

BENU WRITING COLLOQUIUM



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OpenStax Writing Guide

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Detailed Licensing

Licensing

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1.1: WHAT COLLEGE WRITING IS

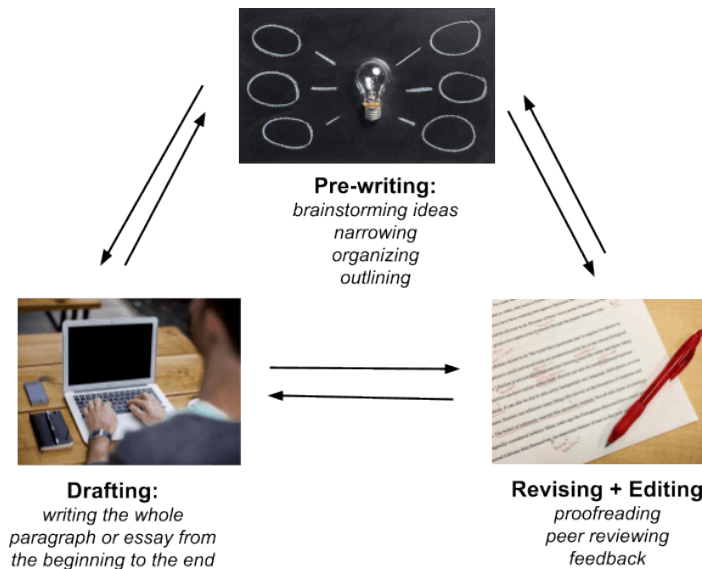
1.1.1: Recommended Readings

1.1.2: What WRIT 1101 Entails

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1.1.1: Recommended Readings

To write a good paragraph, good writers need time and a step-by-step approach. Even writers who are writing in their first language have to change the words, grammar, punctuation, and sentences several times. **Good writing comes from rewriting.** In most writing classes, you will practice different writing processes. While there are many possible steps, there are three main stages:



The pre-writing stage of the writing process includes brainstorming ideas, narrowing, organizing, and outlining. The drafting step includes writing the whole paragraph or essay from the beginning to the end and the revising and editing step includes proofreading, peer reviewing, and feedback.

Figure 2.2: The Writing Process from [Introduction to Academic Writing for ESOL](#) by Tim Krause, CC BY-NC-SA

Exercise 2.4: Define the writing process

Look at the diagram of the writing process in Figure 2.2. Write a word or phrase from the diagram that matches the definitions below.

- _____ checking your writing for errors
- _____ creating a lot of ideas by making a list or a mind-map before you write
- _____ a way of organizing your writing using letters and numbers
- _____ students reading each other's writing to give advice and improve a draft
- _____ focusing more specifically on your topic and removing unconnected ideas

Exercise 2.5: Build a paragraph

Put these sentences in order to make a paragraph. Check your answers with a partner.

The Process of Writing

- _____ After that, the best thing to do is just write the whole first draft.
- _____ Once you have a topic, the first thing to do is brainstorm and outline.
- _____ For many students, writing is one of the most difficult subjects, but by following some simple steps, it doesn't have to be painful.

_____ Following your instructor's recommendations will ensure that you get the best grade possible.

_____ If you feel stuck while writing your first draft, stop and take a shower or go for a walk to clear your mind.

_____ Finally, carefully read your instructor's feedback and follow their instructions if they ask you to write a second draft.

_____ These two steps go well together because you'll need to get ideas with a brainstorm and then organize them with the outline.

_____ By following these simple steps, you will find that writing a paragraph is a piece of cake.

_____ As soon as you have a finished draft, ask a friend or a tutor to read your paper before you give it to your instructor.

Formatting your paragraph

Exercise 2.6: Elements of formatting

Look at this typed paragraph below and notice how it looks on the page. In college, your teachers may ask you to format your paper differently, but this is a good example to copy. Label the following on your paragraph and check your answers with a partner:

- Heading
- Indentation
- Title
- Margin
- Double-spaced lines

Delpha Thomas
ESOL-046
Writing Assignment # 1
January 14, 2026

The Process of Writing

For many students, writing is one of the most difficult subjects, but with a little bit of organization and a good attitude, writing can be a very simple process. Once you have a topic, the first thing to do is brainstorm and outline. These two steps go well together because you'll need to get ideas with a brainstorm and then organize them with the outline. After that, the best thing to do is just write the whole first draft. If you feel stuck while writing your first draft, stop and take a shower or go for a walk to clear your mind. As soon as you have a finished draft, ask a friend or a tutor to read your paper before you give it to your instructor. Finally, carefully read your instructor's feedback and follow their instructions if they ask you to write a second draft. Following your instructor's recommendations and asking questions about them will ensure that you get the best grade possible. By following these simple steps, you will find that writing a paragraph is a piece of cake.

Writing assignment guidelines

1. Include a heading. Write your name, the class, the assignment, and the date in the upper corner. If you type your assignment on a computer, it's customary to include this in the upper left-hand corner of the document. If you write your assignment by hand, it's customary to include this in the upper right-hand corner of your paper.
2. Include a title. Write a title in the center after your heading. Capitalize the first word and all the important words. Unless they are the first word, don't capitalize articles (*a, an, the*), coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, so*), or short prepositions.
3. Indent the first line of every paragraph.

4. Do not start each new sentence on a new line. If you type on a computer, the computer will wrap the text automatically, so you do not have to hit “enter” while typing a paragraph. If you write by hand, continue writing on a line until you reach the right margin. Do not write in the left or right margins of the paper.
5. Double space your paragraph. This means to skip lines when you are writing by hand.
6. Capitalize the first word in each sentence and all proper nouns.
7. After a comma, leave a space between the comma and the next word.
8. End each sentence with a period (.), a question mark (?), or an exclamation point (!). After each sentence, leave a space between the period and the first word of the next sentence.

Exercise 2.7: Identify formatting errors

A student wrote the following paragraph about why she is studying English. Work with a partner to identify the seven formatting errors.

Judy Smith
January 14, 2026
Writing Assignment # 1

reasons for learning english

There are several reasons why I am taking classes at Clackamas Community College. The main reason is because I want to learn the language of the country that I live in now. Learning a new language benefits me in my personal and professional life. I would like to interact with different people from different countries and make friends. Another reason is because I also want to travel and visit different countries around the world. Language skills would not be an issue because English is a universal language. In the workplace, I could get better job opportunities with a better salary because I could speak two languages, and I could even translate between Spanish and English. however, if I want to make my goal a reality, I need to attend classes and learn.

I hope to achieve my life goals with the help of these classes.

Chapter 2.3, The Writing Process, is adapted from [Introduction to Academic Writing for ESOL](#) by Tim Krause which is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA](#)

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- [2.3: The Writing Process](#) by Kathryn Long is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

1.1.2: What WRIT 1101 Entails

A writing-intensive skills course with an emphasis on:

- writing and revision
- grammar review
- basic library research skills and
- textual analysis

A course in which you produce 5,000 polished words in four major texts:

- Ethnographic analysis
- Social issue analysis
- Textual analysis and
- Visual analysis

Why Writing Courses Matter

- Writing = a fundamental way in which people communicate and participate in society
- Writing = a means of demonstrating and sharing learning
- You learn to articulate ideas clearly and precisely, support your claims with credible evidence, and adapt your message to various audiences
- Writing = useful in the academic context and in your everyday life.
- Writing strengthens transferable soft skills needed beyond the academic context:

1. Critical thinking,
2. Problem solving,
3. Organization,
4. Reflection

Revision = a process in which you practice

- Persistence,
- Adaptability, and
- Ability to act on feedback constructively

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1.2: Understanding Audience, Purpose, and Context

Every piece of writing is shaped by three key elements:

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1.3: ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS AND CLASSROOM NORMS

1.3.1: Recommended Readings

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1.3.1: Recommended Readings

Why writing well matters

From a simple text to a post on social media to a work email to a written composition, writing well matters immensely. Applying solid knowledge of grammar basic concepts, mechanics, punctuation, and voice can affect our writing style. Even if our world nowadays is replete with apps like Grammarly, foundational skills play a pivotal role.

Writing well can start with the parts of speech: pronoun, noun, adjective, verb, adverb, conjunction, preposition, interjection, and determiners, yet there are so many other elements involved to help us develop our unique voice in writing. One of these elements involves our masterful control and command of sentence variety at the semantic and pragmatic levels.

In the words of William Zinsser, the author of a well-known text, *On Writing Well*, "the plain old tools of the English language" that existed for E.B. White and other masters are still the same old tools we can use nowadays in our crafts, even if it is merely a simple email or a book-length dissertation ("Introduction").

- How to use this chapter (Instructors and students alike are welcome to use this chapter as needed.):
 - The first section focuses on the most common grammar errors.
 - The second section contains common punctuation errors.
 - The third section has information about success skills, which might be used to boost interest.
 - The fourth section has some information about diction.
 - Finally, the last section centers around grammar and vocabulary.
- Each section is self-contained and can be added to a unit for "just-in-time remediation"

1.4: HOW TO READ A SYLLABUS AND ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

1.4.1: Recommended Readings

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1.4.1: Recommended Readings

1. Don't Panic and Don't Procrastinate

Writing assignments should not incite panic, but it happens. We've already discussed how panicking and other negative reactions work against you by clouding your ability to analyze a situation rationally. So when your instructor gives you that writing assignment, don't try to read the whole assignment sheet at breakneck speed. Instead, take a deep breath and focus. If your instructor talks about the assignment, stop what you're doing and listen. Often, teachers will read through the assignment aloud and may even elaborate on some of the requirements. Write down any extra information or advice your instructor provides about the requirements, his or her expectations, changes, possible approaches, or topic ideas. This information will be useful to you as you begin thinking about the topic and formulating your approach. Also, pay attention to your classmates' questions. You might not need those answers now, but you may find them helpful later.

If you're an undergraduate student taking more than one class, it's not uncommon to have several writing assignments due within days of each other. Hence, you should avoid procrastinating. People procrastinate for different reasons. Maybe you wait because you've always been able to put together a decent paper the night before it's due. Perhaps you wait because avoiding the assignment until the last minute is your response to academic stress. Waiting until the last minute to complete a writing assignment in college is a gamble. You put yourself at risk for the unexpected: your printer runs out of ink, your laptop crashes and you didn't backup your work, the Internet in the library is down, the books you need are checked out, you can't locate any recent research on your topic, you have a last-minute emergency, or you have a question about the assignment you can't find the answer to. The common result of situations like these is that if the student is able to complete the assignment, it is often a poor representation of her actual knowledge or abilities. Start your assignment as soon as possible and leave yourself plenty of time to plan for the unexpected.

2. Read the Assignment. Read It Again. Refer to It Often

The ability to read critically is a useful skill. When you read a textbook chapter for your history course, for example, you might skim it for major ideas first, re-read and then highlight or underline important items, make notes in the margins, look up unfamiliar terms, or compile a list of questions. These same strategies can be applied when reading writing assignments.

The assignment sheet is full of material to be deciphered, so attack it the same way you would attack your history book. When Bailey2, an undergraduate at a university in Los Angeles, was asked to respond to a biology writing assignment, here's what she had to say about where she would start:

When getting a writing assignment, you should read it more than once just to get a knowledge of what they're [the instructors] really asking for and underline important information, which is what I'm doing now. Before starting the assignment, always write some notes down to help you get started.

Here are some other strategies to help you become an active, critical reader of writing assignments:

1. Start by skimming, noting anything in particular that jumps out at you.
2. As soon as you have the time and the ability to focus, re-read the assignment carefully. Underline or highlight important features of the assignment or criteria you think you might forget about after you've started writing.
3. Don't be afraid to write on the assignment sheet. Use the available white space to list questions, define key terms or concepts, or jot down any initial ideas you have. Don't let the margins confine your writing (or your thoughts). If you're running out of space, grab a fresh sheet of paper and keep writing. The sooner you starting thinking and writing about the assignment, the easier it may be to complete.

As you begin drafting, you should occasionally refer back to the official assignment sheet. Maintaining constant contact with your teacher's instructions will help keep you on the right track, may remind you of criteria you've forgotten, and it might even spark new ideas if you're stuck.

3. Know Your Purpose and Your Audience

Instructors give writing assignments so students can demonstrate their knowledge and/or their ability to apply knowledge. On the surface, it may seem like the instructor is simply asking you to answer some questions to demonstrate that you understand the material or to compare and contrast concepts, theorists, or approaches. However, assessing knowledge is usually just one reason for the assignment. More often than not, your instructor is also evaluating your ability to demonstrate other critical skills. For example, she might be trying to determine if you can apply a concept to a particular situation, if you know how to summarize complex material, or if you can think critically about an idea and then creatively apply that thinking to new situations. Maybe she's looking at how you manage large quantities of research or how you position expert opinions against one another. Or perhaps she wants to know if you can form and support a sound, credible argument rather than describing your opinion about a certain issue.

Instructors have different ways of conveying what they expect from their students in a writing assignment. Some detail explicitly what they intend to evaluate and may even provide a score sheet. Others may provide general (even vague) instructions and leave the rest up to you. So, what can you do to ensure you're on the right track? Keep reading through these guidelines, and you'll learn some ways to read between the lines. Once you identify all the intentions at work (that is, what your instructor is trying to measure), you'll be able to consider and address them.

Audience is a critical component to any writing assignment, and realistically, one or several different audiences may be involved when you're writing a paper in college. The person evaluating your essay is typically the audience most college students consider first. However, your instructor may identify a separate audience to whom you should tailor your response. Do not ignore this audience! If your business instructor tells you to write a research proposal that will be delivered to members of the local chamber of commerce, then adapt your response to them. If you're in an engineering course, and your instructor asks you to write a product design report about a piece of medical equipment geared toward medical practitioners (and not engineers), you should think differently about your terminology, use of background information, and what motivates this particular audience when they read your report. Analyzing the background (personal, educational, professional), existing knowledge, needs, and concerns of your audience will help you make more informed decisions about word choice, structure, tone, or other components of your paper.

4. Locate and Understand the Directive Verbs

One thing you should do when interpreting a writing assignment is to locate the directive verbs and know what the instructor means by them. Directive verbs tell you what you should do in order to formulate a written response. The following table lists common directive verbs used in writing assignments:

Table 1. Frequently used directive verbs.

analyze	defend	illustrate
apply	describe	investigate
argue	design	narrate
compare	discuss	show
consider	explain	summarize
contrast	explore	synthesize
create	evaluate	trace

You might notice that many of the directive verbs have similar general meanings. For example, although explore and investigate are not necessarily synonyms for one another, when used in writing assignments, they may be asking for a similar structural response. Understanding what those verbs mean to you and to your instructor may be the most difficult part of understanding a writing assignment. Take a look at this sample writing assignment from a philosophy course:

Philosophy Writing Assignment *

"History is what the historian says it is." Discuss.

All papers are to be typed, spell-checked and grammar-checked. Responses should be 2000 words. They should be well written,

with a logical flow of thought, and double-spaced with 1" margins on all sides. Papers should be typed in 12-pitch font, using Courier or Times Roman typeface. Indent the first line of each new paragraph five spaces. Also include a title page so that the instructor can identify the student, assignment and course number.

Proper standard English is required. Do not use slang or a conversational style of writing. Always avoid contractions (e.g. "can't" for "cannot") in formal essays. Always write in complete sentences and paragraphs! Staple all papers in the upper left-hand corner and do not put them in a folder, binder or plastic cover.

Proper standard English is required. Do not use slang or a conversational style of writing. Always avoid contractions (e.g. "can't" for "cannot") in formal essays. Always write in complete sentences and paragraphs! Staple all papers in the upper left-hand corner and do not put them in a folder, binder or plastic cover.

* Sample undergraduate philosophy writing assignment, courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Locke, Religious Studies Department, University of the West.

You may interpret the word discuss in one way, while your instructor may have a different understanding. The key is to make certain that these two interpretations are as similar as possible. You can develop a mutual understanding of the assignment's directive verbs and calculate an effective response using the following steps:

1. Look up the verb in a dictionary and write down all of the definitions.
2. List all possible synonyms or related terms and look those up as well; then, see if any of these terms suggest a clearer interpretation of what the assignment is asking you to do.
3. Write down several methods you could use to approach the assignment. (Check out guideline eight in this essay for some common approaches.)
4. Consult with your instructor, but do not be discouraged if he/ she is unwilling to clarify or provide additional information; your interpretation of the directions and subsequent approach to fulfilling the assignment criteria may be one of its purposes.
5. Consult a trusted peer or writing center tutor for assistance.
6. Figure out what you know.

When deciphering an assignment's purpose is particularly challenging, make a list. Think about what you know, what you think you know, and what you do not know about what the assignment is asking you to do. Putting this list into a table makes the information easier to handle. For example, if you were given an assignment that asked you to analyze presentations in your business ethics class, like the assignment in Figure 2, your table might look like Table 2 below:

Business Writing Assignment Presentation Analysis

During three weeks of class, you'll observe several small group presentations on business ethics given by your fellow classmates. Choose two of the presentations and write a short paper analyzing them. For each presentation, be sure to do the following:

1. In one paragraph, concisely summarize the group's main conclusions
2. Analyze the presentation by answering any two of the following three:
 - a. With which of the group's conclusions do you agree? Why? With which of the conclusions do you disagree? Why? (include specific examples of both)
 - b. What particular issue of ethics did the group not address or only address slightly? Analyze this aspect from your perspective.
 - c. In what way could you apply one or more of the group's conclusions to a particular situation? (The situation could be hypothetical, one from your personal or professional experience, or a real-world example).

The paper should be no more than 3 pages in length with 12-pt font, 1 ½ line spacing. It is due one week after the conclusion of presentations.

Your grade will depend upon

1. the critical thought and analytical skills displayed in the paper;
2. your use of ethical principles from chapter 7 of our textbook;
3. the professionalism, correctness, and logic of your writing.

Table 2. Sample knowledge table for undergraduate business writing assignment.

What I Know	What I Think I Know	What I Don't Know
Need to observe and take notes on 2 presentations	Concisely means "short," so my summaries should be shorter than the other parts of the paper.	What does the professor mean by "critical thought"?
Need to summarize each groups' conclusions	I think I need to apply my own understanding of ethics to figure out which issue the group didn't address	How does the professor evaluate "professionalism"? How do I demonstrate this?
2–3 pages long; 12 pt font and 1 ½ spacing	I think I understand everything from chapter 7	Do I need to apply both groups' conclusions to the same situation or to two different ones?
Need to include personal opinion	I think it's okay to say "I" in the paper.	How much personal opinion should I include and do I need specific examples to support my opinion?
Need to answer 2 of the 3 questions under part 2	I don't think I need an introduction.	Should I separate my essay into two parts, one for each group I observed?

After reviewing the table, you can see that this student has a lot of thoughts about this assignment. He understands some of the general features. However, there are some critical elements that need clarification before he submits the assignment. For instance, he's unsure about the best structure for the paper and the way it should sound. Dividing your understanding of an assignment into a table or list can help you identify the confusing parts. Then, you can formulate specific questions that your instructor or a writing center consultant can help you answer.

6. Ask Yourself: Do I Need an Argument?

Perhaps one of the most important things to know is whether or not your instructor is asking you to formulate and support an argument. Sometimes this is easy to determine. For example, an assignment many instructors include in their courses is a persuasive paper where you're typically asked to choose an issue, take a position, and then support it using evidence. For many students, a persuasive paper is a well known assignment, but when less familiar assignment genres come up, some students may be confused about argument expectations. This confusion may arise because the instructor uses a directive verb that is easily misinterpreted. What about the verb explain? Does it make you think of words like summarize, review, or describe (which would suggest more facts and less opinion)? Or, do you associate it with words like debate, investigate, or defend (which imply the need for a well-supported argument)? You can also look for other clues in the assignment indicating a need for evidence. If your instructor mentions scholarly citations, you'll probably need it. If you need evidence, you'll probably need an argument. Still confused? Talk to your instructor.

