informal approach to creating trust?
- To what extent does the argument depend on a shared sense of identity for trust?
- Does the argument attempt to undermine trust in an opposing group?
- What point of view ("I," "we," "you," or an impersonal point of view) does the writer use most frequently?
- How does this point of view affect the reader?
- When does the writer switch to a different point of view, and why?

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16.4: Reviewing an Argument Analysis Essay

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Whether you are revising your own draft or reviewing a classmate's draft, you can start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Is the thesis clear, specific, and focused? Does it tell us what is important or interesting about the argument's attempt to convince us and/or give a central reason for its success or failure?
- Does the essay articulate the main claims, reasons, and any important assumptions of the argument, whether implicit or explicit?
- Does the essay convincingly identify at least two key important strategies the argument uses to establish credibility and trust or affect the reader's emotions?
- Does the essay assess the effectiveness of the strategies and identify any potential pitfalls or ways in which the strategies could backfire?
- Does each body paragraph have sufficient quotations or paraphrases of specific examples?
- Does it introduce quotations and paraphrases signal phrases that accurately show us the argument's purpose?
- Does the conclusion offer a final evaluation of the argument and its significance, value, or implications?
- Does the essay clearly show how one paragraph connects to the next and back to the thesis?

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16.5: A Brief Sample Argument Analysis

Media Alternative

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The brief essay "Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution" by student Jun Stephens can serve as an example of argument analysis.

- Sample argument analysis essay "Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution" in PDF with margin notes
- Sample argument analysis essay "Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution" accessible version with notes in parentheses

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16.5.1: Annotated Brief Sample Argument Analysis

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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 "Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution."

Jun Stephens

English 1C

14 February 2019

Note: This essay analyzes the following three-paragraph excerpt from the January 2017 *National Geographic* article titled "Gender Revolution: How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender"

Excerpt

Eric Vilain, a geneticist and pediatrician who directs the UCLA Center for Gender-Based Biology, says that children express many desires and fantasies in passing. What if saying "I wish I were a girl" is a feeling just as fleeting as wishing to be an astronaut, a monkey, a bird? When we spoke by phone last spring, he told me that most studies investigating young children who express discomfort with their birth gender suggest they are more likely to turn out to be cisgender (aligned with their birth-assigned gender) than trans—and relative to the general population, more of these kids will eventually identify as gay or bisexual.

"If a boy is doing things that are girl-like—he wants long hair, wants to try his mother's shoes on, wants to wear a dress and play with dolls—then he's saying to himself, 'I'm doing girl things; therefore I must be a girl,'" Vilain said. But these preferences are gender expression, not gender identity. Vilain said he'd like parents to take a step back and remind the boy that he can do all sorts of things that girls do, but that doesn't mean he is a girl...

As Vilain might have instructed, Mack tried to broaden her child's understanding of how a boy could behave. "I told my child over and over again that he could continue to be a boy and play with all the Barbies he wanted and wear whatever he liked: dresses, skirts, all the sparkles money could buy," Mack said in her podcast, How to Be a Girl. "But my child said no, absolutely not. She was a girl." (Note: the excerpt ends here.)

Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution

The above excerpt is from Robin Marantz Henig's article in the January 2017 issue of *National Geographic* called "Gender Revolution: How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender." (Note: The introduction signals that the argument analyzed contrasts the ideas of two other thinkers.) Here she offers two interesting points of view: that of Eric Vilain, geneticist, pediatrician, and director of the UCLA Center for Gender-Based Biology, and Marlo Mack, a mom of a transgender girl and creator of the podcast "How to Be a Girl." Vilain states that children can't differentiate between gender expression and gender identity easily, and that they go through many phases of wanting to be impossible things. (Note: Summary of a summary of the ideas of the first thinker discussed in Henig's argument and the contrasting response of the second thinker.) He says most studies on children questioning their birth-assigned gender suggest they are more likely to be cisgender than transgender later on. He advises parents of questioning children to "take a step back" and tell their children that they can do anything a child of another gender can do, but it doesn't mean they aren't the gender they were assigned at birth. Mack, however, has tried this with her daughter, who, even though she was told that boys can play with Barbies and wear dresses, insisted that she was a girl every time.