7. Consider the Evidence

If your assignment mentions a minimum number of required sources, references a particular citation style, or suggests scholarly journals to review during your research, then these are telltale signs that you'll need to find and use evidence. What qualifies as evidence? Let's review some of the major types:

- Personal experience
- Narrative examples (historical or hypothetical)

- Statistics (or numerical forms of data) and facts
- Graphs, charts, or other visual representatives of data
- Expert opinion
- Research results (experimental or descriptive)

Each of these offers benefits and drawbacks when used to support an argument. Consider this writing assignment from a 200-level biology class on genetics:

Biology Writing Assignment

Genes & Gene Research

Purpose:

This writing assignment will ask you to familiarize yourself with genes, the techniques gene researchers use when working with genes, and the current research programs investigating genes. The report is worth 10% of your final grade in the course.

In a research report of at least 1500 words, you should address the following:

1. Generally, what is a gene and what does it do? Create a universally applicable definition for a gene.
2. Choose a specific gene and apply your definition to it (i.e., what does this particular gene do and how does it work?)
3. Recreate the history of the gene you've chosen including the gene's discovery (and discoverer), the motivation behind the research into this gene, outcomes of the research, and any medical, social, historical, or biological implications to its discovery.
4. Explore the current research available on your gene. Who is conducting the research, what are the goals (big/small; longterm/short-term) of the research, and how is the research being funded?

Research should be properly documented using CSE (Council of Science Editors) style.

The report should be typewritten, double spaced, in a font of reasonable size.

This instructor asks students to demonstrate several skills, including definition, summary, research, and application. Nearly all of these components should include some evidence, specifically scientific research studies on the particular gene the student has chosen. After reading it, here's what Bailey said about how she would start the assignment: "This assignment basically has to do with who you are, so it should be something simple to answer, not too difficult since you should know yourself." Ernest, another student, explains how he would approach the same assignment: "So, first of all, to do this assignment, I would go on the computer, like on the Internet, and I would . . . do research about genes first. And . . . everything about them, and then I would . . . start with the first question, second question, third and fourth, and that's it." For Bailey, using her own life as an example to illustrate genetic inheritance would be the best way to start responding to the assignment. Ernest, on the other hand, thinks a bit differently; he knows he needs "research about genes" to get started, and, like many students, figures the internet will tell him everything he needs to know. So, how do you know what evidence works best? Know the field you're writing in: what type(s) of evidence it values, why it's valuable, and what sources provide that evidence. Some other important questions you should ask yourself include

- Where, in the paper, is the most effective place for this evidence?
- What type of evidence would support my argument effectively?
- What kind of evidence would most convince my audience?

- What's the best way to integrate this evidence into my ideas?
- What reference/citation style does this discipline use?

If your writing assignment calls for evidence, it is important that you answer these questions. Failure to do so could cost you major points—in your assignment and with your instructor.

8. Calculate the Best Approach

When you decide how to approach your paper, you're also outlining its basic structure. Structure is the way you construct your ideas and move from one idea to the next. Typical structural approaches include question/answer, comparison/contrast, problem/solution, methodology, cause/effect, narration/reflection, description/illustration, classification/division, thesis/support, analysis/synthesis, and theory/application. These patterns can be used individually or in combination with each other to illustrate more complex relationships among ideas. Learning what structures are useful in particular writing situations starts with reviewing the assignment. Sometimes, the instructor

clearly details how you should structure your essay. On the other hand, the assignment may suggest a particular structural pattern but may not actually reflect what the instructor expects to see. For example, if the prompt asks four questions, does that mean you're supposed to write a paragraph for each answer and then slap on an introduction and a conclusion? Not necessarily. Consider what structure would deliver your message accurately and effectively.

Knowing what structures are acceptable within the discipline is also important. Many students are uncomfortable with rigidity; they wonder why their chemistry lab reports must be presented "just so." Think about the last time you looked at a restaurant menu. If you're looking for appetizers, those items are usually listed at the front of

the menu whereas desserts are closer to the back. If a restaurant menu listed the desserts up front, you might find the design unfamiliar and the menu difficult to navigate. The same can be said for formalized writing structures including lab reports or literature reviews, for example. Examining scholarly publications (journal articles or books)

within that field will help you identify commonly used structural patterns and understand why those structures are acceptable within the discipline.

9. Understand and Adhere to Formatting and Style Guidelines

Writing assignments usually provide guidelines regarding format and/or style. Requirements like word count or page length, font type or size, margins, line spacing, and citation styles fall into this category. Most instructors have clear expectations for how an assignment should look based on official academic styles, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS), or the Council of Science Editors (CSE). If your instructor specifically references a style then locate a copy of the manual, so you'll know how to cite source material and how to develop your document's format (font, spacing, margin size, etc.) and style (use of headings, abbreviations, capitalization).

Occasionally, an instructor may modify a standard style to meet her personal preferences. Follow any additional formatting or style guidelines your instructor provides. If you don't, you could lose points unnecessarily. They may also refer you to scholarly journals to use as models. Don't ignore these! Not only will you be able to review professional examples of the kinds of work you're doing (like lab reports, lit reviews, research reports, executive summaries, etc.), you'll also learn more about what style of writing a discipline values.

10. Identify Your Available Resources and Ask Questions

Even after following these steps, you may still have questions. When that happens, you should know who your resources are and what they do (and don't do). After Nicole read the business ethics assignment (provided earlier in this chapter), she said, "I would send a draft to [the instructor] and ask him if he could see if I'm on the right track."

Nicole's instincts are right on target; your primary resource is your instructor. Professors may appear intimidating, but they are there to help. They can answer questions and may even offer research recommendations. If you ask ahead of time, many are also willing to review a draft of your project and provide feedback. However, don't expect your teacher to proofread your paper or give you the "right" answer. Writing assignments are one method by which instructors examine your decision making, problem solving, or critical thinking skills.

The library is another key resource. Reference librarians can help you develop an effective research process by teaching you how

to use the catalog for books or general references, how to search the databases, and how to use library equipment (copy machines, microfiche, scanners, etc.). They will not choose your topic or conduct your research for you. Spending some time learning from a reference librarian is worthwhile; it will make you a more efficient and more effective student researcher, saving you time and frustration.

Many institutions have student support centers for writing and are especially useful for first year students. The staff is an excellent source of knowledge about academic expectations in college, about research and style, and about writing assignment interpretation. If you're having trouble understanding your assignment, go to the writing center for help. If you're working on a draft and you want to review it with someone, they can take a look. Your writing center tutor will not write your paper for you, nor will he serve as an editor to correct grammar mistakes. When you visit your university's writing center, you'll be able to discuss your project with an experienced tutor who can offer practical advice in a comfortable learning environment.

The above are excellent resources for student assistance. Your instructor, the librarians, and the writing center staff will not do the work for you. Instead, they'll teach you how to help yourself. The guidelines I've outlined here are meant to do exactly the same. So the next time you've got a writing assignment, what will you do?

<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/writing-spaces-readings-on-writing-vol-i>

<https://writingspaces.org/volume1>

1.5: GROWTH MINDSET FOR WRITERS (REVISION, PRACTICE, FEEDBACK)

1.5.1: Recommended Readings

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1.5.1: Recommended Readings

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Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (10 min, 57 sec):

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.

Attributions

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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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2: THE WRITING PROCESS

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2.10: Reflective Writing About Your Process

2.10.1: Recommended OER Readings

2.1: Overview of the Writing Cycle

The writing process is a series of steps that help writers develop, shape, and refine ideas.

Good writers do not create “perfect” work in one sitting. They move through a cycle of drafting, revising, and improving their writing over time.

The writing cycle includes five main stages:

1. Prewriting – exploring ideas, planning, and gathering information
2. Drafting – putting ideas into sentences and paragraphs
3. Revising – reorganizing, strengthening, and expanding ideas
4. Editing – polishing grammar, word choice, and mechanics
5. Publishing/Submission – sharing your final work

These stages don’t always happen in order. Writers often loop back and forth. Drafting leads to new ideas, revision leads to more drafting, and so on. The important thing is to keep moving forward.

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2.1.1: Recommended OER Readings

Introduction to Writing Processes

Read this article on the writing process from prewriting to publishing. Do you find that you follow these steps when writing essays? Which prewriting activity works best for you?

Writing Processes

Based on scholarship and research in the field of Writing Studies, the term "writing process" refers to a suite of attitudes about composition and literacy practices. Based on this body of work, faculty assume writing processes may differ from person to person and that different projects may affect which composing strategies are employed. Since the early 1980s, writing instructors have tended to restructure their courses so that students have greater opportunities to revise their work in response to instructor and/or peer feedback. Despite this emphasis on "process writing", research in Writing Studies suggests students often submit early drafts for grading.

YouTube Video

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Thinking rhetorically about one's audience and purpose, collaborating, researching, organizing texts for readers at global and local levels, maintaining focus (such as formulating a thesis, the thesis, working with sources to create a first draft, and positioning yourself in academic writing), practicing diverse invention strategies, designing one's format rhetorically, revising, editing, and publishing – these are some of the dominant activities that characterize what is broadly conceived of as "the writing process".

Believing and Doubting

The Writing Process is bounded by two contrary actions: believing and doubting.

A range of writing activities, behaviors, and attitudes can enhance – or thwart – your ability to write successfully in college or in work-place settings. However, no factor is more important than playing the believing game, which simply means staying positive, ignoring the internal critic, and having faith in the writing process – faith that with revision, lousy first drafts can become effective, maybe even elegant.

As hard as it sometimes is to stay positive while working on a document, give yourself encouraging, energizing messages, such as "I can do this ... I have enough time ... I'm smart enough ..." If you find your thinking/writing process to be undercut by negative, energy-draining messages, pull out a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle of the page. On the left-hand side, write down the negative message. Then, on the right-hand side, write a more affirming message, one that either contradicts the negative statement or that shows a way around the problem. While ideally it makes sense to play the believing game during the time you're working on the document, you may find it most helpful to emphasize believing during the early stages of a writing project and doubting in the final stages.

Drawing of the Believing Game

Figure 2.1.1.1

Play the Believing Game

During the early stages of the writing process, you can work more productively by setting aside doubt and playing the believing game, a "game" that is characterized by having faith in the writing process – faith that with additional work, you will develop effective writing habits.

Thinking rhetorically, collaborating, researching, organizing, focusing, and using invention strategies – these are the sorts of activities you need to practice to engage your creative self, to be as productive as possible.

Play the Doubting Game

While playing the believing game is critical to the Writing Process, at times you need to play the doubting game – that is, examining your ideas and drafts in a critical (even hypercritical) manner. On occasion, you need to step back and ask yourself critical questions, such as "Am I providing the narrative that my readers need to find my analysis compelling? Is my evidence truly credible? Jeez, is this wordy? Can I say the same thing in half the word count?"

Organizing, focusing, inventing, formatting, revising, editing, and publishing – these activities are essential to playing the doubting game, a process that is invariably necessary as you work your way toward meaning, significance, and clarity.

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2.2: Prewriting

Prewriting helps you discover ideas before you start drafting. You do not need to know your thesis or your full argument yet.

Common prewriting strategies include:

- Freewriting
- Brainstorming or mind-mapping
- Listing
- Asking questions (who, what, when, where, why, how)
- Reading sources and taking notes
- Talking with classmates or your instructor
- Visualization exercises

Prewriting reduces anxiety and makes drafting faster and smoother.

2.2.1: Recommended OER Readings

Loosely defined, prewriting includes all the writing strategies employed **before** writing your first draft. Although many more prewriting strategies exist, using the strategies in the following section can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process. In the next few sections, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she explores and develops her essay's topic and focus. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself **why** you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and **for whom** you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter and write the first draft.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Prewriting Techniques

Prewriting techniques are used to:

- Generate topic ideas
- Transfer your abstract thoughts on a topic into more concrete ideas on paper (or digitally on a computer screen)
- Organize the ideas you have generated to discover a focus and develop a working thesis

Although prewriting techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, you will have to find the techniques that are most effective for your writing needs. The following general strategies can be used when initially deciding on a topic, or for narrowing the focus for a topic: **Freewriting**, **Brainstorming/Listing**, and **Clustering/Idea Mapping**.

In the initial stage of the writing process, it is fine if you choose a general topic. Later you can narrow the focus of the topic. When selecting a topic, you may want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

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

Freewriting

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

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

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

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

Example 2.2.1.1: freewriting

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

Exercise 1

Freewrite about one event you have recently experienced. With this event in mind, write without stopping for five minutes. After you finish, read over what you wrote. Does anything stand out to you as a good general topic to write about? One of the following prompts may help you get started:

- A celebration
- The first day of a job or the first day of school
- An illness
- The loss of a friend or relative
- Finding a place to live

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

The prewriting technique of freewriting helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- Brainstorming/Listing
- Clustering/Idea Mapping

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

Brainstorming/Listing

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

Mass Media

Magazines	DVD	Smart Phones
Newspapers	Gaming/Video	Text Messages
Broadcasting	Games	Tiny Cameras

Radio	Internet	GPS
Television	Cell Phones	

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

Idea Mapping

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

To create an idea map:

1. Start by writing your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Moving out from the main circle, write down as many concepts and terms ideas you can think of related to your general topic in blank areas of the page. Jot down your ideas quickly--do not overthink your responses. Try to fill the page.
2. Once you've filled the page, circle the concepts and terms that are relevant to your topic. Use lines or arrows to categorize and connect closely related ideas. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

To continue brainstorming, Mariah tried idea mapping. Review the following idea map that Mariah created:



Figure 2.2.1.1

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

If visual strategies are helpful for you, you may also want to consider **doodling/sketching** in addition to mapping. Rather than only using words in your notes, you could also draw pictures and include symbols as you generate ideas.

Prewriting strategies are a vital first step in the writing process. First, they help you choose a broad topic, and then they help you narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific idea. An effective topic ensures that you are ready for the next step: Developing a working thesis and planning the organization of your essay by creating an outline.

Exercise 2

Return to the topic explored in Exercise 1 through the prewriting technique of freewriting. Explore and narrow the topic further by practicing the prewriting techniques of Brainstorming (listing) and Idea Mapping. Allow yourself no more than five to seven minutes for each technique.

Collaboration: Share your results with a classmate or in small groups, and compare answers. Offer feedback to your classmate(s) on what you find interesting about his or her topic.

2.3: Drafting

Drafting is when you begin turning ideas into sentences and paragraphs.

A draft does not need to be perfect. Its purpose is to:

- Get your ideas down
- Begin shaping your structure
- Try out explanations and examples
- Discover what you really want to say

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2.3.1: Recommended Readings

Directions

Here, you will find the readings "Shitty First Drafts" by Anne Lamott.

The articles are .docx. file or posted on a website. I recommend either printing it out, or annotating the digital copy on your computer, or taking notes on the story on a separate piece of paper.

While reading the articles, keep these questions/ideas in mind:

- What does a "Shitty First Draft" mean?
- How can we relate this to our own fear about writing?
- How can we apply this idea of a rough rough draft to our identity?
- Is our identity a Shitty First Draft that is always changing?

Essay Topic

As a reminder, your essay topic is: How are identities shaped/constructed? What factors shape the authors identity? What factors shape your own?

(Example: "Identities are constructed through overcoming obstacles, becoming in-touch with one's culture, having a connection to one's family, and by accepting oneself for who they are." OR "Identities are shaped by our family, culture, religion, and education")

["Shitty First Drafts" by Anne Lamott.docx](#)

Video Lecture- "Shitty First Drafts"-00:01:50

[Links to an external site.](#)

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2.4: Revising

Revising means re-seeing your writing. Revision focuses on ideas, organization, clarity, and logic, not grammar.

During revision, writers:

- Strengthen their thesis
- Reorganize paragraphs
- Add evidence, examples, and explanation
- Clarify confusing sections
- Remove off-topic material
- Improve transitions and flow

Revision often produces larger changes than editing, and it may take multiple rounds.

2.4.1: Recommended OER Readings

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (10 min, 57 sec):

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.



Photo by [Michael Burrows](#) on [Pexels](#) under the [Pexels License](#).

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.

Attributions

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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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2.5: Editing

Editing focuses on sentence-level correctness and clarity.

Editing includes:

- Checking grammar and punctuation
- Fixing run-on sentences or fragments
- Improving word choice
- Correcting citation formatting
- Ensuring tone and style match the audience

Editing comes after revision because there's no point polishing a sentence you might delete later.

2.5.1: Recommended OER Readings

For many students, the discussion of grammar, mechanics, and style is intimidating. There are rules, and lots of them. And when rules are broken, some kind of inquisition or punishment is bound to follow. Any student who has experienced an instructor's editorial comments (also known as the red pen "blood" in the margins of a paper) knows what it feels like to be a hapless violator of the rules.

Rules Matter

Despite your gut reactions to learning certain rules for grammar, mechanics, and style, you have to acknowledge [Photo of uncapped red pen laying on a typed page, which has proofreading marks on it](#) that the rules matter. People communicate daily in written forms, such as emails, letters, reports, and essays. And many of them need to communicate in such a way that they are taken seriously.

In academic writing, it is your job to make sure that the people who read what you write (your instructor and classmates) understand what you are trying to say. If your thoughts are not arranged appropriately, your readers may get confused. If you do not acknowledge and employ the rules of grammar, mechanics, and style, you are at a distinct disadvantage as a communicator.

The Grammar Report

Being able to identify grammatical, mechanical, or stylistic problems that exist in your writing is one way to improve your writing. These problems may have been with you for some time, failing to be identified, researched, and remedied.

The Grammar Report assignments will assist you in not only identifying your problem, but also you help you seek out examples of the problem, research the rules related to the problem, and finally "reporting" on your experience to your classmates. Indeed, the process is not just about you addressing a writing problem; it is about sharing your experience and remedies, so that you can teach others to avoid writing errors.

Improving Grammar, Mechanics, and Style

There are a wide variety of resources to support your research. A good place to start is the free online textbook, [Successful Writing](#). You can use the find/search feature of your browser to look up particular topics and use the practice exercises to work through the process of identifying and correcting errors.

Here are some online resources that you may find useful, as well:

- [Capital Community College's Guide to Grammar and Writing](#)
- [Grammar Book](#)
- [Excelsior Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#)
- [Grammar Girl](#)

At some point, you may find that you share the same grammatical, mechanical, or stylistic problems with others in this course. Take a moment to look at the [most commonly occurring grammar errors](#) listed in the "Attending to Grammar" materials developed by the Dartmouth Writing Program. Of the top 20 grammar errors listed, consider which ones are common to you. Then make sure you make every effort to eradicate them from your writing.

2.6: Publishing/Submission

Publishing or submitting your work means sharing your final draft.

In a college class, this may mean:

- Uploading a file to your LMS
- Sharing a draft in a workshop
- Submitting an essay to your instructor
- Posting a project online

Writers prepare their final version by checking:

- Format (MLA/APA)
- File type
- Heading and title
- Word count
- Accessibility (readable fonts, alt text if needed)

Submitting work professionally shows respect for your readers.

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2.6.1: Recommended OER Readings

Layout and Document Design

On the most global level, document design is all about layout. The design of a document is first and fundamentally controlled by the layout of the text and images on the page. Yes, the size and color of the text matters in how someone reads, as we'll get to in a moment, but layout controls what they encounter and when as they navigate in the traditional top-left corner and over and down manner. (And, if you're writing for languages that are right-to-left, from the top-right corner and over and down). Learning how to use layout to guide/assist readers is a fundamental skill for technical writers.

With that said, most word processing software doesn't really dive into in-depth document design as part of its core functionality. Instead, we tend to operate in a set of conventional document design presets that govern how we read and write everyday documents. When you open a word processor, you likely have a white page with black text, probably Calibri or Times New Roman or Cambria as your font, and your margins are usually set to 1 inch or so on all sides. When you type, the text fills the whole page until it hits the margin, unless you may use of tools like tabs or lists or indents. This is the world we're used to operating in, and while document design is possible in these types of environments, the freedom to determine layout isn't really baked into the fundamental operation of these traditional word processors. You aren't supposed to have to think about fundamental layout—you're writing.

When we take control of layout, much more is opened up to us. Many times a program truly dedicated to document design will simply open up to a blank page—there will be no places to write, there will no places to insert images. All of the choices are open to you, the designer. This can be a bit overwhelming at first, but you'll come to enjoy the freedom. You can place text boxes to house text, you insert frames for images, or just insert the image into the document and move it around. You can create custom paragraph and text styles as well as object-level styles that govern how and when text and images interact. The amount of choices you have are virtually endless.

Document design programs are designed as sandboxes for the creation of any sort of document you can think of rather than any particular type of document. The amount of choices they provide and the lack of handholding go hand-in-hand with professional work where you want to create your design rather than spend your time undoing someone else's preconceptions of what a design should start with.

This can be a bit overwhelming if you're new to things, and you may try to start reinventing the wheel, creating your own take on a fundamental document type from scratch. Try to resist that urge. If you're creating a document that you've never made before, find some examples of the document in the wild from competitors or internally. Look at what they've done that you like and that you don't like. Figure out which elements work for you, and bring them together in a unique design that borrows from a few different traditions. This is how design works—incrementally and building off older ideas. Sometimes you'll see older content brought back to the forefront as the next new thing. Sometimes you'll see existing content tweaked a bit for a new take on design. Designers tend to work to develop off of what is already here—it is much more rare to create something that is fundamentally unconnected to any previous design. Design is a conversation more than anything, and when you contribute to the conversation you're building on what has already come before.

If you can think of the flavoring you wish to give your design, you often start off in a much better place than simply saying, I'm going to create this type of document. I'll give you an example from my own development as a designer to illustrate this point. When I was a Ph.D. student, I met my future wife and we decided to get married. At the same time we were planning the wedding, I was taking a design studio course over the summer. Neither of us were happy with the traditional wedding program, so I decided—naïvely—to suggest that I could design it and get it printed at the local printer. At first, this did not work out well at all. I would go to my future wife with a design, and she wouldn't like it. I would go to her with another, and she wouldn't like it. A good part of this was related to my actions—I was trying to create something I had no experience with and with no conventions to reference. It was awful. This happened for a while before I realized that I didn't need to reinvent the wheel—I simply needed a new paradigm to view what I was doing.

I thought about who we were as a couple and what we had in common in our pasts. Both of us had many friends in theater when we were in college, and we both helped a lot with theater productions. I realized that what we could do was create a wedding program that was designed with the same visual aesthetic as a low-budget college theater's program for a play. Once I had this idea, which my future wife loved, I had a much easier time developing things. I was able to use classic clip art to give it a retro

and low budget feel, and I set up the “play” of the wedding as a love story. The exit song and theme of the program was “Ever Ever After,” so that tied in nicely. The different parts of the wedding were set up as acts and scenes in the play. Our history as a couple was the summary of the story thus far. And the back page, which I was particularly proud of, was the cast and crew—the wedding party basically—with headshots and short bios about each member and how they connected to the bride or groom. Having the theme, an approach that I could take to reimagine and meld two different types of documents, made all the difference.

So, with your layout work, don’t try to start with nothing and create something. Do some research on what is out there. Think about your goals, your audience, the use of your text. Find a thematic that works well and features that you like from elsewhere and blend them together into your own design that speaks in a particular design language that makes sense. As I’ve mentioned, you see this all the time. Ever noticed how phone design seems to work based off one hit design that gets copied and adapted just because? It works the same with material design and even architecture! Folks doing design operate in existing traditions and expectations. You can get rewarded for something novel, but that is extremely hard to pull off, and often outside the scope of what you need to do in any given project.

To flesh out the rest of our discussion on layout, we’re going to cover some fundamental ways of viewing layout and doing layout. We’ll look at the basic concept of stacking to create layouts and designs, we’ll discuss placement and purpose, we’ll discuss legibility and color, and we’ll discuss print concerns with layout choices (bleeds and such).

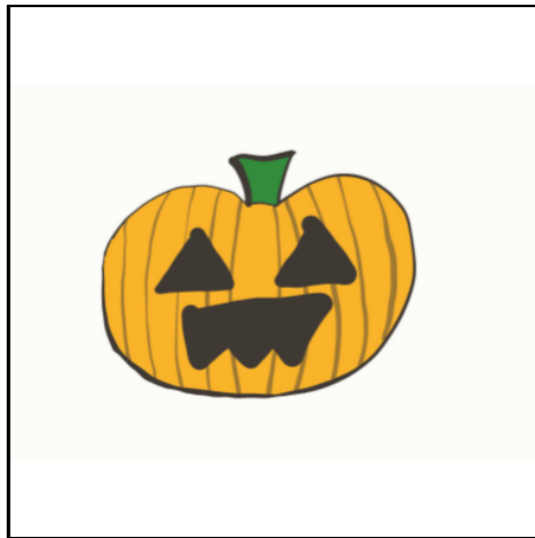
Stacking—The Fundamental Design Tool

When it comes to doing document design, or any sort of visual design really, the concept of stacking is absolutely central to pulling off virtually any sort of complicated multi-element design. (And, if we’re honest, it applies to drawing and painting too, but let’s not go too far astray). Stacking is a way of viewing design, one that makes the process of breaking down and then creating or recreating a design much easier than trying to tackle a full image by itself. I’ll explain.

Let’s start with a terribly-drawn example of a carved pumpkin. I believe I’ve mentioned that Halloween is my favorite holiday, and thanks to the iPad Pro that I’m working on, I can draw you the world’s worst drawing of a pumpkin. (I promise I can do better design work on a pc with a mouse). This example will provide for us both comic relief as well as a brief insight into how stacking can be used to create document design effects when doing layout.

In this image, you see a pumpkin or something that looks like a pumpkin that has been carved for Halloween—but we need to move beyond seeing the image as a single entity to understand how stacking works. Normally, we would view this image as a single visual. The stem, the eyes and mouth, the banding on the body, the outline of the body, and the color of the main body are all seen as one. We need to instead see each of these items as a single entity that has been created through stacking several different elements.

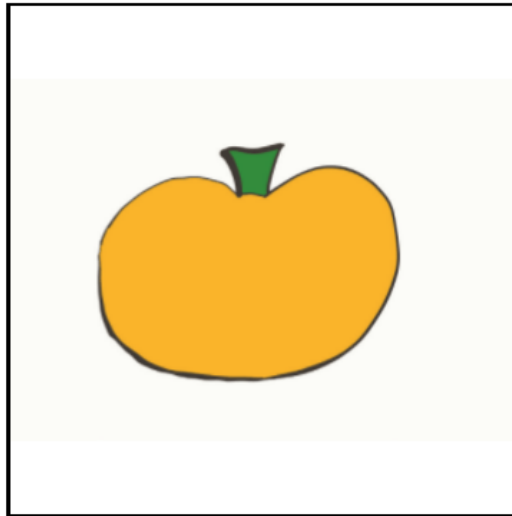
Stacking works in layout and document design fairly simply, much like an old fashioned projector, you layer one visual element on top of another, creating a stacked effect that creates your final product. Crucially, you also operate in a stacking mindset, creating each individual level of elements on their own layer of the image. By breaking down the image into differing layers and stacking those on top of each other, you create a final image.



A BADLY DRAWN JACK-O'-LANTERN

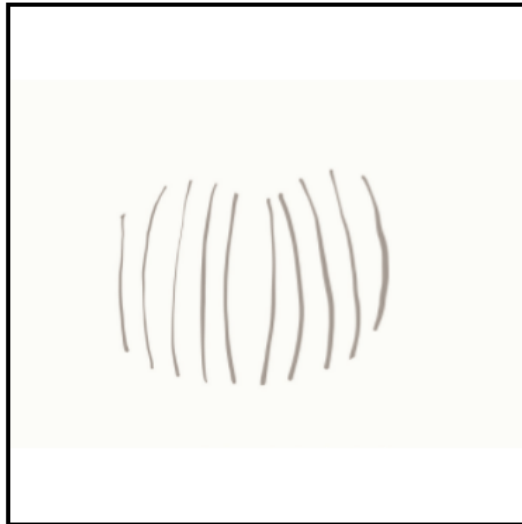
In the example above, we actually have four different layers that are being used. First, we have a background image that is being used. In this case, we have a transparent background, so we can ignore that for now. Next, we have the actual shape of the pumpkin and its outline and stem as you can see on the next page.

This is all that we have on this layer, and if we wanted to be really process-driven, we could have put the stem on a different layer entirely. What this allows is for us to create the basic look and overall shape of our design element without having to worry about other elements.



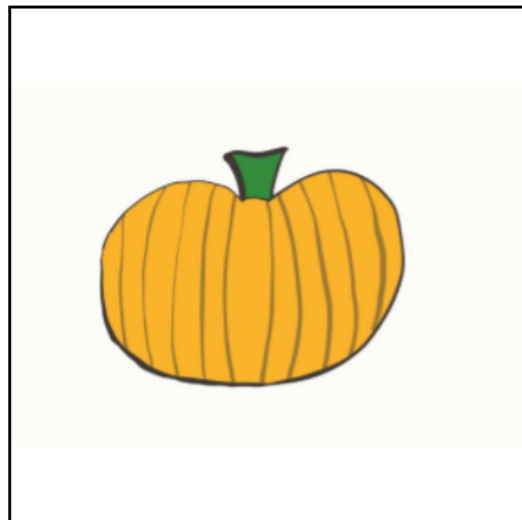
THE BASIC PUMPKIN SHAPE LAYER

Next, you have a layer that consists just of the banding that you see on the pumpkin. In this case, I started with a solid black line stroke and painted that onto the pumpkin body from left to right. Once that was done, I lowered the opacity of the layer so it would be less harsh and look more organic—which I suppose is overkill when you're drawing the world's worst pumpkin carving. Once I was done, I was able to clean up by erasing any strokes that went past the edge of the pumpkin body. Because I was on a totally different layer, I didn't have to worry about erasing any of the pumpkin's body. This is another key advantage to stacking and layer-based design. Here is what this layer looks like alone:



THE PUMPKIN LINE LAYER

Notice that just the lines are visible here. That is all that is operating on this layer. However, due to the way that layers work, I was able to see what was below when I was doing my line insertion. The final product, combining the two layers, can be seen here.



THE PUMPKIN AND LINES COMBINED

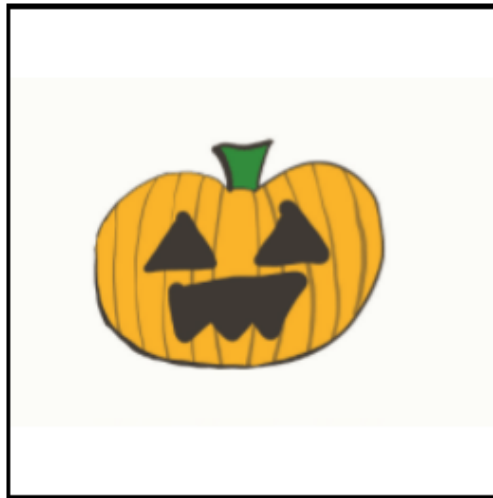
Through the use of layering, you can see how the image slowly evolves into something that looks more and more like a terrible pumpkin. The complex design elements (ha!) are layered on top of each other, allowing you to tweak each layer independently without impacting the others.



THE FACE

The final step was to take the eyes and mouth and add them onto the pumpkin. This was, as you might guess, yet another layer that was drawn on top.

As you can see, there is simply a mouth and two eyes here. This was drawn with the advantage of seeing what was going on below, allowing me to line everything up. However, since the elements were all on their own layer, I was able to tweak them, erase the edges as needed, and redo them even without having to worry about the rest of the document getting altered. The end result, which you can see, was far from striking, but it does take advantage of this concept of stacking when doing document design layout.



THE FULL EFFECT

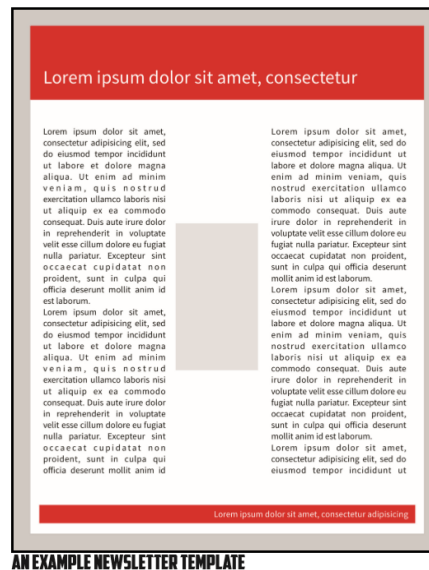
Each stacked element, from bottom to top, blends together in the final image to create a carved pumpkin. Each element is standalone, which means I can tweak the colors and the shapes quickly without having to do much work at all. If I want to have a bright purple pumpkin with a silly face, I can do that by simply repainting the coloration on the pumpkin, making the lines darker, and redrawing the face layer. In less than two minutes, I was able to get just such a result that you can see on the next page.



Again, because of the leeway that stacking gives us when doing a design, we can quickly change the elements, move different elements and recolor them quickly, etc. Stacking really is the secret to a good layout! It also helps when you need to replicate something with slightly different looks over and over again. Think about my pumpkins above—I was able to create a basic pumpkin then riff off that design with the same dimensions over and over again, giving me a basic template for future pumpkins that could all fit into the same slot/spot.

Now most of our examples thus far have been with our outrageously bad pumpkin illustration. I started with that type of example because stacking is often the secret to creating complex logo elements and other pieces of technical writing that you may need to create from time to time. But, it also works for standard designs like signs and newsletters. You just need to apply the same paradigm and thought process to your work. Think in layers and stacks and you'll be able to break down virtually any design that you see and replicate it fairly easily. This also gives you any number of ways to find inspiration for a design because you start to see the various elements in the stack rather than the entirety of the image or document. You can borrow a few elements of the stack as inspiration and leave the rest.

Take for another example the newsletter template you'll find below. In this example, you have several different items stacked in simple layers. The background layer has all of the major color blocks for the header and the footer, then you have text on top of those layers one layer of text for the main text in the body of the newsletter. To create colored segments that are edge-to-edge, you simply need to draw a box or equivalent shape and then color it. That becomes a stand-alone layer and colors that particular part of the layout:



Here you get the effects of a simply-designed newsletter with a space for a photo in the center and a colored header and footer. A few of the elements could be aligned better, but the overall layout works as a newsletter. By making use of layers and stacking, you can create virtually any design layout you'd like by breaking down your intended final product into a series of independent layers. And, again, this makes recoloring and movement of elements easy because you're not constantly running into all of the elements at any single time.

Section Projects

1. Take a document with a fair level of design applied—visuals and colors and the like. Break it down into a stack that you could reproduce. What elements will be on what level? What order will they be in?
2. Build your own stack—you just need a program that does design in layers. Create a simple graphic using a stack, such as an icon representing a PC. Plan your stack out and then build it.

Placement and Purpose in Layout Design

Having looked at stacking, we now need to look at the central move we make when doing document design work—placing elements and using that placement to convey purpose. Whereas stacking is an approach to creating document designs, placement represents a type of choice we make with each individual element in our design. Where we place elements and the relationship of that placement to the whole document and other elements in the document controls the way our text is perceived and navigated.

When we view a traditional document, placement often determines the level of importance that we give to a line of text. Looking at the x-axis of the document, the further left or right an item is placed usually determines the level of importance in the textual hierarchy. If this sounds familiar, it is because we touched on this same issue when we were discussing taxonomies in chapter 1. Generally the closer to the left side of the document, the more importance something is given. The same also holds true to the y-axis: the closer to the top, the more important something is.

As we noted earlier in the taxonomy discussion, placement has a crossover effect—items that are placed in the same way and along the same line on an axis are considered to be of equal importance. If you have three images that are placed side-by-side in the middle of a page, you consider them of equal importance.

Going along with the idea of placement equaling the same value for different items, placement together also creates groups of items, groups that are usually read as being considered one unit to be read together. You see this in many texts where you will have a grouping of images or paragraphs. Each of the paragraphs or images that are placed together are considered to be equal and connected in some way because they share the same placement on a line in the x or y axis. See the example below for what this looks like:



In the above example, you have three different images of pumpkins on the same level of the y-axis. Because they are of equal size and on the same line, they are viewed as being of equal value to most readers. If you look at the x-axis alignment of the pumpkin images with the text that is below them, both the text and the image are on the same line of the x-axis. This creates an association that these two items are of equal importance and draws a connection.

In addition to simple alignment along an axis, the relative closeness of two items in a document matters as well. In the pumpkin example, the relative closeness of the text and the images suggests to the reader that they are part of the same item—they belong together because they are quite close. Each of the pairs is considered to be of equal value because they are on the same line of the y-axis, but they are not considered the same item because they are not quite as close together.

The end result is that we can use placement along an axis to indicate that items are of equal importance, and the relative closeness between two items along an axis to group them together visually, creating a unit within the text on account of the proximity each item has to its companion.

When it comes to placement, do note that subtlety is usually not something to be sought after. What I mean by that is simply that when you want to space items out or want to group them together, don't be ambiguous or subtle. If items are together, place them close to each other. If they are of equal importance, place them along the same line. If they are not together, make sure the distance is great enough that it doesn't appear to be a mistake—very slight variations in distance can be read as mistakes by an author rather than a differentiation between two different images. The same holds true for any types of placement that indicate value or groupings—if you make the differences between groupings or alignments slight, it can and will be read as a mistake. See the image below for an example of this:



AN EXAMPLE OF BAD GROUPING

In this example, you can see that the placement of the left and right pairings of pumpkins is almost exactly along the same line on the y-axis. There really isn't much difference between the two, and there is an awkward gap between them on the x-axis that just sits empty and open. To most readers, this is read as a design mistake because there is a very subtle shift in the placement of the images and a general lack of balance to the placement as well—the large white space doesn't sit well with us.

Supplementing Placement with Size and Design Elements

To fix this, we would likely want to use a different alignment, but we can also supplement our placement using size and other tools. Generally speaking, the size of an item that is placed in a document correlates to importance, just like the size of a font usually connects to the importance of text in a document. In addition, much like with text, we can use lines and other visuals to underscore our choices in the layout placement.

Putting a line between grouped items is the equivalent of a line break or other spacing equivalent in text. The size and placement already indicates a relationship in the layout, but the extra elements underscore this as in the example below:



AN EXAMPLE OF GROUPING WITH SIZE AND LINES

Here we have a massive size difference between the two pumpkin/text groups. On the left we have traditional colors for the pumpkin in a fairly large size. On the right, separated by a black vertical line but still occupying the same line on the y-axis, we have two additional pumpkins. This line exaggerates the importance or at least draws attention to the importance of the

size difference and layout differences between these two groups. It also makes the two groups separate cleanly. The symmetry between the smaller elements size and placement also indicates they are of equal importance, but of less importance than the larger and left-most image and text combination.

Section End Prompts

1. Take an example designed document and breakdown the layout choices. How are size and placement used to control the navigation of the document? How are groups created and what impact do they have on the text?
2. Create your own layout using simple wire frames to meet a specific purpose, perhaps creating a poster or flyer for an event. Think about how you can use size, placement, grouping, and stacking to indicate intent.
3. Take a layout that works well and break it. Move things in ways that ruin the intended effect. Why do your choices mess things up? What rules are being broken that make things uncomfortable to read or misleading?