The author relies on Vilain's scholarly reputation. He is a doctor, scientist, and in charge of a gender-related facility at a prestigious university. (Note: Discusses how Henig establishes Vilain as an authority to be trusted, with partial success.) However, from an

intrinsic ethos perspective, the quotes included for him leave something to be desired. He said that most studies on children who show discomfort with their assigned at birth gender reveal that most of those children remain cisgender (identifies with their assigned at birth gender). This leaves the reader with questions. How did they define "discomfort" with their gender and for how long had they been expressing those feelings? A specific cited study that is well respected amongst pediatricians, endocrinologists, and psychologists working with trans children would have increased the support for his claim. The author let the reader ask these questions and look at his argument critically.

As well as a trust strategy, Henig presents Vilain's argument with sound reasoning. (Note: Compares the main strength of the Vilain argument--sound reasoning--with the main strength of the Mack argument, its appeal to sympathy with parental care.) What is quoted from him is logical. His claim is that children shouldn't be trusted to identify their gender. His warrant is that children go through many phases of wanting to be things they're not, and that children can't differentiate between gender expression and identity. Finally, his reason is that one's gender identity is not a phase, or gender expression. This is countered with Mack's argument which although it also has sound reasoning, is unique because of it's appeal to emotion. Henig knows the *National Geographic* audience to be one composed of everyday people and families, so an argument with an emotional appeal that is relatable to readers is a convincing tool. She knows the values of her audience.

The author introduces Mack one paragraph away from Villain's last words. He said "he'd like parents to take a step back and remind the boy that he can do all sorts of things that girls do, but that doesn't mean he is a girl." A better quote could not have been chosen by Henig for Mack to respond to. The author begins with "As Vilain might have instructed," to start Mack's account of her experience. (Note: Shows how the summary of the second argument is effectively poised to counter the first.) Mack is a parent with a trans girl, and the article states "'I told my child over and over again that he could continue to be a boy and play with all the Barbies he wanted...But my child said no, absolutely not. She was a girl." Not only does this respond directly to Vilain's call to action—or inaction, rather, but it breaks down his assumption. His assumption was that children go through many phases of wanting to be things they're not, and that children can't differentiate between gender expression and identity. If his argument were to stand, Mack's daughter would've told her mom that she didn't know boys could play with girl things. She didn't. (Note: Shows how Henig's description of the arguments accentuates Vilain's weakness.)

Perhaps Vilain has conceded to children in the past, and has personally had experience with those who do know the difference between gender expression and identity, such as Mack's daughter. This would have proved for a stronger argument from Vilain, and would have convinced the reader that he is reasonable, and not an extremist. Either such a case of his has yet to exist, or the author purposefully left it out. Henig provided us with a real example of someone trying Vilain's technique, and it failing over and over. The similar use of language in Vilain's section and in Mack's section, as well as the placement of their arguments one after another, show that the author intended for the reader to choose one side over the other. (Note: Highlights Henig's indirect method of convincing the readers of one side through the argument's structure.)

Henig's article is an apparently unbiased piece on gender and how people come to identify. However, the positioning of Mack's response to Vilain's technique on raising gender-questioning children shows Henig's support for Mack, and therefore supports children deciding their own gender. She does this by choosing a quote from Mack that would convince the reader with intrinsic ethos. She gets a different perspective by having the counterpoint be presented by a mother of a trans child, as opposed to only showing scientists' perspectives. Henig positions Mack's story right after Vilain in this article. While it would still be relevant elsewhere, that positioning and the quote she chose indicates that it is a response to Vilain's statement just a couple paragraphs before. These strategies were effectively used by Henig to endorse one side of this controversial argument. Because of this, the reader is inclined to agree, and will come out of reading an almost neutral article with support for Mack and her experience. (Note: Here we find the positive evaluation of the effectiveness of Henig's argument as a whole.)

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16.6: A Longer Sample Argument Analysis

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The essay "Argument Analysis of Cory Doctorow's 'Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)'" can serve as an example.

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Anonymous

Professor Anonymous

English 101

Argument Analysis of Cory Doctorow's "Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)"

iPads, like iPhones, are so omnipresent in 2020 that a critique of the technology almost seems futile. However, a decade ago at the time of its launch, the iPad actually sparked idealistic, energetic protest. (Note: The opening seeks to catch the reader's interest through the contrast between today's perspective and a decade ago.) (Note: Mentions the author, title, and place of publication of the argument analyzed.) Writers like Cory Doctorow lamented the way the iPad shut down possibilities for an open platform not controlled by a single company. Doctorow's 2010 article "Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)" on BoingBoing critiques the iPad in the face of enormous media hype over its release. Apple proclaimed the iPad a technological revolution, but Doctorow thinks the real revolution would consist in opening up the hardware and software to consumers to modify. (Note: A teaser hinting at the argument's main point.)

Doctorow's perspective in this article grows out of his passionate advocacy of free digital media sharing. He got his start as a CD-ROM programmer and is now a successful blogger and author on the tech site BoingBoing. (Note: Background on the author's interests and credibility.) In this article, he argues that the iPad is just another way for established technology companies to control our technological freedom and creativity. Doctorow complains that Apple limits the digital rights of those who use its products by controlling the content that can be used and created on the device. (Note: Summary of Doctorow's thesis.) While he cites valid concerns, his argument against buying the iPad will likely only persuade software developers. The disadvantages he cites for consumers are slight compared with the advantage of smooth user experience the iPad offers. Yet his argument remains relevant to all today because it can revive a sense of excitement and possibility around open models that could still be developed with the right policies. (Note: Three sentences work together as the full thesis. The first provides a negative assessment of the argument. The second explains the reason for the failure. The third suggests a way the argument could still inspire us.)

Doctorow draws readers in by encouraging them to side with him as a smart, hip techie. (Note: Topic sentence shows how one of Doctorow's strategies affects the reader. No technical rhetoric terms are needed, but we see from the wording that this paragraph focuses on an emotional appeal.) He builds credibility by quoting popular science fiction writer and technology guru William Gibson, known among techies as a brilliant expert, the one who coined the term "virtual reality." Doctorow joins with Gibson in scoring the idea that consumers are passive and stupid by quoting at length Gibson's satirical picture of this view of the consumer as a drooling mutant. The implication is that corporations that try to create a streamlined user experience are dumbing things down too much. Doctorow implies that smart and creative users will be offended by these assumptions. He appeals to readers' pride as he invites us to see ourselves as active, creative consumers who reject technology built for dummies.

Doctorow creates a sense of the wonderful, cheap variety that users could enjoy if they weren't bound by Apple's restrictive, expensive platform. (Note: This paragraph describes one reason Doctorow gives not to buy the iPad, but it also shows how he creates a feeling of excitement as he gives that reason.) He argues that consumers do not have to settle for limited digital rights; we have other options. According to him, "The reason people have stopped paying for a lot of 'content' isn't just that they can get it for

free, though: it's that they can get lots of competing stuff for free, too" (4). Doctorow essentially says, "You could have this one thing…or you could have all of these things." Why pay for an expensive iPad and monitored apps, when you can get equal or better products and programs for free?

He underscores this vision of abundance by appealing to the value of freedom. (Note: The transition refers back to the idea of the previous paragraph (summarized in the word "abundance") and introduces a complementary appeal.) He writes, "As an adult, I want to be able to choose whose stuff I buy and whom I trust to evaluate that stuff. I don't want my universe of apps constrained to the stuff that the Cupertino Politburo decides to allow for its platform" (3). By referencing the constricting forces of Communist Russia, the author appeals to a basic human fear of being controlled. He stirs up a natural rebellion against being told what to do. He appeals to our patriotism by implying that an open digital platform is more American, whereas Apple's policies are more typical of a totalitarian regime like the Soviet Union.

Doctorow appeals effectively to our values and pride in the way he contrasts the open approach to the consumer with the Apple approach. (Note: This sentence summarizes the previous body paragraphs by pointing out that they all show the success of emotional appeals.) However, he does not bother to support his claim that consumers can really get what they want from an open platform. (Note: The paper turns toward critique with the word "however" and then undercuts the more positive assessment of the previous paragraph by citing a lack of evidence and possible bias.) He asserts that the free products available elsewhere are just as good as what the iPad offers, but are they really? Doctorow provides no evidence that this is so. Rather, he creates the suspicion that his interests as an independent software creator guide his assessment more than the actual consumer experience. As a software creator, he has something personal to gain from free digital media sharing and thus opposes digital rights management (DRM). He reminds us that he identifies as a developer when he writes, "It [Apple] uses DRM to control what can run on your devices, which means that...Apple developers can't sell on their own terms" (3). He fumes, "Of course I believe in a market where competition can take place without bending my knee to a company that has erected a drawbridge between me and my customers!" (3). The problem is that not everyone is interested in making or modifying software, and, therefore, not everyone cares.