Legibility and Color in Layout

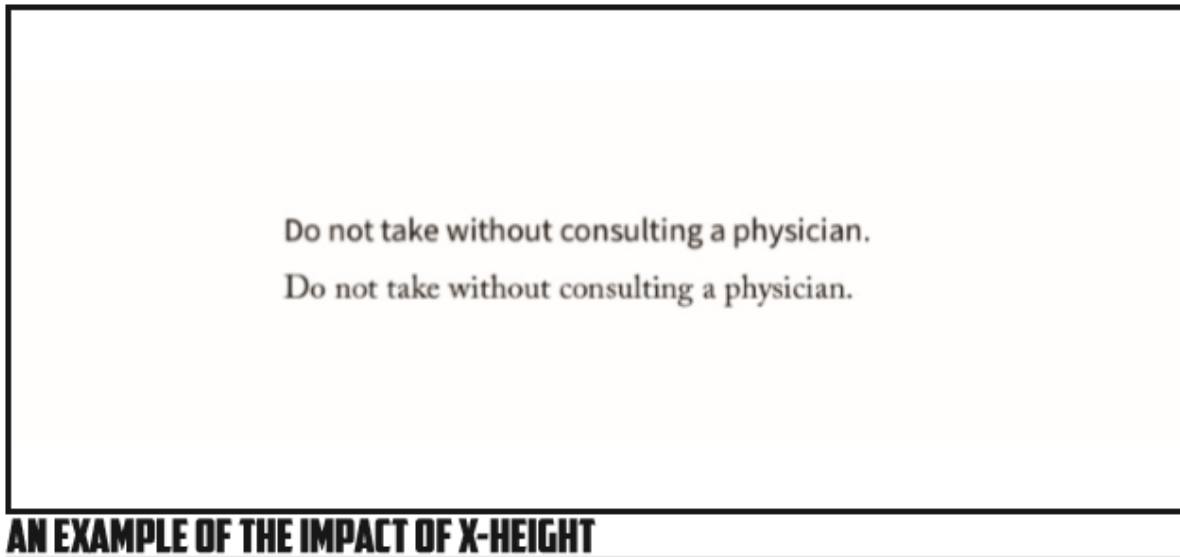
In addition to the placement of the elements of a design and the relative size of elements in a design, we need to consider the relationship the overall legibility of elements and the relationship in particular of legibility to color choices. While you can put a lot of great information into a document, that doesn't matter much if no one can actually read the information that you've placed in the text. Texts can become illegible for a couple of reasons including physical placement, size, and color contrast. We'll spend a little extra time discussing color because uses of color can cause text to be less obvious without necessarily making it fully illegible.

We cover legibility for practical and ethical reasons. If you've ever run into a document that had important information in a place that was hard to find or in a place that didn't allow you to read very easily, you understand the ethical issues with legibility. Sadly, there are some writers out there who have purposefully used the layout and design of their texts to make some information less legible or to hide it altogether. One fundamental question we have to ask ourselves regarding legibility is simply: am I making this text fit at the cost of readability?

One way we need to deal with legibility is just the physical aspects of legibility—where text is on a document and how conducive that placement is to use and reference. In some cases, you may have a text where certain parts of the document simply aren't that useful for prime information. For example, if part of your document could be exposed to excessive wear, you wouldn't want anything important to go in that space. (This might be an issue with a text that has a long life and gets referenced and used continually). You can also have parts of a text hidden by the physical structure of a document—content too close to the spine of a book can be unreadable.

We also want to think about the size of the text that we're placing and how that size impacts readability. When it comes to working with size, we want to be able to balance the overall amount of space that a bit of text is using with the importance of that text, the amount of information that needs to be there, and the legibility of the choices that we're making.

Not all fonts are created equally, as we'll discuss in our next major section on typography. One way we can measure/assess fonts is their relative x-height: the height of a given font's lowercase "x." X-height allows us to assess the general contrast between the height of lower-case and upper-case letters in a particular font. The closer the lower and upper case letters are in height, the more legibility a particular font tends to be at smaller sizes. This isn't universally true—some fonts are just hard to read at small sizes—but, it can be a great rule of thumb. So, if you need a font that will perform at small sizes, find one with a relatively small level of contrast between lower and upper case letters. For an example, see below:



Here you have two different fonts, each set at 10pt. Notice that the top example is much easier to read at any level of distance. A major reason for this readability? The x-height.

When we're dealing with text in general, legibility concerns should lead us to try to never go below 10 point sizing. 12 point is a relatively common size for general paragraph text, and while smaller font sizes can be readable in certain contexts, going below 10 can cause issues for some readers. If you simply need more space to convey the information on a given document, you may need to either edit your information for clarity and brevity, or you may need to create a larger document or a supplemental text that can be referenced. (Though, the issue with supplemental texts is that very few of us are going to go out of our way to find and read them).

As a secondary issue related to legibility and size, we want to make sure our use of size is proportional to the importance of a bit of information to our users. We shouldn't go out of our way to make less important information super visible while hiding less important information—to do so is unethical and often causes no amount of frustration with readers. Have you ever gone to the store and seen a special and decided to go ahead and take advantage of it, only to get to the checkout and realize you didn't see the fine print that makes you ineligible to actually get the special price? If so, you've encountered this very issue! Depending on your mood, you may have rewarded the misuse of font sizing by just going ahead and getting the purchase, regardless of the sale price, but if you're annoyed enough you might just abandon your whole purchase. Without naming names, I can tell you that a certain local retailer with a national footprint has basically turned me off of all of their "buy X and get a gift card for X amount" deals for this exact reason. If I see those signs, I tend to ignore them—I've been misled too often and I'm too annoyed to mess with them.

To get around issues related to size and importance, simply make sure that any critical information is obvious enough on a quick read. If you've gone out of your way to make a special visible to a reader, make sure any common disqualifications are equally visible, or at least make sure the fact that qualifications exist is very visible. When possible, try to give all information regarding a subject equal billing, that way you don't risk annoying or misleading your readers by gating certain information via sizing. For example, a BOGO (buy one, get one) sale sign that doesn't let you see that the BOGO nets you a 10% discount is deeply frustrating to someone who assumed a second item was free or heavily discounted. In this case, we would want the tail end of the BOGO to show up at the same size as the rest of the text, or at least at a size that allows instant comprehension of the deal. In situations like this, the extra text placement simply makes sense—you can't assess the value of a BOGO offer without the final bit of information.

Having looked at physical placement, font size, and the size/importance connection, we finally need to cover the importance of color in layout legibility and readability. Color can impact the way that we process texts in any number of ways, each worth taking a moment to focus on. First, color can impact overall legibility of text and other elements. It can also impact the way that readers assess a text and associate a text with other information. Finally, color poses an accessibility concern that we need to be aware of.

When thinking about the legibility of a text's layout in regards to color, we want to think about how much contrast is available between a given text and that text's background. The traditional writing arrangement that we see when we fire up a word processor makes optimum usage of contrast by presenting us with a total contrast between a solid white background and solid black text. In

a few cases we see this reversed for nighttime reading on a screen with a solid black background and solid white text. Regardless of which is used, the goal for both layouts is an optimum level of contrast. When moving beyond these two choices, we need to make sure our color choices maintain an acceptable color contrast in our layout.

When dealing with contrasting colors, the simple rule of thumb is to choose colors that different in their general darkness or shade—you want a lighter option to contrast with a darker option. Generally speaking, light text and light background shades don't go well together as in the example below:



With this example, you can see the horror that has been wrought by using a light yellow with a light blue background. These two shades are both too close in coloration to be of use to us.

One trick to finding useful colors is to simply use complementary colors—colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel. Any number of tools exist to select color off of a wheel-type selector, and all you need to do is choose from colors on opposite sides to create a level of contrast that is legible and often aesthetically pleasing as well. See the example below where we've kept the same general shade of blue but alternated the text with something complementary:



Notice that the orange shade is much more legible on the blue background, creating a much more attractive layout choice in general for text that should be easy-to-read.

Now, when it comes to color, this isn't to say that you should always avoid using similar colors! When you're creating a design, you may well want to use colors that are shades of each other or that blend well together. This can create aesthetically pleasing designs with the various elements of your text. You should only avoid having colors that blend together easily when you're trying to say something important to your readers, when you're passing along textual information.

In addition to general legibility, color often impacts the way that we read a text—it colors our interpretation. For example, if you're trying to associate a document with a particular brand, you will want to use that brand's colors. Think about the way we can identify someone's affiliation at a given sports event based almost entirely on the colors they are wearing—the same holds true for texts. Certain brands have iconic colors and iconic imagery—by using those, we're drawing on the associations and immediately impacting how someone assesses the text.

There can be issues when we misuse color to draw associations—you want to make sure your usage is genuine and not misleading,

else you risk the ire of your users. No one likes to be deceived by a document and using color to imply something that isn't accurate does just that.

In addition to brands, colors also have seasonal and cultural associations. We've already highlighted how black and orange can signal Halloween, and the same can be true for green and red for Christmas in the US. You likely can think of any number of color associations you have with seasonal and local events, and the number of associations that go with these colors reaches even further when we open up to an international audience. For example, Chinese weddings tend to make use of abundant amounts of red—white wouldn't be appropriate at all because of associations with funerals. At the same time, a red wedding in current US culture might draw entirely different associations with a popular television and book series. Color and culture have a close connection that must be researched and respected!

Next, as with size, you want to use the contrast and impact of a color choice to correlate with the information's importance that you're sharing. If you're simply creating a background element that makes the text nicer looking, there is no duty to make things stand out—blending in is a good thing. But, if you're relaying important information, you need to make sure that it stands out! Don't use your contrasting colors for unimportant information while hiding the important stuff with colors that blend into the background. Make sure your text stands out!

Finally, keep in mind that colors can pose accessibility issues to those with different visible color spectrums. Keep in mind that combinations such as red and green can be difficult to many readers who cannot differentiate between these two colors! While going into a full discussion of colorblindness accessibility is outside the scope of this current text, you should make sure to test your documents and identify issues with color choices that may impact your readers. For example, green and black can be a difficult distinction for some with colorblindness to make: my father's favorite pair of pants is a set of olive slacks that are his favorite pair of black pants that he owns. A growing number of design tools have a built-in testing tool for color accessibility—if those are available for you, use them.

Just like other audience issues, color needs to be researched! You need to be aware of any brand connections with your color choices, any cultural significance related to your colors when you're creating a text, and any barriers that your colors may present to those with color blindness and different views of the colors around them. This type of work is simply due diligence for us as technical writers. Colors send a message, and we want to make sure we're using them to send a message we fully understand and intend to send.

Layout and Printing Considerations

One final layout consideration we need to tackle is the issue of printing, primarily an issue of bleeds and margins. If you've not done any professional printing, or at least any edge-to-edge color printing, you likely have no idea what I'm talking about. That's okay. We'll dive into the physicality of printing in this section and give you a brief boot camp on getting this stuff done.

Whenever you see a printed document that has color elements that go all the way to the edge of the page, you're seeing a choice that was designed around the physical nature of printing using bleeds. Edge-to-edge printing is not something that naturally happens in a production environment. You may have noticed with your own printers that you can't print all the way to the edge of a piece of paper—there is always a margin the printer simply can't touch. The same is mostly true for professional printing. To get around this, documents are printed on larger pieces of paper than the final product and then cut down to the actual size needed. Usually you pay per cut for this service, so if you had four sides of a text cut, you'd pay for the four different cuts in your run. (Note, this is for the full run, not per document).

The issue with cutting a text down to size is that cutting is not as precise as we'd prefer. There is almost always going to be some variability in the cut made by the printer. To get around this variability, we make use of a document element known as a bleed. A bleed is a small extra margin around a text where all elements that go to the edge of the final text will bleed off the normal page to a secondary edge of the text, usually one that is perhaps a quarter of an inch or less more than the standard edge. This extra area is the bleed, and is used to make sure if the blade cuts too far outside the document there will still be designed elements to keep the text looking as intended. The same is true for the opposite side—you generally don't want important information within the same margin of the bleed on the inside of a text's border either—the cut can be too far in either direction.

When you set up your document for these types of printing, you'll want to go into your document settings and create a bleed. The size of the bleed will depend on where you're getting the document printed—different places will have different tolerances they prefer. Once you've set the bleed, you'll want to make the printer aware of the bleed that will need to be cut off the text to reach the ideal size.

In addition to the bleed, you'll want to be aware of the binding's impact on your text. Any text that is bound by some sort of spine will have less room on the inside of each page for legible content. Too close to the spine of the text and your words will be lost in the page—especially on documents with a hefty spine.

Section End Prompts

1. Think about colors and connections. What colors are associated with your campus, with events on your campus, and with groups there? What about with your workplaces or your hometowns?
2. Bleeds are a concept that can be foreign at first. Do some searching for designs that use edge-to-edge color or images or text and assess how they use the bleed. What do you think the document would look like after the margin, in the space for the bleed? What freedom does allowing elements to hang off the text provide for you as an author or designer?

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2.7: Time Management for Writing Tasks

Writing usually takes longer than students expect. Breaking tasks into smaller steps helps you avoid procrastination.

Strategies include:

- Creating a writing schedule
- Setting mini-deadlines for each stage
- Using timers (Pomodoro technique)
- Working in shorter, focused sessions
- Planning research early

Time management is one of the strongest predictors of writing success in college.

2.7.1: Recommended OER Readings

Case Study

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

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

For work-life balance, we need to

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

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

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

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

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

Identify Your Time Management Style



Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

Exercise 1

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

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

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

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

Assessing Your Responses

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

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

The Early Bird

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

The Balancing Act

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

The Pressure Cooker

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

The Improviser

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

Create a Schedule

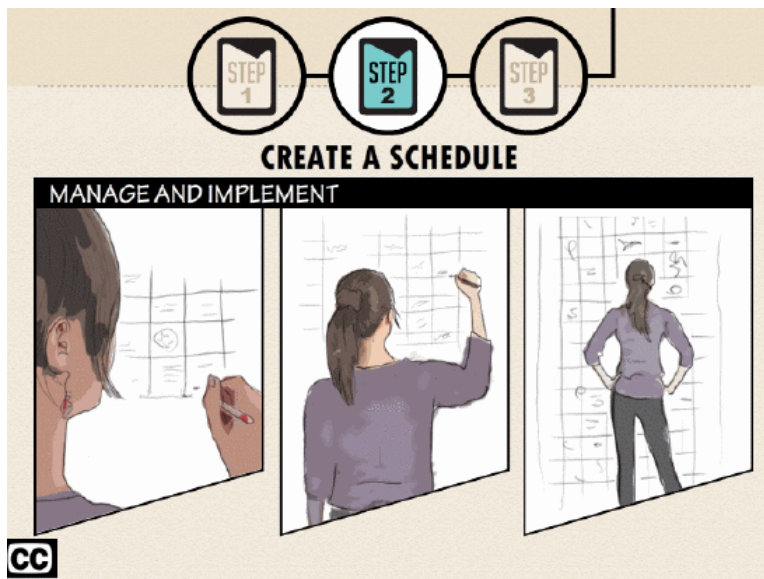


Figure: Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

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

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

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

TIP

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

Start with Fixed Time Commitments

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

Kai's Schedule

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

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

Consider Your Studying and Homework Habits

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

Kai's Schedule

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

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

Plan Ahead

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

Consider Leisure Time

TIP

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

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

Exercise 2

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

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

YouTube Video

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[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Video 2.7.1.1

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

Get Better at Prioritizing

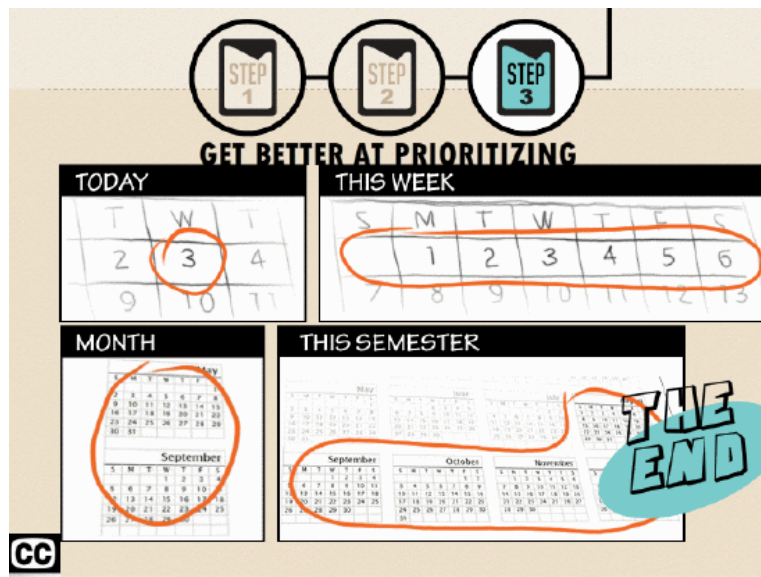


Figure: . Authored by: Unknown. License: CC

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

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

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

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

Procrastination Checklist

Do any of the following descriptions apply to you?

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

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

Strategies to Combat Procrastination

Below are some effective strategies for overcoming procrastination:

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

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

YouTube Video

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[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Video 2.7.1.1

Staying Consistent: Time Management Dos and Don'ts

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

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

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

Dos

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

Don'ts

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

TIP

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

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

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

Writing at Work

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

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

YouTube Video

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

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Video 2.7.1.1

Additional Resources:

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

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This page last updated on June 5, 2020.

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2.8: Strategies for Getting Started

Getting started is often the hardest part of writing.

Helpful strategies include:

- Write a zero-pressure introduction (you can replace it later)
- Start with the body paragraphs instead of the intro
- Use a guiding question instead of a thesis
- Begin with a quote or example that interests you
- Freewrite for 5–10 minutes without stopping

The goal is to begin producing text, not to be perfect.

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2.8.1: RECOMMENDED OER READINGS

SLO-Conduct inquiry-based research by formulating research questions, identifying a variety of sources (e.g., utilizing internet and library resources, such as scholarly sources), and evaluating and integrating sources into writing, including using sources as evidence in researched arguments.

Intro: In this lesson, you will learn how to start research by asking questions instead of starting with a thesis. In this way, you will learn how to engage in inquiry based research.

2.8.1.1: The Reading Learning About Discourse Communities and Academic Disciplines

2.8.1.2: The Classroom Lecture and Activity

2.8.1.3: The Assignment Practicing Inquiry Based Research Questions

2.8.1.1: The Reading Learning About Discourse Communities and Academic Disciplines

Read: For a more in-depth understanding of discourse communities and academic disciplines read the following chapter: Writing in the Academic Disciplines by Salyor Academy via Quillbot (CC BY NA SA). This will help you understand some of the research question categories better, especially disciplines. It will also help when you are looking for a variety of sources.

SLO-Conduct inquiry-based research by formulating research questions, identifying a variety of sources (e.g., utilizing internet and library resources, such as scholarly sources), and evaluating and integrating sources into writing, including using sources as evidence in researched arguments.

Course Objective: Foster the appreciation of writing as an important skill for success in the classroom, workplace, and community, and as an essential component of learning and thinking.

Intellectual and Discourse Communities

My contention has been that, in order to become better researchers and writers, we need to know not only the “how’s” of these two activities but also the “why’s.” In other words, it is not sufficient to acquire practical skills of research and writing. It is also necessary to understand why you do what you do as you research and what results you can expect to achieve as a result of your research. And this is where rhetorical theory comes in. Writing and reading are interactive, social processes. Ideas presented in written texts are born as a result of long and intense dialog between authors and others interested in the same topic or issue. Gone is the image of the medieval scholar and thinker sitting alone in his turret, surrounded by his books and scientific instruments as the primary maker and advancer of knowledge.

Instead, the knowledge-making process in modern society is a collaborative effort to which many parties contribute. Knowledge is not a product of individual thinking, but of collective work, and many people contribute to its creation. Academic and professional readers and writers function within groups known as discourse communities. The word “discourse” means the language that a group uses to talk about what interests its members. For example, as a student, you belong to the community of your academic discipline.

Together with other members of your academic discipline’s intellectual community, you read the same literature, discuss and write about the same subjects, and are interested in solving the same problems. The language or discourse used by you and your fellow-intellectuals in professional conversations (both oral and written) is discipline-specific. This explains, among other things, why the texts you read and write in different academic disciplines are often radically different from one another and even why they are often evaluated differently.

Exercise 2.8.1.1.1

WRITING ACTIVITY: ANALYZING INTELLECTUAL AND DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

List all intellectual and discourse communities to which you belong. Examples of such communities are your academic major, any clubs or other academic or non-academic groups you belong to, your sorority or fraternity, and so on. Do not limit yourself to the groups with which you interact while in school. If you are a member of any virtual communities on the Internet, such as discussion groups, etc., include them in this list as well. Once you have listed all the intellectual and discourse communities to which you belong, consider the following questions:

- What topics of discussion, issues, problems, or concerns keep these communities together? And what constitutes new knowledge for your group? Is it created experimentally, through discussion, or through a combination of these two and other methods?
- How would you characterize the kinds of language which each of these communities use? Is it formal, informal, complex, simple, and so on? How are the community’s reasons for existence you listed in the first question reflected in their language?

- When you entered into the community, did you have to change your discourse, both oral and written, in any way, to be accepted and to participate in the discussions of the community? This might be a good time to consider all the linguistic adjustments you had to make becoming a college student or entering your academic major.
- Think of several classes you are currently taking. How do the discourses used in them differ from one another? Think about topics discussed, ways of making knowledge accepted in them, the degree of formality of the language used, and so on.
- Does your community or group produce any written documents? These may include books, professional journals, newsletters, and other documents. Don't forget the papers that you write as a student in your classes. Those papers are also examples of your intellectual community's discourse.
- What is the purpose of those documents, their intended audience, and the language that they use? How different are these documents from one community to the next? Compare, for example, a paper you wrote for your psychology class and one for a literature class.
- How often does a community you belong to come into contact with other intellectual and discourse groups? What kinds of conversations take place? How are conflicts and disagreements negotiated and resolved? How does each group adjust its discourse to hear the other side and be heard by it?

After completing this activity, you will begin to see knowledge making as a social process. I also hope that you will begin to notice the differences that exist in ways that different groups of people use language, reading, and writing. As persuasive and rhetorical mechanisms, reading and writing are supposed to reach between people and groups.

The term community does not necessarily mean that all members of these intellectual and discourse groups agree on everything. Nor does it mean that they have to be geographically close to one another to form such a community. Quite the opposite is often true. Debates and discussions among scientists and other academics who see things differently allows knowledge to advance. These debates in discussions are taking place in professional books, journals, and other publications, as well as at professional meetings.

The Making of Knowledge in Academic Disciplines

In the preceding section of this chapter, I made a claim that the making of new knowledge is a social process, undertaken by intellectual communities. In this section, we will look at one influential theory that has tried to explain how exactly this knowledge-making process happens. The theory of knowledge-making which I am talking about was proposed by Thomas Kuhn in his much-cited 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Although, as the book's title suggests, Kuhn was writing about sciences, Kuhn's theory has now been accepted as relevant and useful not only by academic disciplines outside of natural sciences. According to Kuhn, the change in human knowledge about any subject takes place in the following steps. At first, an academic discipline or any other intellectual community works within the confines of an accepted theory or theories. The members of the community use it systematically and methodically.

Kuhn calls this theory or theories the accepted paradigm, or standard of the discipline. Once the majority of an intellectual community accepts a new paradigm, the community's members work on expanding this paradigm, but not on changing it. While working within an established paradigm, all members of an intellectual community have the same assumptions about what they study and discuss, use the same research methods and approaches, and use the same methods to present and compare the results of their investigation. Such uniformity allows them to share their work with one another easily.

More importantly, though, staying within an accepted paradigm allows researchers to create a certain version of reality that is based on the paradigm that is being used and which is accepted by all members of the community. For example, if a group of scientists studies something using a common theory and common research methods, the results that such investigation yields are accepted by this group as a kind of truth or fact that had been experimentally verified. Changes in scientific paradigms happen, according to Kuhn, when scientists begin to observe unusual phenomena or unexpected results in their research. Kuhn calls such phenomena anomalies. When anomalies happen, the current paradigm or system of research and thinking that a community employs fails to explain them. Eventually, these anomalies become so great that they are impossible to ignore. Then, a shift in paradigm becomes necessary.

Gradually, then, existing paradigms are re-examined and revised, and new ones are established. When this happens, old knowledge gets discarded and substituted by new knowledge. In other words, an older version of reality is replaced by a newer version. To illustrate his theory, Kuhn uses the paradigm shift started by the astronomer Copernicus and his theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun. I have also used this example in the chapter of this book dedicated to rhetoric to show that even scientific truths that seem constant and unshakable are subject to revision and change. To an untrained eye it may seem

that all scientists and other researchers do is explain and describe reality which is unchangeable and stable. However, when an intellectual community is working within the confines of the current paradigm, such as a scientific theory or a set of research methods, their interpretations of this reality are limited by the capabilities and limitations of that paradigm. In other words, the results of their research are only as good as the system they use to obtain those results.

Once the paradigm use for researching and discussing the subjects of investigation changes, the results of that investigation may change, too. This, in turn, will result in a different interpretation of reality.

Application of the Concept of Discourse Communities to Research Writing

Kuhn's theory of knowledge making is useful for us as researchers and writers because it highlights the instability and changeability of the terms "fact" and "opinion." As I have mentioned, the popular perception of these two terms is that they are complete opposites. According to this view, facts can be verified by empirical, or experimental methods, while opinions are usually purely personal and cannot be verified or proven since they vary from one person to another. Facts are also objective while opinions are subjective. This ways of thinking about facts and opinions is especially popular among beginning writers and researchers.

When I discuss with my students their assumptions about research writing, I often hear that research papers are supposed to be completely objective because they are based on facts, and that creative writing is subjective because it is based on opinion. Moreover, such writers say, it is impossible to argue with facts, but it is almost equally impossible to argue with opinions since every person is entitled to one and since we can't really tell anyone that their opinions are wrong.

In college writing, such a theory of fact and opinion has very tangible consequences. It often results in writing in which the author is either too afraid to commit to a theory or points of view because he or she is afraid of being labeled subjective or biased. Consequently, such writers create little more than summaries of available sources. Other inexperienced writers may take the opposite route, writing exclusively or almost exclusively from their current understanding of their topics, or from their current opinions. Since "everyone is entitled to their own opinion," they reason, no one can question what they have written even if that writing is completely unpersuasive. In either case, such writing fails to fulfill the main purpose of research, which is to learn.

What later becomes an accepted theory in an academic discipline begins as someone's opinion. Enough people have to be persuaded by a theory in order for it to approach the status of accepted knowledge. All theories are subject to revision and change, and who is to say some time down the road, a better research paradigm will not be invented that would overturn what we now consider a solid fact. Thus, research and the making of knowledge are not only social processes but also rhetorical ones. Change in human understanding of difficult problems and issues takes place over time. By researching those problems and issues and by discussing what they find with others, writers advance their community's understanding and knowledge.

A study by Daniel Melzer examined the kinds of research and writing assignments students in various colleges and universities across the nation receive in different disciplines. Melzer's shows that students in various academic disciplines are asked to conduct research for a variety of purposes, which ranged from informing and persuading to exploration and self-expression (91). Also, according to Melzer's study, students in different disciplines researched and wrote for a variety of audience which included not only the instructor of their class, but also their classmates and for wider audiences outside of their classes (95). Despite this variety of goals, methods, and approaches, there are several key principles of source-based writing which span different academic disciplines and professions. These principles are:

- The purpose of academic writing is to generate and communicate new knowledge and new ideas.
- Academic writers write "from sources." This means that new ideas, conclusions, and theories are created on the basis of existing ideas and existing research
- Academic writers examine their sources carefully for their credibility and appropriateness for the writer's goals and objectives.
- Academic writers carefully acknowledge all their research sources using source citation and documentation systems accepted in their disciplines.

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2.8.1.2: The Classroom Lecture and Activity

How to Start Research By Using Inquiry Based Research

SLO-Conduct inquiry-based research by formulating research questions, identifying a variety of sources (e.g., utilizing internet and library resources, such as scholarly sources), and evaluating and integrating sources into writing, including using sources as evidence in researched arguments.

The reason why writers and researchers start with questions is so that they can narrow information down to the most relevant and useful. You may be used to starting your essay with a thesis and then finding a few sources to support your ideas. While this method is useful to teach you about writing basic argumentative essays, it often leads to one-sided or flimsy arguments and skimming of information. Example: Children who play violent video games learn violent behavior. You might also have been assigned to write a persuasive essay where you try to convince the audience to do, think or feel something. For these assignments, you may have also started with a thesis. Example: Private schools are better than public schools. Now that you know how to write these types of essays, it is time to learn how to balance these rhetorical strategies to write more effective essays. An effective argumentative research essay balances these two styles. If you focus too much on persuasion and only thinking about the audience, your essay can become skewed and fall into propaganda. If you focus too much on exploring the topic, you will writing more of an expose with no explicit argument. See the chart below.

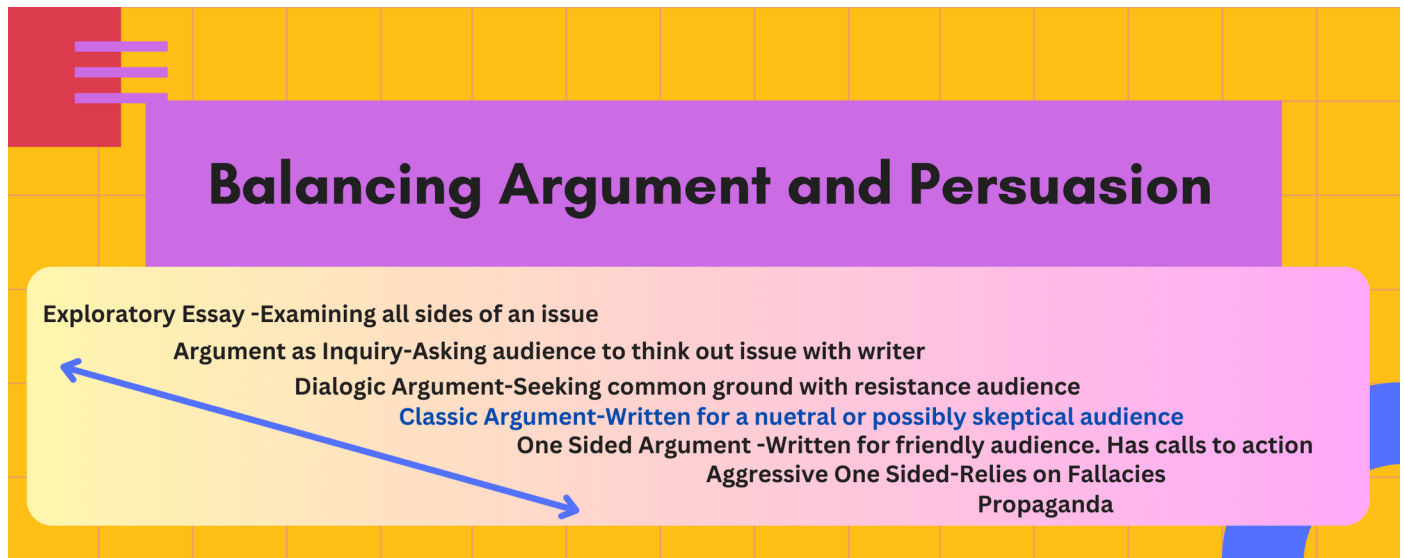


Image: Truth Seeking-Persuasion

Exploratory essay examining all sides of an issue

Argument as inquiry, asking audience to think out issue with writer

Dialogic argument seeking common ground with a resistant audience

Classical argument aimed at a neutral or possibly skeptical audience

One-sided argument aimed at a friendly audience often for fund-raising or calls to action)

Aggressive one-sided arguments

"Outright propaganda"(Ramage, Bean, Johnson)

By starting with a question, you are not predetermining the outcome of your research. It allows you to see first what the information and experts are currently saying before making decision. It can also allow yo the opportunity to conduct your own

primary research if you have the time and resources. This approach gets you closer to truth seeking and further away from propaganda.

Works Cited: *Writing Arguments* 10th ed. by John D. Ramage, John C. Bean, and June Johnson

Inquiry-Based Research

"In inquiry-based research, you often begin a project not knowing much about the topic. But to find the questions that will sustain your investigation, you have to quickly listen in to what other people have said about it." For example, take a student's interest in The Projects. She certainly knows something about the projects because she passes by them everyday in her commute to school and remembers where other project buildings used to be. She knows enough to ask a preliminary question: **What is happening with former CHA land?** But this student needs to have working knowledge of her topic before she will be able to pose an inquiry question that might work. But what kinds of things do you need to know to ask a good question?

<i>Steps for developing an Inquiry Question</i>	
	Topic: The Projects
Working Knowledge	Opening Question: What is happening with former CHA land?
Focused Knowledge	Inquiry Question: What is the relationship between Chicago housing policies and where low income housing is placed?

You need some background (or working) knowledge on your topic before you can settle on a researchable inquiry question. In this example, the student begins with a general factual question, and after learning enough about her topic (focused knowledge), is able to craft the inquiry question that will guide her research for the next few weeks.

Developing that knowledge means asking many more questions and looking your topic through certain lenses or using certain categories. If the student develops a working knowledge on Chicago housing policies, this is what she might discover.

1. Definitions. The way in which something is defined has impact on how people use it. This extends to connotations. Is there a set of specialized criteria that is used to define it? Why does this matter?

The student quickly discovers that there are competing definitions about things she thought were settled. What, for example, is the difference between low-income housing, section-8, and mixed income housing? What do people mean when they use the term redlining? What are the current housing policies?

2. Conversations. The ongoing conversations and debates/controversies that people are having can determine what issues get noticed. What do experts disagree on? Which debates are the most heated in this topic? After some time searching online, it's obvious that there are fundamental disagreements among people on a whole range of issues. Should the city be allowed to sell CHA land to private developers? Should property tax statements be more transparent? Should low-income housing be mixed with high end properties? Is it wrong that certain banks don't lend in African-American and Latinx neighborhoods? Can ethnic or racial community areas be better than diverse areas?

3. People. Behind every argument or conversation is a person or group of people. This can range from experts to community members. Who are the influential people in the field? What about their ideas are interesting? Could you profile them?

It doesn't take much searching on this subject to begin to recognize certain experts or advocates whose names come up again and again in the debates. For example community advocates such as, Karen Freeman-Wilson of The Chicago Urban League

who works for economic, educational and social progress for African Americans and promotes strong, sustainable communities through advocacy, collaboration and innovation. Diane Latiker of Kids off the Block organization, and Leah Levinger of the Chicago Housing Initiative. There are investigative journalist such as Natalie Moore- the Southside reporter for WBEZ news and Josh McGhee of the Chicago Reporter. Equally important is also the mayor of the city- depending on the year- Richard Daley, Rahm Emanuel, Lori Lightfoot, or Brandon Johnson. Since positions of authority can change often which means the people will change, it is important to make sure the information you find is timely.

4. Disciplines. Disciplines are the areas of expertise or study that people choose to pursue. This can fall into different discourse communities. Before long, the student will realize that she can understand Chicago housing policies in more than just the context of debates among advocates, journalists, and government officials. Can the student ask what her topic has in relationship to another topic? What type of context does it create? How does this help her understand her topic better? This is a topic that combines a whole range of disciplines: anthropology, sociology, law, psychology, and urban planning.

5. Impact and Place- What about the topic has the most impact on the most people? What may have the most effect in the future? Are there any specific places (a city or state?) that are directly impacted by the topic? While the student's topic already deals with Chicago, she will have to consider that not every person that lives in the city of Chicago cares about, deals with, or is impacted by the Chicago Housing Authority. By focusing on one or two specific neighborhoods, the student might find more information. For example they might look at articles, documentaries, and events surrounding the Ida B Wells projects or Cabrini Green.

6. Trends - Are there any recent and significant developments in this topic? This is importance especially for timeliness. The student can always add in relevant history, but seeing what is currently happening with help her see if some of her questions have already been answered or some issues already solved.

Works Cited: The Curious Researcher By Bruce Ballenger

Continue to Narrow your Topic by developing a working knowledge

As you search and collect information, ask yourself new questions about your topic that were not on your list. This is why keeping a research notebook, whether physical or digital is important.

Classroom Activity: Using the six categories above, and your knowledge of issues or concerns about Harold Washington College or City Colleges of Chicago, write **one** question for **each** category. You may work in groups or alone. Which categories do did find it easier to come up with questions? Explain. Share out.

Criteria	Meets All Requirements	Meets Most Requirements	Missing Some Requirements	Missing Most Requirements
Completeness	Student answers the full question completely using details, instances, and adds personal examples	Student mostly answers the full question using some details, instances, and adds personal examples	Student mostly answers the full question using few details, instances, and adds personal examples	Student does not answer the full question using details, instances, and adds personal examples
Focus	Student's answer is focused, clear, and stays on topic throughout the post.	Student's answer is mostly focused, clear, and stays on topic during most of the post.	Student's answer is somewhat unfocused, clear, and stays on topic during most of the post.	Student's answer is not focused, not clear, and does not stay on topic throughout the post.

Criteria	Meets All Requirements	Meets Most Requirements	Missing Some Requirements	Missing Most Requirements
Grammar and Mechanics	Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation shows evidence of editing. Appropriate vocabulary with complex sentence structure.	Mostly correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation shows some evidence of editing.	Some correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.	Frequent grammatical and mechanical errors in each sentence. Inappropriate language.

2.8.1.3: The Assignment Practicing Inquiry Based Research Questions

SLO-Conduct inquiry-based research by formulating research questions, identifying a variety of sources (e.g., utilizing internet and library resources, such as scholarly sources), and evaluating and integrating sources into writing, including using sources as evidence in researched arguments.

Activity: Complete in research notebook. Using the categories that you learned about, create questions for each category using your research topic. If you completed the lesson on finalizing a topic, you can look through the questions you already have and copy them next to a category that best fits. Once you are finished, all categories should have at least one question.

Here are the categories again.

- **Definitions**
- **Conversations**
- **People**
- **Disciplines**
- **Impact and Place**
- **Trends**

Assessment Tool: Student Survey-Formative Assessment

Do you feel like you are ready to develop a research question? Yes, No, Maybe. Explain why. Be sure to add what else you think you need to move forward.

For students that responded no, work with a tutor on the next step which is writing the official research question.

2.9: Understanding and Using Feedback

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. It helps you see your writing the way others do.

There are three kinds of feedback:

1. Instructor feedback – comments on structure, clarity, ideas
2. Peer feedback – comments from classmates or writing groups
3. Self-feedback – reflecting on your own progress

Strong writers learn to:

- Identify patterns in comments
- Prioritize the most important revisions
- Ask questions to clarify confusing feedback
- View comments as guidance, not criticism

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2.9.1: Recommended OER Readings

Teachers can use the following pages to provide students with information about specific errors in their writing. If the students' papers are graded online, write a short comment and add a link to one of these pages.

- [Enumeration consistency](#)
- [Unclear demonstrative pronoun reference](#)

When providing feedback to any writer, whether they are a peer or a student, there are a few general rules of thumb. Make comments specific and clear. Instead of simply using words like "good" and "awkward" to summarize a comment, try using phrases that directly state what sounds awkward or which part of the paragraph / sentence sounds good. However, do not smother the students' paper with writing. This can be detrimental to students' psyches and affect their writing process. Try to work with a theme. If a paper has recurring errors in a specific area, address this error once and provide the grammatical rule (if one applies) or provide an example to help the student improve.

For example, in the following sentence a writer is using two different verb tenses within the sentence.

Example: "From outside the building I could hear the opening bands tearing through their sets, and all the way from the sidewalk I felt the beat and vibrations from the drums and bass guitar literally **make** my rib cage shake"

Example Instructor / Peer Comment: "We have two different verb tenses within this sentence. For clarity you'll want to stick with a single verb tense. I would suggest using something like '...**making** my rib shake'..."