Doctorow wants consumers to take an active role like software developers, but that is his priority, not everyone's. He overestimates how much intelligent consumers want to look under the hood of their device and their apps. He underestimates how much they want a streamlined experience so they can focus on their own objectives. Doctorow could have been more fair-minded about the benefits of owning the iPad and, by implication, the benefits big corporations can offer consumers. His only positive mention of the iPad states, "Clearly there's a lot of thoughtfulness and smarts that went into the design" (2). He could have gone on to acknowledge that the iPad could be a great piece of equipment for people who are willing to commit to one platform. If he had conceded this, he would have built credibility as a person in touch with consumer needs. (Note: Doctorow's failure to recognize his readers' needs costs him readers' trust.)

The last decade has shown that the iPad succeeded in convincing consumers. (Note: A historical claim that doesn't reference the text introduces a larger perspective on the argument.) Doctorow's idea of an open platform never materialized. Apple has encountered competition in the tablet market only from other huge companies like Amazon, Microsoft, and Samsung that offer similarly proprietary platforms. (Note: A concluding meditation on the value of the argument.) Yet Doctorow's article still has value because it reminds us of the possibility of a different model. He should follow it up today with a proposal for 2020, a longer range vision for replacing these closed corporate platforms with an open marketplace. (Note: Suggests a way in which the argument could be made more convincing by changing its focus to one that it can achieve.) After all, his real enemy is not the iPad, but the laws that allow for digital rights management and monopolistic power. It remains to be seen whether, given the right government regulation, an open platform could give consumers ease of use at the same time as it gave everyone access to create and sell and modify software. Maybe a glance at Doctorow's vision from 2010 will yet help us move toward that vision. (Note: Final reference to the value of the argument, using language intended to inspire.)

Work Cited

Doctorow, Cory. "Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)." BoingBoing. 2 Apr. 2010. Web. 10 November 2014.

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16.7: A Sample Visual Argument Analysis

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Student Y

English 1C

Prof. Swigart

An Image Is Worth a Thousand Calls to Arms

It may be tempting to think of arguments as being, well, wordy: lengthy essays or speeches designed to make a point and defend it. However, arguments can be entirely or primarily visual. (Note: The author introduces visual arguments as an everyday phenomenon that the reader may often encounter without consciously recognizing as arguments.) Virtually every man-made image is meant to communicate something, and even things so simple and everyday as magazine advertisements or internet banner ads—things we see so often that we often no longer consciously notice—convey the implied argument that we should buy a product, subscribe to a service, or otherwise do what the advertisement wants us to do. The same is nonetheless true of military recruitment posters and ads, which generally share the same common argument: the viewer should join the Armed Forces. (Note: This statement narrows the broad topic of visual arguments down to a particular example: military recruitment posters and ads.)

The entry of the United States into World War I led to a massive recruitment drive for military service as a nation without a large standing army was drawn into an ongoing conflict and forced to rapidly mobilize the population. (Note: This paragraph provides historical context for the posters under discussion, focusing the lens on WWI recruitment in the United States.) Although a draft was issued, making military service for draftees compulsory, there was understandably a vested national interest in recruiting as many volunteers for the armed services as possible. These two recruitment posters below (Figs. 1 and 2), originally printed during World War I and for the United States Army and Navy respectively, use different techniques to appeal to potential recruits' sensibilities and desires. (Note: This is the essay's real thesis, citing the Army and Navy posters as using different techniques to appeal to readers. Comparing these techniques is the focus of the essay's body paragraphs.)



The “I Want YOU for U.S. Army” poster, featuring James Montgomery Flagg's iconic illustration of Uncle Sam, is an image so instantly recognizable that it has become part of the American cultural vocabulary (Fig. 1). (Note: The beginning of this body paragraph introduces the name and source for Figure 1.) Uncle Sam, with his red, white, and blue wardrobe and star-spangled hat,