Inevitably, this type of constructive feedback will require more time with each assignment the person is grading. However, constructive criticism may be the best route to see positive and significant changes within a written work. To speed up the feedback process consider inserting links to websites like the [Purdue OWL](#), St. Cloud State University's Literacy Education Online ([LEO](#)) or other online university writing labs. Listed below are different attitudes to consider adopting while providing feedback.

7 Types of Active Feedback

1. Correcting- removing errors or mistakes from written work
2. Emoting- adding expression or emotion to a written work
3. Describing- giving an account or conveying an idea or impression within writing
4. Suggesting- offering or proposing changes for consideration
5. Questioning- putting a question to or expressing doubt about an aspect within writing
6. Reminding- causing a person to remember or making the writer aware of something
7. Assigning- designating additional writing for a particular purpose

Attitudes as a Reader:

Editor- The editor provides feedback mainly on grammar, punctuation, syntax, sentence structure, and word choice. This type of feedback is typically time consuming. Requires thorough knowledge of standard written English in addition to strict adherence to grammar rules. Those who choose to provide editor-type should be wary that the criticism is balanced with praise.

Average Reader- The average reader feedback focuses primarily on what the writer is attempting to communicate. Reading the text as though it were an ordinary magazine or newspaper, the author gains perspective through the reader's reactions to the text. Text reactions include responding to descriptions, arguments, and examples provided within the paper.

Academic Reader- The academic reader analyzes the text for how well the paper conforms to the standards of academic

discourse. A knowledge of academic standards is needed in order to provide feedback as an academic reader.

Coach- A coach is someone who actively facilitates the development of writing. This is perhaps the most complex attitude as it adopts various aspects of the three previous attitudes listed.

Citing Sources

- Citing Sources
 - [Plagiarism](#)

External Links

- [Common Errors in English](#) - resource for information on common English-language usage errors
- [The Elements of Style](#) - resource for information on "principle requirements of plain English style" "intended for use in English courses" (quotations taken from linked page)
- [Darling's Guide to Grammar](#) - resource for information on writing at sentence, paragraph, and essay levels as well as other grammar materials
- [Grammar Bytes!](#) - resource for information on grammar terms and practice as well as online coursework
- [The Hypertext Book: Modern English Grammar](#) - resource for information on supplemental reading materials for modern English grammar
- [Punctuation Points](#) - resource for information on punctuation and mechanics as well as practice materials
- [Grammar Tips from Harvard](#) - resource for information on grammar, punctuation, and style as well as links to strategies for essay writing
- [The Owl at Purdue](#) - resource for information on writing resources and instructional material for general writing, research and citation, subject-specific writing, and more
- [Academic Grammar](#) - resource for information on writing problems of ESL students
- [English Grammar](#) - resource for information on "a complete English grammar guide filled with the rules of English usage. Each grammatical rule is explained in plain English with several examples, and when needed, counter-examples" (quotation taken from linked page)
- [Online Bibliography Maker](#) - resource for information on citation generation

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2.10: Reflective Writing About Your Process

Reflection helps writers become more aware of their growth.

When you reflect, you ask:

- What did I try?
- What worked well?
- What challenges did I face?
- What will I do differently next time?

Reflection improves your habits over time and helps instructors understand your decision-making as a writer.

Reflection can take forms such as:

- A short letter to your instructor
- A paragraph at the end of each assignment
- A writer's memo
- A final portfolio reflection

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2.10.1: Recommended OER Readings

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3: READING SKILLS FOR WRITERS

3.1: Active Reading Strategies (Annotating, Previewing, Questioning)

3.1.1: Recommended OER Readings

3.2: Identifying Main Ideas and Supporting Details

3.2.1: Summarizing Texts Accurately

3.3: Introduction to Critical Reading

3.4: Evaluating Sources for Credibility and Bias

3.1: Active Reading Strategies (Annotating, Previewing, Questioning)

Strong writing begins with strong reading. In college, reading is not just about understanding what a text says, it is also about noticing how the author makes their argument, what evidence they use, and how you can respond in your own writing. This unit introduces core academic reading skills that support your growth as a writer.

Active reading means engaging with a text instead of reading passively.

College writers use several strategies:

Previewing

Before reading in depth, scan the text for:

- The title and headings
- Introduction and conclusion
- Topic sentences
- Key terms or repeated ideas
- Visuals or charts

Previewing helps you predict what the text is about and prepares your brain for deeper reading.

Annotating

As you read, mark the text so you don't have to remember everything. You can:

- Underline or highlight key ideas
- Write questions in the margins
- Note unfamiliar words
- Summarize paragraphs
- Circle claims or evidence
- Mark sections you might want to quote later

Annotations make the text a tool you can use when writing.

Questioning

Good writers ask questions such as:

- What is the author trying to argue?
- What evidence do they use?
- What assumptions are they making?
- Do I agree, disagree, or have mixed feelings?

Questions help you understand the text's deeper meaning and prepare you for analysis.

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3.1.1: Recommended OER Readings

Learning Objective

- Describe active reading strategies

Good writing begins with good reading. Every time you read, you're exposed to someone else's ideas and to their way of writing: their word choice, vocabulary, knowledge base, use of language, and so forth. You can become a better reader by reading every day and practicing effective reading skills.

Reading effectively means reading in a way that helps you understand, evaluate, and reflect on a written text. As you might guess, these skills are very important to college students. No matter what field you're going into, you'll be doing a lot of reading. The more effectively you read, the easier it will be, the less time it will take, and the more you'll enjoy the experience.

These tips can help make your reading more effective:

- Create an optimal setting for reading—pick the best time, place, and conditions. Create a reading environment that helps decrease distraction.
- Engage in pre-reading strategies before starting to read
- Read material efficiently: pick up a piece of material, engage actively with it, and finish.
- Annotate written texts—write directly *on* the texts and/or take notes as you read. By doing this, you can enter into a discussion with the text, interacting with it.
- Research or investigate content you don't fully understand.
- Work to discover the central meaning of the piece. Ask questions like:
 - What is the author's point?
 - What is the text trying to say?
 - What story is the author telling?
 - How does the author create and build this meaning?
- Reflect on what the text means, internalizing the meaning:
 - How am I responding to this text?
 - Why am I responding that way?
 - What does the text make me think about?
 - What does this information mean to me?



Figure 1. Although reading anywhere you can is a great idea, active reading generally requires sitting down with a pen or computer in a distraction-free environment and taking notes so that you can fully engage with the text.

Active Reading Strategies

You have already learned that college requires active reading, not passive reading. But it is hard to keep our minds focused on a task all the time. Further, it is difficult to get away from the excitement and “noise” of a college life.

Read Thoroughly and in a Distraction-Free Environment

It is a good idea to read multiple times, especially items such as prompts, texts for analysis, materials for exams, etc. Reading multiple times will enhance your ability to cognitively process the material. If you can do your reading in a distraction-free environment, that will also increase your ability to make sense of the material and to commit it to memory.

Annotate Your Texts

Readings in college are meant to be marked-up. You cannot make the most of your reading experiences if you do not synthesize complex parts, write questions that arise, or note connections. And don't simply highlight parts you find interesting—highlighting certainly isn't a bad strategy, but it doesn't advance active reading in and of itself. If you are using an online text, you can use programs to take online notes, or take notes on your readings in a separate notebook.

Think of your reading experience as you would a conversation with someone, especially someone you might not know well. If all that happens is the other person talks to you while you sit passively, you may well get some information, but you would be unable to get clarification, ask questions, or think about the larger context, just for starters. Conversation works best when multiple people are active participants. Think of reading in a similar way.

Use Your Personal Knowledge to Your Advantage

Though college involves a lot of reading on subjects or topics that are new to you, your prior knowledge can still help. Try to connect readings to what you already know, even if that isn't a lot. For example, you might be reading for your Biology class and remember a relative's heart attack. What you learned as your family member went through the treatment could help you contextualize the reading. One trick to helping you retain knowledge during reading is to apply the information you read to what you already know about a topic.

Don't Bite Off More Than You Can Chew

You probably learned long ago that you can't read the 200-page text that is the basis for your book report the day before the paper is due; however, you might not have thought much about shorter readings. Remember, reading in college is more difficult than it was in high school, so even that 20-page chapter might be more work than it sounds like.

Since you will be annotating and thinking critically about the material, it might be a good idea to stop once in a while or break up even shorter pieces. Of course, you should probably be able to read a six-page article in one sitting, but you might want to go back at a later time to re-read it. You know your reading and thinking capacities better than anyone else, but don't push ahead if you find yourself not reading critically or not retaining information. This is why it is important to get to reading assignments early and leave time to come back to them if you need to do so.

The Reading-Process Loop

On the next page are strategies for a reading process loop—previewing, questioning, annotating, and reviewing—that will help you better think about and understand what you are reading. Don't forget, reading is a recursive act, which means you can move back and forth through different steps as you work. Keep reading and thinking about what you have read until you feel comfortable with the material.

Try It

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/20209>

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3.2: Identifying Main Ideas and Supporting Details

Academic texts almost always contain:

- A main idea (central claim, thesis, or overall purpose)
- Supporting details (examples, evidence, statistics, reasoning, stories, or explanations)

To identify a main idea:

1. Look for the author's thesis or central question
2. Notice repeated or emphasized words
3. Look at the introduction and conclusion
4. Ask: If I had to summarize this in one sentence, what would it be?

Supporting details help explain, prove, or illustrate the main idea. Understanding how they connect helps you write stronger summaries and responses.

Recommended OER Readings

- [“Main Ideas and Supporting Details” from Blueprint for Success in College and Career \(OER\)](#)
- [“How to Identify a Thesis” in Writing Spaces, Vol. 1](#)

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3.2.1: Summarizing Texts Accurately

A summary is a shortened, objective version of a text that presents only the key ideas.

A good summary:

- Is accurate
- Uses your own words
- Does not include your opinions
- Focuses on the main argument and major supporting points

Steps for writing a summary:

1. Read the text once for understanding
2. Identify the main idea
3. Note the most important supporting details
4. Write a brief paragraph capturing those ideas
5. Check your summary against the original for accuracy

Summaries help writers show understanding before offering their own analysis or argument.

Recommended OER Readings

- “How to Write a Summary” in The Word on College Reading and Writing
- “Summarizing” from Scribner’s Academic Success: Reading (OER)

3.3: Introduction to Critical Reading

Critical reading means going beyond “what the text says” to examine:

- How the author builds arguments
- What assumptions they make
- What evidence they use
- Whether the reasoning is logical
- What perspectives may be missing

Critical reading does not mean being negative. It means reading thoughtfully and asking deeper questions.

Some key critical reading questions:

- What is the author’s purpose?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What types of evidence are used? Are they reliable?
- How is the argument organized?
- What biases might be present?
- How does this text relate to other ideas I’ve studied?

Critical reading helps you build stronger arguments in your own writing.

Recommended OER Readings

- [“Critical Reading: What It Is and Why It Matters” in Writing Spaces, Vol. 2](#)
- [“Thinking Critically” in College Success \(OpenStax\)](#)
- [“Reading Strategically” in Writing Commons](#)

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3.4: Evaluating Sources for Credibility and Bias

As a college writer, you need to decide which sources are trustworthy and appropriate for your assignments.

Credibility

Credible sources typically have:

- A clear author or organization
- Evidence to support claims
- Citations or references
- A publication date
- A professional tone
- A publisher with expertise (university press, academic journal, nonprofit, government agency)

Academic sources are generally more credible than commercial blogs or anonymous websites.

Bias

Every text has a perspective. Bias becomes a problem when:

- Information is one-sided
- Evidence is ignored or misused
- Emotional language replaces reasoning

To evaluate bias, ask:

- What is the author's goal?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What viewpoints are missing?
- Does the language seem emotional or persuasive rather than logical?

Evaluating credibility and bias helps you choose the best evidence for your writing.

Recommended OER Readings

- [“Evaluating Sources” in The Information Literacy User’s Guide \(OER\)](#)
- [“CRAAP Test: Evaluating Sources” Benedictine University Library LibGuide, “Evaluating Sources”](#)
- [“A Rhetorical Approach to Reading Sources” in Writing Spaces, Vol. 3](#)

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4: PARAGRAPHS AND ORGANIZATION

Paragraphs are the building blocks of essays. Strong paragraphs help readers understand your ideas, follow your reasoning, and stay engaged in your writing. This unit explains how paragraphs work and how to develop them effectively.

4.1: What a Paragraph Does

4.2: Topic Sentences and Controlling Ideas

4.3: Coherence- Transitions and Logical Flow

4.4: Developing Paragraphs with Evidence and Examples

4.5: Paragraph Types (Narrative, Descriptive, Expository, Argumentative)

4.1: What a Paragraph Does

A paragraph presents one main idea and develops it with clear explanation, support, and detail.

A well-constructed paragraph:

- Introduces an idea
- Explains its meaning or importance
- Provides evidence or examples
- Connects the idea to the writer's larger purpose
- Helps the reader move smoothly to the next idea

In college writing, paragraphs are not just about length. They are about focus and development.

Recommended OER Readings

What this handout is about

This handout will help you understand how paragraphs are formed, how to develop stronger paragraphs, and how to completely and clearly express your ideas.

What is a paragraph?

Paragraphs are the building blocks of papers. Many students define paragraphs in terms of length: a paragraph is a group of at least five sentences, a paragraph is half a page long, etc. In reality, though, the unity and coherence of ideas among sentences is what constitutes a paragraph. A paragraph is defined as “a group of sentences or a single sentence that forms a unit” (Lunsford and Connors 116). Length and appearance do not determine whether a section in a paper is a paragraph. For instance, in some styles of writing, particularly journalistic styles, a paragraph can be just one sentence long. Ultimately, a paragraph is a sentence or group of sentences that support one main idea. In this handout, we will refer to this as the “controlling idea,” because it controls what happens in the rest of the paragraph.

How do I decide what to put in a paragraph?

Before you can begin to determine what the composition of a particular paragraph will be, you must first decide on a working thesis for your paper. What is the most important idea that you are trying to convey to your reader? The information in each paragraph must be related to that idea. In other words, your paragraphs should remind your reader that there is a recurrent relationship between your thesis and the information in each paragraph. A working thesis functions like a seed from which your paper, and your ideas, will grow. The whole process is an organic one—a natural progression from a seed to a full-blown paper where there are direct, familial relationships between all of the ideas in the paper.

The decision about what to put into your paragraphs begins with the germination of a seed of ideas; this “germination process” is better known as brainstorming. There are many techniques for brainstorming; whichever one you choose, this stage of paragraph development cannot be skipped. Building paragraphs can be like building a skyscraper: there must be a well-planned foundation that supports what you are building. Any cracks, inconsistencies, or other corruptions of the foundation can cause your whole paper to crumble.

So, let's suppose that you have done some brainstorming to develop your thesis. What else should you keep in mind as you begin to create paragraphs? Every paragraph in a paper should be

- **Unified**—All of the sentences in a single paragraph should be related to a single controlling idea (often expressed in the

topic sentence of the paragraph).

- **Clearly related to the thesis**—The sentences should all refer to the central idea, or thesis, of the paper (Rosen and Behrens 119).
- **Coherent**—The sentences should be arranged in a logical manner and should follow a definite plan for development (Rosen and Behrens 119).
- **Well-developed**—Every idea discussed in the paragraph should be adequately explained and supported through evidence and details that work together to explain the paragraph's controlling idea (Rosen and Behrens 119).

How do I organize a paragraph?

There are many different ways to organize a paragraph. The organization you choose will depend on the controlling idea of the paragraph. Below are a few possibilities for organization, with brief examples.

- **Narration:** Tell a story. Go chronologically, from start to finish. ([See an example.](#))
- **Description:** Provide specific details about what something looks, smells, tastes, sounds, or feels like. Organize spatially, in order of appearance, or by topic. ([See an example.](#))
- **Process:** Explain how something works, step by step. Perhaps follow a sequence—first, second, third. ([See an example.](#))
- **Classification:** Separate into groups or explain the various parts of a topic. ([See an example.](#))
- **Illustration:** Give examples and explain how those examples prove your point. (See the detailed example in the next section of this handout.)

5-step process to paragraph development

Let's walk through a 5-step process to building a paragraph. Each step of the process will include an explanation of the step and a bit of "model" text to illustrate how the step works. Our finished model paragraph will be about slave spirituals, the original songs that African Americans created during slavery. The model paragraph uses illustration (giving examples) to prove its point.

Step 1. Decide on a controlling idea and create a topic sentence

Paragraph development begins with the formulation of the controlling idea. This idea directs the paragraph's development. Often, the controlling idea of a paragraph will appear in the form of a topic sentence. In some cases, you may need more than one sentence to express a paragraph's controlling idea. Here is the controlling idea for our "model paragraph," expressed in a topic sentence:

Model controlling idea and topic sentence— *Slave spirituals often had hidden double meanings.*

Step 2. Explain the controlling idea

Paragraph development continues with an expression of the rationale or the explanation that the writer gives for how the reader should interpret the information presented in the idea statement or topic sentence of the paragraph. The writer explains his/her thinking about the main topic, idea, or focus of the paragraph. Here's the sentence that would follow the controlling idea about slave spirituals:

Model explanation—*On one level, spirituals referenced heaven, Jesus, and the soul; but on another level, the songs spoke about slave resistance.*

Step 3. Give an example (or multiple examples)

Paragraph development progresses with the expression of some type of support or evidence for the idea and the explanation that came before it. The example serves as a sign or representation of the relationship established in the idea and explanation portions of the paragraph. Here are two examples that we could use to illustrate the double meanings in slave spirituals:

Model example A— *For example, according to Frederick Douglass, the song "O Canaan, Sweet Canaan" spoke of slaves' longing for heaven, but it also expressed their desire to escape to the North. Careful listeners heard this second meaning in the following lyrics: "I don't expect to stay / Much longer here. / Run to Jesus, shun the danger. / I don't expect to stay."*

Model example B— *Slaves even used songs like “Steal Away to Jesus (at midnight)” to announce to other slaves the time and place of secret, forbidden meetings.*

Step 4. Explain the example(s)

The next movement in paragraph development is an explanation of each example and its relevance to the topic sentence and rationale that were stated at the beginning of the paragraph. This explanation shows readers why you chose to use this/or these particular examples as evidence to support the major claim, or focus, in your paragraph.

Continue the pattern of giving examples and explaining them until all points/examples that the writer deems necessary have been made and explained. NONE of your examples should be left unexplained. You might be able to explain the relationship between the example and the topic sentence in the same sentence which introduced the example. More often, however, you will need to explain that relationship in a separate sentence. Look at these explanations for the two examples in the slave spirituals paragraph:

Model explanation for example A— *When slaves sang this song, they could have been speaking of their departure from this life and their arrival in heaven; however, they also could have been describing their plans to leave the South and run, not to Jesus, but to the North.*

Model explanation for example B— *[The relationship between example B and the main idea of the paragraph’s controlling idea is clear enough without adding another sentence to explain it.]*

Step 5. Complete the paragraph’s idea or transition into the next paragraph

The final movement in paragraph development involves tying up the loose ends of the paragraph and reminding the reader of the relevance of the information in this paragraph to the main or controlling idea of the paper. At this point, you can remind your reader about the relevance of the information that you just discussed in the paragraph. You might feel more comfortable, however, simply transitioning your reader to the next development in the next paragraph. Here’s an example of a sentence that completes the slave spirituals paragraph:

Model sentence for completing a paragraph— *What whites heard as merely spiritual songs, slaves discerned as detailed messages. The hidden meanings in spirituals allowed slaves to sing what they could not say.*

Notice that the example and explanation steps of this 5-step process (steps 3 and 4) can be repeated as needed. The idea is that you continue to use this pattern until you have completely developed the main idea of the paragraph.

Here is a look at the completed “model” paragraph:

Slave spirituals often had hidden double meanings. On one level, spirituals referenced heaven, Jesus, and the soul, but on another level, the songs spoke about slave resistance. For example, according to Frederick Douglass, the song “O Canaan, Sweet Canaan” spoke of slaves’ longing for heaven, but it also expressed their desire to escape to the North. Careful listeners heard this second meaning in the following lyrics: “I don’t expect to stay / Much longer here. / Run to Jesus, shun the danger. / I don’t expect to stay.” When slaves sang this song, they could have been speaking of their departure from this life and their arrival in heaven; however, they also could have been describing their plans to leave the South and run, not to Jesus, but to the North. Slaves even used songs like “Steal Away to Jesus (at midnight)” to announce to other slaves the time and place of secret, forbidden meetings. What whites heard as merely spiritual songs, slaves discerned as detailed messages. The hidden meanings in spirituals allowed slaves to sing what they could not say.

Troubleshooting paragraphs

1) Problem: the paragraph has no topic sentence. Imagine each paragraph as a sandwich. The real content of the sandwich—the meat or other filling—is in the middle. It includes all the evidence you need to make the point. But it gets kind of messy to eat a sandwich without any bread. Your readers don’t know what to do with all the evidence you’ve given them. So, the top slice of bread (the first sentence of the paragraph) explains the topic (or controlling idea) of the paragraph. And, the bottom slice (the last sentence of the paragraph) tells the reader how the paragraph relates to the broader argument. In the original and revised paragraphs below, notice how a topic sentence expressing the controlling idea tells the reader the point of all the evidence.

Original paragraph

Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

Revised paragraph

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

Once you have mastered the use of topic sentences, you may decide that the topic sentence for a particular paragraph really shouldn't be the first sentence of the paragraph. This is fine—the topic sentence can actually go at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph; what's important is that it is in there somewhere so that readers know what the main idea of the paragraph is and how it relates back to the thesis of your paper. Suppose that we wanted to start the piranha paragraph with a transition sentence—something that reminds the reader of what happened in the previous paragraph—rather than with the topic sentence. Let's suppose that the previous paragraph was about all kinds of animals that people are afraid of, like sharks, snakes, and spiders. Our paragraph might look like this (the topic sentence is underlined):

Like sharks, snakes, and spiders, piranhas are widely feared. Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

2) Problem: the paragraph has more than one controlling idea. If a paragraph has more than one main idea, consider eliminating sentences that relate to the second idea, or split the paragraph into two or more paragraphs, each with only one main idea. In the following paragraph, the final two sentences branch off into a different topic; so, the revised paragraph eliminates them and concludes with a sentence that reminds the reader of the paragraph's main idea.

Original paragraph

*Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. A number of South American groups eat piranhas. They fry or grill the fish and then serve them with coconut milk or *tucupi*, a sauce made from fermented manioc juices.*

Revised paragraph

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

3) Problem: transitions are needed within the paragraph. You are probably familiar with the idea that transitions may be needed between paragraphs or sections in a paper (see our handout on this subject). Sometimes they are also helpful within the body of a single paragraph. Within a paragraph, transitions are often single words or short phrases that help to establish relationships between ideas and to create a logical progression of those ideas in a paragraph. This is especially likely to be true within paragraphs that discuss multiple examples. Let's take a look at a version of our piranha paragraph that uses transitions to orient the reader:

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, except in two main situations, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' instinct is to flee, not attack. But there are two situations in which a piranha bite is likely. The first is when a frightened piranha is lifted out of the water—for example, if it has been caught in a fishing net. The second is when the water level in pools where piranhas are living falls too low. A large number of fish may be trapped in a single pool, and if they are hungry, they may attack anything that enters the water.

In this example, you can see how the phrases “the first” and “the second” help the reader follow the organization of the ideas in the paragraph.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout’s topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the [UNC Libraries citation tutorial](#).

Lunsford, Andrea and Robert Collins. *The St. Martin’s Handbook, Annotated Instructor’s Edition*. 5th Ed. New York: St. Martin’s, 2003.

Rosen, Leonard and Laurence Behrens. *The Allyn and Bacon Handbook, Annotated Instructor’s Edition*. 4th Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

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4.2: Topic Sentences and Controlling Ideas

A topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a paragraph. It signals to the reader what the paragraph will be about.

A strong topic sentence includes:

1. The topic – what the paragraph discusses
2. The controlling idea – what you want to say about that topic

Example:

College students benefit from active reading strategies because these methods help them understand complex texts more efficiently.

- Topic: active reading strategies
- Controlling idea: they help students understand difficult texts

Everything in the paragraph should connect back to the controlling idea.

Recommended OER Readings

Media Alternative

Listen to an audio version of this page (11 min, 10 sec):

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 4.2.1

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 4.2.2

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 4.2.1

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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4.3: Coherence- Transitions and Logical Flow

Coherence means that a paragraph flows logically and is easy to follow. Readers should feel that each sentence naturally leads to the next.

Writers create coherence through:

Transitions (Words and phrases that signal relationships:)

- Addition: also, moreover, in addition
- Contrast: however, on the other hand
- Cause/effect: therefore, because, as a result
- Example: for instance, such as
- Sequence: first, next, finally

Repetition of key terms.

- Repeating important concepts helps readers stay grounded in the main idea.

Pronoun reference

- Using words like this, these, it, they to connect ideas without repeating entire sentences.

Logical order

Ideas should be arranged in a way that makes sense:

- Chronological
- Order of importance
- Problem → solution
- General → specific

Recommended OER Readings

With a key sentence established, the next task is to shape the body of your paragraph to be both cohesive and coherent. As Williams and Bizup⁸ explain, cohesion is about the “sense of flow” (how each sentence fits with the next), while coherence is about the “sense of the whole”.⁹ Some students worry too much about “flow” and spend a lot of time on sentence-level issues to promote it. I encourage you to focus on underlying structure. For the most part, a text reads smoothly when it conveys a thoughtful and well organized argument or analysis. Focus first and most on your ideas, on crafting an ambitious analysis. The most useful guides advise you to first focus on getting your ideas on paper and then revising for organization and wordsmithing later, refining the analysis as you go. Thus, I discuss creating cohesion and coherent paragraphs here as if you already have some rough text written and are in the process of smoothing out your prose to clarify your argument for both your reader and yourself.

Cohesion refers to the flow from sentence to sentence. For example, compare these passages:

Version A (That I Rewrote):

Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. If an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other, according to balance theory (1973:1363).¹⁰ Bridge

ties between cliques are always weak ties, Granovetter argues (1973:1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. If two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. Only weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the “friends of friends” can connect people in different cliques.

Version B (The Original By Giuffre):

Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. In brief, balance theory tells us that if an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other (1973:1363). Granovetter argues that because of this, bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties (1973:1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. This is because if two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. The only way, therefore, that people in different cliques can be connected is through weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the “friends of friends.” ¹¹

Version A has the exact same information as version B, but it is harder to read because it is less cohesive. Each sentence in version B begins with old information and bridges to new information. Here's Version B again with the relevant parts emboldened:

Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. In brief, balance theory tells us that if an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other (1973:1363). Granovetter argues that because of this, bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties (1973:1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. This is because if two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. The only way, therefore, that people in different cliques can be connected is through weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the “friends of friends.”

The first sentence establishes the key idea of balance theory. The next sentence begins with balance theory and ends with social ties, which is the focus of the third sentence. The concept of weak ties connects the third and fourth sentences and concept of cliques the fifth and sixth sentences. In Version A, in contrast, the first sentence focuses on balance theory, but then the second sentence makes a new point about social ties *before* telling the reader that the point comes from balance theory. The reader has to take in a lot of unfamiliar information before learning how it fits in with familiar concepts. Version A is coherent, but the lack of cohesion makes it tedious to read.

The lesson is this: if you or others perceive a passage you've written to be awkward or choppy, even though the topic is consistent, try rewriting it to ensure that each sentence begins with a familiar term or concept. If your points don't naturally daisy-chain together like the examples given here, consider numbering them. For example, you may choose to write, “Proponents of the legislation point to four major benefits.” Then you could discuss four loosely related ideas without leaving your reader wondering how they relate.

While cohesion is about the sense of flow; coherence is about the sense of the whole. For example, here's a passage that is cohesive (from sentence to sentence) but lacks coherence:

Your social networks and your location within them shape the kinds and amount of information that you have access to. Information is distinct from data, in that makes some kind of generalization about a person, thing, or population. Defensible generalizations about society can be either probabilities (i.e., statistics) or patterns (often from qualitative analysis). Such probabilities and patterns can be temporal, spatial, or simultaneous.

Each sentence in the above passage starts with a familiar idea and progresses to a new one, but it lacks coherence—a sense of being about one thing. Good writers often write passages like that when they're free-writing or using the drafting stage to cast a wide net for ideas. A writer weighing the power and limits of social network analysis may free-write something like that example and, from there, develop a more specific plan for summarizing key insights about social networks and then discussing them with reference to the core tenets of social science. As a draft, an incoherent paragraph often points to a productive line of reasoning; one just has to continue thinking it through in order to identify a clear argumentative purpose for each paragraph. With its purpose defined, each paragraph, then, becomes a lot easier to write. Coherent paragraphs aren't just about style; they are a sign of a thoughtful, well developed analysis.

Reading from Amy Guptill The College at Brockport, SUNY [Writing in College - From Competence to Excellence](#)

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4.4: Developing Paragraphs with Evidence and Examples

Development means providing enough detail for readers to fully understand your idea. Most college paragraphs include several types of support:

Explanation

Clarify what you mean and why it matters.

Examples

Give specific cases or illustrations.

Facts and Data

Show concrete information that supports your point.

Quotes or Paraphrases

Use credible sources to add authority.

Analysis

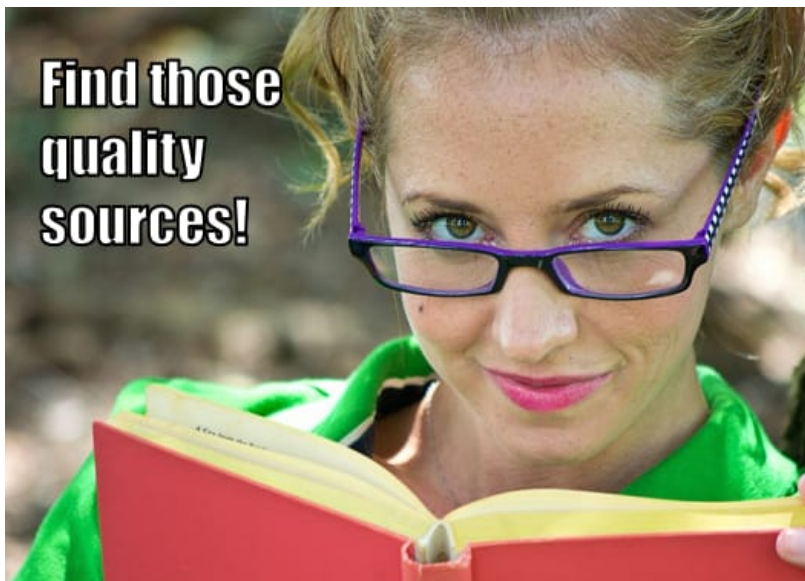
Explain how the evidence supports the controlling idea.

A good rule: if a reader might ask “How?” or “Why?,” you probably need more development.

Recommended OER Readings

Using Evidence

Using Evidence



When writing an argumentative essay, you'll definitely want to locate quality sources to support your claims, and you have a lot of options for sources. You can look for support for your argument in journal articles, magazine articles, documentaries, and more. You may even be allowed to use **personal experience** and observations, but this isn't always the case. No matter what, you'll want logical, clear, and reasonable evidence that helps you support your claims and convince your audience.

It's important to review the **logical fallacies** before you develop evidence for your claims. If you're using personal experience, you have to be careful that you don't make claims that are too broad based on limited experiences.

The following pages provide you with information on the types of sources you may be able to include, how to decide if your sources are credible, and how to make good decisions about using your sources.

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4.5: Paragraph Types (Narrative, Descriptive, Expository, Argumentative)

Different types of paragraphs serve different writing purposes.

Narrative Paragraph

- Tells a story or describes an event.
- Uses chronological order, sensory details, and often personal experience.

Descriptive Paragraph

- Creates a picture using sensory details.
- Focuses on what something looks, sounds, or feels like.

Expository Paragraph

- Explains a concept or provides information.
- Common in academic and technical writing.

Argumentative Paragraph

- Makes a claim and supports it with reasoning and evidence.

Common in persuasive and research-based writing.

Even though paragraphs have different purposes, they all need:

- A clear main idea
- Development
- Coherence
- Logical flow

Recommended OER Readings

Types of Writing

There are four main types of writing: expository, descriptive, persuasive, and narrative. Each of these writing styles is used for a specific purpose. A single text may include more than one writing style.

EXPOSITORY

Expository writing is one of the most common types of writing. When an author writes in an expository style, all they are trying to do is explain a concept, imparting information from themselves to a wider audience. Expository writing does not include the author's opinions, but focuses on accepted facts about a topic, including statistics or other evidence.

Example 4.5.1:

Examples of Expository Writing

- Textbooks

- How-to articles
- Recipes
- News stories (not editorials or Op-Eds)
- Business, technical, or scientific writing

DESCRIPTIVE

Descriptive writing is often found in fiction, though it can make an appearance in nonfiction as well (for example, memoirs, first-hand accounts of events, or travel guides). When an author writes in a descriptive style, they are painting a picture in words of a person, place, or thing for their audience. The author might employ metaphor or other literary devices in order to describe the author's impressions via their five senses (what they hear, see, smell, taste, or touch). But the author is not trying to convince the audience of anything or explain the scene – merely describe things as they are.

Example 4.5.2:

Examples of Descriptive Writing

- Poetry
- Journal/diary writing
- Descriptions of Nature
- Fictional novels or plays

PERSUASIVE

Persuasive writing is the main style of writing you will use in academic papers. When an author writes in a persuasive style, they are trying to convince the audience of a position or belief. Persuasive writing contains the author's opinions and biases, as well as justifications and reasons given by the author as evidence of the correctness of their position. Any "argumentative" essay you write in school should be in the persuasive style of writing.

Example 4.5.3:

Examples of Persuasive Writing

- Cover letters
- Op-Eds and Editorial newspaper articles
- Reviews of items
- Letters of complaint
- Advertisements
- Letters of recommendation

NARRATIVE

Narrative writing is used in almost every longer piece of writing, whether fiction or nonfiction. When an author writes in a narrative style, they are not just trying to impart information, they are trying to construct and communicate a story, complete with characters, conflict, and settings.

Example 4.5.4:

Examples of Narrative Writing

- Oral histories
- Novels/Novellas
- Poetry (especially epic sagas or poems)
- Short Stories
- Anecdotes

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5: ACADEMIC ESSAYS (BASICS)

5.1: What an Essay Is

5.2: Structure of an Academic Essay

5.3: Developing a Strong Thesis

5.4: Common Essay Patterns (Comparison, Cause-Effect, Analysis)

5.5: Peer Review Basics

5.1: What an Essay Is

An essay is a focused piece of writing that makes a point and supports it with reasoning and evidence.

In college, essays are tools for:

- Exploring ideas
- Analyzing texts or issues
- Arguing a position
- Explaining concepts

Essays are not just collections of paragraphs. They are organized arguments. Every part of an essay works together to help readers understand your main point.

Recommended OER Readings

What is an Academic Essay?

In college writing classes, your instructor may ask you to write an essay. The word 'essay' comes from the French word “essayer,” which means to try or attempt. So what are we trying to attempt when writing an essay? In academic essays, we aim to share ideas, feeling, or claims through writing. Instead of simple reporting of facts, you will write to persuade your reader to accept your ideas. You will also practice rhetoric and information literacy to make your arguments stronger. All this comes together in a short piece of writing that conveys your message in a text we call an [essay](#).

LauraLee Miller Western Technical College in [Argument in Action: Academic Writing and Critical Thought](#)

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5.2: Structure of an Academic Essay

Most academic essays follow a familiar structure:

1. Introduction – prepares readers and presents the thesis
2. Body Paragraphs – develop and support the thesis with evidence
3. Conclusion – reinforces the main ideas and gives readers a final insight

This structure helps writers organize their thinking and helps readers follow the argument.

Introduction

An introduction sets the stage for your essay. A strong introduction:

- Introduces the topic
- Provides brief context
- Leads toward your thesis
- Engages the reader

Many writers use a “funnel” shape. Start broad and narrow to the specific claim.

Effective introductions often include:

- A question
- A surprising fact
- A brief story
- A relevant observation

Your introduction should prepare readers without overwhelming them.

Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph should develop one aspect of your thesis.

A well-structured paragraph includes:

1. Topic Sentence – the main idea of the paragraph
2. Evidence – examples, data, quotes, or explanation
3. Analysis – your interpretation of the evidence
4. Connection – how this paragraph supports the thesis

Body paragraphs should flow logically from one to the next.

Transitions help readers follow your reasoning.

Conclusion

A conclusion brings the essay to a thoughtful close.

A strong conclusion does more than restate the thesis.

It may:

- Summarize key ideas
- Reflect on the significance of the argument
- Offer a broader insight
- Suggest implications or next steps

Avoid introducing brand-new arguments. Instead, leave the reader with a sense of closure and meaning.

Recommended OER Readings

Learning Objectives

- Identify strategies for revising for paragraph structure

Most formal writing will require you to organize information in paragraphs. There are many strategies for composing paragraphs, but most boil down to a similar formula that includes a key sentence, evidence, and author commentary on that evidence. If you already have these elements in a paragraph, you'll want to focus on the organization of ideas within a paragraph. Creating a reverse micro outline or cutting up the sentences of an individual paragraph, along with strengthening transitions within a paragraph, can help you as you revise for paragraph structure.

In general, if you feel your readers may have a hard time making connections, providing transition words (e.g., “due to” or “on the other hand”) can help lead them. Transitions between paragraphs may appear at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places. If the transition introduces new ideas, it usually appears at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Below is a chart of transition words that are useful for linking ideas within a paragraph:

<https://h5p.cwr.olemiss.edu/h5p/embed/100>

practice

Select the most appropriate transitions in the following passage:

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/16742>

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- Revising and Editing. **Provided by:** Bay College. **Located at:** [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Book%3ARhetoric_and_Composition_\(Bay_College\)/02%3A_The_Writing_Process/2.5%3A_Revising_and_Editing](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Book%3ARhetoric_and_Composition_(Bay_College)/02%3A_The_Writing_Process/2.5%3A_Revising_and_Editing). **Project:** LibreTexts. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)

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5.3: Developing a Strong Thesis

Developing a powerful thesis requires reflection and revision. Strategies include:

- Asking a focused question → then answering it
- Freewriting until a pattern emerges
- Narrowing a broad topic
- Taking a debatable position
- Using the “because” test:
- My claim is true because...
- Checking that each body paragraph clearly supports the thesis

Your thesis may evolve as you draft and revise. This is normal and healthy.

Recommended OER Readings

Do I Need to Edit My Thesis?

A careful analysis of your notes will help you reevaluate your working thesis and determine whether you need to revise it. Remember that your working thesis was the starting point—not necessarily the end point—of your research. You should revise your working thesis if your ideas have changed. Even if your sources generally confirmed your preliminary thinking on the topic, it is still a good idea to tweak the wording of your thesis to incorporate the specific details you learned from research.

For most college papers, a thesis advocates a specific point of view on a debatable issue. In academic writing, the thesis is often stated directly somewhere in the first few paragraphs of the paper. A thesis is a point. Theses are not statements of facts, simple questions, or summaries of events. They are positions that you as the writer take on and defend with evidence, logic, observations, and the other tools of discourse. Most kinds of writing—and particularly academic writing—have a thesis, directly stated or implied. Even most of the writing we largely think of as informational has a directly stated or implied thesis.