draws on the iconography of the American flag to represent something of the American national spirit. (Note: The author describes the poster's imagery and typography, what the poster denotes.) Although depicted as an older man, with longish white beard and hair and bushy white eyebrows, he is depicted as active and authoritative, staring and pointing with one finger at the viewer. Even without the text, it is clear from Uncle Sam's posture and gesture that we, the viewer, are the one being addressed. The text makes the poster's appeal explicit: "I Want YOU for U.S. Army," with the "YOU" highlighted in red text for added emphasis. (Note: The author here shifts into an analysis of what that imagery may mean, or what feelings or ideas it may arouse (what the poster connotes).) The appeal here is primarily one to trust: this character of the national spirit, drawn as an older and paternalistic figure, calls on the viewer directly to go to the "Nearest Recruiting Station." Given that the average Army recruit is bound to be a younger man, this appeal from an older, paternal figure endows the appeal to enlist with an almost filial sense of obligation: if obeying one's father is what a good son does, obeying Uncle Sam is what a good citizen does. Uncle Sam's unsmiling expression signals to the recruit that this appeal to join is a matter of grave importance and urgency, and clearly no laughing matter.



The naval recruitment poster, featuring Richard Fayerweather Babcock's illustration of a sailor riding a torpedo, employs an entirely different aesthetic and makes a radically different appeal to its audience. (Note: The author introduces the name and source of Figure 2, while also emphasizing its contrast with Figure 1.) If the Army recruitment poster invokes a sense of solemn duty, the Navy recruitment poster invokes a sense of adventure. (Note: Here a different pattern is employed: instead of talking about the imagery or type first, the author first describes the feelings aroused by the poster, contrasting these with Figure 1.) Rather than a figure addressing the viewer, we see a sailor riding a torpedo in the manner of a rodeo cowboy riding a bull--even with reins (somewhat inexplicably) in hand. (Note: This passage describes Figure 2's imagery and typography, its content, similar to how the last paragraph described the imagery of Figure 1…) The torpedo, rather than submerged in the water, kicks up spray by the sailor's feet as it skims the water's surface. The sailor's right hand wields a length of rope to act as a crop, showing that he is not a passive passenger on his unlikely steed but in control, whipping it forward, onward. Without context, this image might be confusing as it employs not only an unrealistic depiction of the life of the average sailor but also one that seems as reckless and suicidal as well, riding a bomb. However, the poster's text clarifies its appeal and makes it explicit: "Join the Navy, the Service for Fighting Men." (Note: Here the argument shifts again into an analysis of the emotional appeal being made there.) The characterization of the Navy as the "Service for Fighting Men," combined with the rodeo cowboy imagery, the inherent and obvious danger of riding an (arguably phallic) torpedo qualify the poster's call to wild adventure with a macho, masculine sensibility. Again, given that the average recruit is a young man, these subtle and not-so-subtle appeals to the viewer's masculinity qualify as appeals to the viewer's emotions and self-image. If the Uncle Sam poster gravely calls on dutiful citizens to join the Army, the Navy poster calls on adventurous "Fighting Men." While this poster may have been effective at reaching the audience of its time, it must be noted that audience of a modern Naval recruitment poster has changed. (Note: Unlike the previous paragraph, there is an additional analysis provided of how the appeal of Figure 2's argument has perhaps not aged as well as that of Figure 1.) With the abolition of gender restrictions in the Armed Forces and the re-orientation of recruitment efforts, it's likely that a poster calling on "Fighting Men" to enlist would prove less appealing to a broader audience. Also, the cultural connotation of riding a bomb has itself changed, and would today perhaps be sooner associated with *Dr. Strangelove* and catastrophic self-destruction than a call to adventure.

Analysis of visual arguments can be rewarding and surprising. (Note: The essay returns to the broader subject of visual arguments and how visual elements can enhance, strengthen, or complicate the argument beyond what can be achieved through words alone.) Images can subtly convey a rich and dense amount of information, saying a lot without necessarily saying anything at all. In these

examples, most of the message is carried in image alone. Text slogans like “I Want You for U.S. Army” and “Join the Navy” would hardly capture a sense of grave patriotic duty or wild, dangerous adventure without such evocative illustrations to appeal to patriotism and a collective national identity or a wild adventure on the high seas. The effectiveness and appeal of these posters are enough to show how effective a non-verbal argument can be.

Works Cited

(Note: Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class.

Babcock, Richard Fayerweather, Artist. *Join the Navy, the service for fighting men / Babcock*. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2002699393/

Flagg, James Montgomery, Artist. *I want you for U.S. Army: nearest recruiting station / James Montgomery Flagg*. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/96507165/

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