Theses also tend to lend a certain organization to written arguments since what you include (or exclude) in a written text is largely controlled by the thesis. The main goal of the thesis (either as a specific statement or as an implied statement) is to answer two key questions that are concerns of all readers: “What’s your point?” and “Why should I care?”

A working thesis is more or less a temporary thesis you devise in the beginning of the research process in order to set some direction in your research. Your working thesis is temporary and should change as you research, write, and learn more about your topic. What does a working thesis look like? Before considering some potentially good examples of working theses, read through these bad examples of statements:

NOT Thesis Statements

None of these sentences would make effective theses because each of these is more or less a statement of fact. Of course, we could debate some of the details here. But practically speaking, most people would assume and believe these statements to be true. Because of that, these statements don’t have much potential as working theses.

- Computer crime is bad.
- Fisheries around the world are important.
- The Great Gatsby is an American novel.

NOT Thesis Statements Either

These revised working thesis statements are better than the previous examples, but they are not quite working theses yet. The problem with these possible working theses is that they are hopelessly vague and give no idea to the reader where the essay is going. Also, while these statements are a bit more debatable than the previous group of examples, they are still statements that

most people would more or less accept as facts.

- There are many controversial ways of dealing with computer crime.
- There are many things that could be done to preserve fisheries around the world.
- The Great Gatsby is a wonderful novel for several different reasons.

Still NOT Thesis Statements

Each of these statements is close to being a working thesis because each is about an idea that has been focused into a specific topic. However, these statements are not quite working thesis statements because they don't offer a position or opinion that will be defended in some way. To turn these topics into working theses, the writer needs to take a side on the issues suggested in the statements.

- This essay will be about the role computer hackers play in computer crime committed on the Internet.
- This essay will discuss some of the measures the international community should take in order to preserve fisheries around the world.
- My essay is about the relevance today of The Great Gatsby's depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream.

Possible Working Thesis Statements

If you compare these possible working theses with the statements at the beginning of this section, you can see the characteristics of a viable working thesis. Each of the working thesis statements takes a stand that is generally not considered a fact, is specific enough to give the writer and potential reader some idea as to the direction the writing will take, and offers an initial position on the topic that takes a stand.

- While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.
- The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world.
- The Great Gatsby's depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today.

Another useful characteristic of a good working thesis is that it can help you as a writer to determine what your essay will NOT be about. For example, the phrasing of the working thesis on computer hackers suggests to both the reader and the researcher that the essay will NOT be about the failure of "dot com" business, computer literacy, or computer software. Certainly, these issues are related to the issue of computer hackers and computer crime, but these other issues will not become the focus of the essay.

Example 5.3.1

Recheck Your Thesis Statement

- [EVC Library Video: Thesis Statement](#)

LICENSES AND ATTRIBUTIONS

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5.4: Common Essay Patterns (Comparison, Cause–Effect, Analysis)

Academic essays often follow certain patterns or modes.

Comparison/Contrast

Shows similarities and differences between two subjects.

Useful for literature, history, or evaluating choices.

Cause and Effect

Explains why something happens or what results follow.

Useful for social issues, science, and argument writing.

Analysis

Breaks down a topic into parts to understand how it works.

Common in literature, media studies, and academic arguments.

Writers may blend these patterns depending on their purpose.

Recommended OER Readings

The term rhetorical modes refers to the different styles and techniques we use when we write. This chapter will discuss different modes, explaining the specific aspects and techniques involved in these methods of communication. As you read about these, remember that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on his/her purpose for writing. Some assignments ask students to use a specific rhetorical mode, such as writing a descriptive passage or contrasting two concepts, but most essays incorporate several different rhetorical modes to express an idea. Overall, the rhetorical modes are a set of tools that allow you different methods to effectively communicate information to your audience.

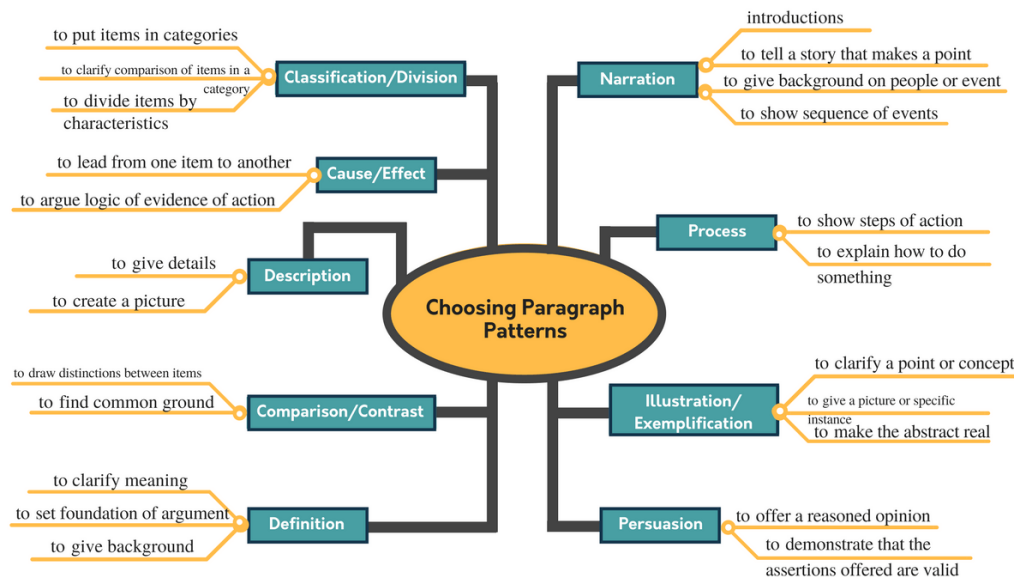


Figure 5.4.1A description of different paragraph patterns

- **5.1: Narrative**

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. This is a form we are familiar with, as any time we tell a story about an event or incident in our day, we are engaging in a form of narration.

- **5.2: Description**

Description is the tool writers use to make things come alive for their readers, to make sure that their audience is fully immersed in the words on the page. Every time you tell a story to someone, or tell someone about something, you use description even if you don't know it.

- **5.3: Process Analysis**

The purpose of a process analysis essay is to explain how to do something or how something works. In either case, the formula for a process analysis essay remains the same. The process is articulated into clear, definitive steps.

- **5.4: Illustration and Exemplification**

To illustrate means to show or demonstrate something clearly through the use of evidence. To exemplify means to demonstrate through the use of examples. This is a technique that can stand alone but is most often used within an essay to demonstrate the various points that an essay is offering as it supports its thesis.

- **5.5: Cause and Effect**

It is often considered human nature to ask, "why?" and "how?" We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why our colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well.

- **5.6: Compare and Contrast**

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

- **5.7: Definition**

The purpose of a definition essay may seem self-explanatory, to simply define something. But defining terms in writing is often more complicated than just consulting a dictionary. In fact, the way we define terms can have far-reaching consequences for individuals as well as collective groups.

- **5.8: Classification**

The purpose of classification is to break down broad subjects into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts. We classify things in our daily lives all the time, often without even thinking about it.

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5.5: Peer Review Basics

Peer review is a critical part of the writing process. It helps you:

- See your writing from a reader's perspective
- Identify unclear or underdeveloped areas
- Improve organization and coherence
- Practice giving constructive feedback

Effective peer reviewers:

- Focus on ideas, structure, and clarity before grammar
- Use specific examples from the draft
- Ask questions instead of giving orders
- Are respectful and honest

Writers benefit by learning how others interpret their work.

Recommended OER Readings

Many students are quite nervous when first faced with peer review, but do not fret: no one expects you to be a grammarian or professional editor. Instead, you should respond to your peer's paper as someone who has written a similar paper and can speak as a peer, not as an expert.

Peer review is an important activity because it helps you see your own writing through new eyes. Seeing how another writer has succeeded and struggled with a paper similar to yours will help you consider your own work with new eyes when you return to it. Further, community is important in any class, and writing is at the center of a writing class, so building community through sharing our writing is really a natural process in an English classroom. Changing your mindset to see peer review as a community building activity that can be very productive for the writing process will indeed help the peer review process proceed smoothly.

The role of a peer reviewer:

- You are not casting judgment on a work, you are coaching the writer. Remember to include the writer in the process, helping them find the draft's strengths and weaknesses rather than telling them what they are or are not doing wrong.
- Check with the writer to make sure you're understanding the main ideas of the work.
- Give specific compliments and specific criticism; reviewing is not just about one or the other.
- If you find a passage confusing, ask the writer for clarification.
- Always express an interest in reading the next draft.

Tips for Marking Your Peer's Paper

1. Read the entire paper through before you start making any comments to get a sense for the paper and its general strengths and weaknesses.
2. If you think a sentence, phrase, etc., might need revision but you cannot tell why it is incorrect, circle or underline it and put a question mark to the side to show your uncertainty. This encourages the writer to review that section with skeptical eyes.
3. Identify parts of your peer's paper to help them re-consider their structure: put TH by the thesis and TS by the topic sentence of each paragraph. Further, mark transitions with a TR so that your peer and you can see where there is more work needed to show the relationship between ideas. If the writer is lacking any of these elements, consider pointing out the omission.
4. Point out specific elements of the paper you like and put positive comments in the margins.

5. When you think writing out an idea will be unclear, talk to the author about it. Talking is never against the rules, and face to face communication is generally clearer than written. Especially if you aren't sure how to say something or you have a question, be sure to ask the author or explain your point so you are sure they understand. If you are in an online class, consider posting a comment to your peer on the draft, asking your question.
6. Be sure to give some local comments (edits) and also offer some general feedback (ideas for revision). Edits generally focus on smaller issues within a sentence or section of a paper whereas revision has to do with more overarching issues (i.e. a story that is lacking description, an argument that is lacking proof, or an unstructured paper).

Conducting Peer Review in Canvas

There is more than one way to complete peer review in Canvas, and your instructor may require you to complete this activity via a discussion or a peer review assignment. Regardless of the method for completing online peer review, this activity is frequently time consuming and frustrating for new online students. Be sure to leave yourself ample time to complete this activity and start on it early. There is a good chance that you will need to consult the Canvas help guide or read through the instructions a second time to get everything right.

When completing a Canvas peer review assignment, use the following steps to upload, return feedback, and view feedback from others:

1. Upload your rough draft to the peer review assignment
2. Once you are assigned a review, return to the original assignment (where you turned in your own rough draft). The review will appear directly below the icon letting you know you turned in the assignment. Click on the peer review.
3. A new window will open that contains your peer's paper. If you click "View Feedback," you can put comments directly on the paper within Canvas using their commenting and highlighting tools. You can also download the paper from this page to comment on and upload it with comments.
4. Leave a general comment or feedback in the comment box to the far right of the screen. You can also upload files by attaching them to the general comment stream.
5. If you need to navigate back to the assignment, be sure to click on the "peer review" link instead of turning your review in as your assignment. You do not want to go back through the assignment submission process as this will override your original rough draft for your peer reviewer. Instead, be sure to upload all documents as an attachment to a comment.

See this [video for more ideas on how to mark your peer's paper peer review](#), whether online or face to face

6: USING EVIDENCE

6.1: What Counts as Evidence in College Writing

6.2: Integrating Quotes, Paraphrases, and Summaries

6.3: Avoiding Plagiarism

6.4: Basics of Attribution and Citation

6.5: Using Verification and Fact-Checking Skills

6.5.1: Why Fact-Checking?

6.5.2: The SIFT Method

6.5.3: Using Wikipedia Effectively

6.5.4: Fact-Checking Images and Memes

6.5.5: Conclusion

6.1: What Counts as Evidence in College Writing

Different subjects use different types of evidence, but college writers commonly use:

Examples

- Specific illustrations that help explain an idea.
- Facts and Statistics
- Reliable data from credible sources.
- Expert Opinions
- Ideas from scholars, researchers, or professionals.
- Research Findings
- Results from studies, experiments, or surveys.
- Quotations from Texts
- Direct words from authors, characters, or sources.
- Paraphrases and Summaries
- Rewritten versions of someone else's ideas in your own words.
- Logical Reasoning
- Clear explanation of why something makes sense.

Good evidence is:

- Relevant
- Accurate
- Credible
- Clearly connected to the writer's point

Recommended OER Readings

WHAT THIS HANDOUT IS ABOUT

This handout will provide a broad overview of gathering and using evidence. It will help you decide what counts as evidence, put evidence to work in your writing, and determine whether you have enough evidence. It will also offer links to additional resources.

INTRODUCTION

Many papers that you write in college will require you to [make an argument](#); this means that you must take a position on the subject you are discussing and support that position with evidence. It's important that you use the right kind of evidence, that you use it effectively, and that you have an appropriate amount of it. If, for example, your philosophy professor didn't like it that you used a survey of public opinion as your primary evidence in your ethics paper, you need to find out more about what philosophers count as good evidence. If your instructor has told you that you need more analysis, suggested that you're "just listing" points or giving a "laundry list," or asked you how certain points are related to your argument, it may mean that you can do more to fully incorporate your evidence into your argument. Comments like "for example?," "proof?," "go deeper," or "expand" in the margins of your graded paper suggest that you may need more evidence. Let's take a look at each of these issues—understanding what counts as evidence, using evidence in your argument, and deciding whether you need more evidence.

WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE?

Before you begin gathering information for possible use as evidence in your argument, you need to be sure that you understand the purpose of your assignment. If you are working on a project for a class, look carefully at the assignment prompt. It may give you clues about what sorts of evidence you will need. Does the instructor mention any particular books you should use in writing

your paper or the names of any authors who have written about your topic? How long should your paper be (longer works may require more, or more varied, evidence)? What themes or topics come up in the text of the prompt? Our handout on [understanding writing assignments](#) can help you interpret your assignment. It's also a good idea to think over what has been said about the assignment in class and to talk with your instructor if you need clarification or guidance.

WHAT MATTERS TO INSTRUCTORS?

Instructors in different academic fields expect different kinds of arguments and evidence—your chemistry paper might include graphs, charts, statistics, and other quantitative data as evidence, whereas your English paper might include passages from a novel, examples of recurring symbols, or discussions of characterization in the novel. Consider what kinds of sources and evidence you have seen in course readings and lectures. You may wish to see whether the Writing Center has a handout regarding the specific academic field you're working in—for example, [literature](#), [sociology](#), or [history](#).

WHAT ARE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES?

A note on terminology: many researchers distinguish between primary and secondary sources of evidence (in this case, “primary” means “first” or “original,” not “most important”). Primary sources include original documents, photographs, interviews, and so forth. Secondary sources present information that has already been processed or interpreted by someone else. For example, if you are writing a paper about the movie “The Matrix,” the movie itself, an interview with the director, and production photos could serve as primary sources of evidence. A movie review from a magazine or a collection of essays about the film would be secondary sources. Depending on the context, the same item could be either a primary or a secondary source: if I am writing about people's relationships with animals, a collection of stories about animals might be a secondary source; if I am writing about how editors gather diverse stories into collections, the same book might now function as a primary source.

WHERE CAN I FIND EVIDENCE?

Here are some examples of sources of information and tips about how to use them in gathering evidence. Ask your instructor if you aren't sure whether a certain source would be appropriate for your paper.

Print and electronic sources

Books, journals, websites, newspapers, magazines, and documentary films are some of the most common sources of evidence for academic writing. Our handout on [evaluating print sources](#) will help you choose your print sources wisely, and the library has a [tutorial](#) on evaluating both print sources and websites. A librarian can help you find sources that are appropriate for the type of assignment you are completing. Just visit the reference desk at Davis or the Undergraduate Library or chat with a librarian online (the library's IM screen name is undergradref).

Observation

Sometimes you can directly observe the thing you are interested in, by watching, listening to, touching, tasting, or smelling it. For example, if you were asked to write about Mozart's music, you could listen to it; if your topic was how businesses attract traffic, you might go and look at window displays at the mall.

Interviews

An interview is a good way to collect information that you can't find through any other type of research. An interview can provide an expert's opinion, biographical or first-hand experiences, and suggestions for further research.

Surveys

Surveys allow you to find out some of what a group of people thinks about a topic. Designing an effective survey and interpreting the data you get can be challenging, so it's a good idea to check with your instructor before creating or administering a survey.

Experiments

Experimental data serve as the primary form of scientific evidence. For scientific experiments, you should follow the specific guidelines of the discipline you are studying. For writing in other fields, more informal experiments might be acceptable as evidence. For example, if you want to prove that food choices in a cafeteria are affected by gender norms, you might ask classmates to undermine those norms on purpose and observe how others react. What would happen if a football player were eating dinner with his teammates and he brought a small salad and diet drink to the table, all the while murmuring about his waistline and wondering how many fat grams the salad dressing contained?

Personal experience

Using your own experiences can be a powerful way to appeal to your readers. You should, however, use personal experience only when it is appropriate to your topic, your writing goals, and your audience. Personal experience should not be your only form of evidence in most papers, and some disciplines frown on using personal experience at all. For example, a story about the microscope you received as a Christmas gift when you were nine years old is probably not applicable to your biology lab report.

USING EVIDENCE IN AN ARGUMENT

Does evidence speak for itself?

Absolutely not. After you introduce evidence into your writing, you must say why and how this evidence supports your argument. In other words, you have to explain the significance of the evidence and its function in your paper. What turns a fact or piece of information into evidence is the connection it has with a larger claim or argument: evidence is always evidence *for* or *against* something, and you have to make that link clear.

As writers, we sometimes assume that our readers already know what we are talking about; we may be wary of elaborating too much because we think the point is obvious. But readers can't read our minds: although they may be familiar with many of the ideas we are discussing, they don't know what we are trying to do with those ideas unless we indicate it through explanations, organization, transitions, and so forth. Try to spell out the connections that you were making in your mind when you chose your evidence, decided where to place it in your paper, and drew conclusions based on it. Remember, you can always cut prose from your paper later if you decide that you are stating the obvious.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself about a particular bit of evidence:

1. O.k., I've just stated this point, but so what? Why is it interesting? Why should anyone care?
2. What does this information imply?
3. What are the consequences of thinking this way or looking at a problem this way?
4. I've just described what something is like or how I see it, but why is it like that?
5. I've just said that something happens-so how does it happen? How does it come to be the way it is?
6. Why is this information important? Why does it matter?
7. How is this idea related to my thesis? What connections exist between them? Does it support my thesis? If so, how does it do that?
8. Can I give an example to illustrate this point?

Answering these questions may help you explain how your evidence is related to your overall argument.

HOW CAN I INCORPORATE EVIDENCE INTO MY PAPER?

There are many ways to present your evidence. Often, your evidence will be included as text in the body of your paper, as a quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Sometimes you might include graphs, charts, or tables; excerpts from an interview; or photographs or illustrations with accompanying captions.

Quotations

When you quote, you are reproducing another writer's words exactly as they appear on the page. Here are some tips to help you

decide when to use quotations:

1. Quote if you can't say it any better and the author's words are particularly brilliant, witty, edgy, distinctive, a good illustration of a point you're making, or otherwise interesting.
2. Quote if you are using a particularly authoritative source and you need the author's expertise to back up your point.
3. Quote if you are analyzing diction, tone, or a writer's use of a specific word or phrase.
4. Quote if you are taking a position that relies on the reader's understanding exactly what another writer says about the topic.

Be sure to introduce each quotation you use, and always cite your sources. See our handout on [quotations](#) for more details on when to quote and how to format quotations.

Like all pieces of evidence, a quotation can't speak for itself. If you end a paragraph with a quotation, that may be a sign that you have neglected to discuss the importance of the quotation in terms of your argument. It's important to avoid "plop quotations," that is, quotations that are just dropped into your paper without any introduction, discussion, or follow-up.

Paraphrasing

When you paraphrase, you take a specific section of a text and put it into your own words. Putting it into your own words doesn't mean just changing or rearranging a few of the author's words: to paraphrase well and avoid plagiarism, try setting your source aside and restating the sentence or paragraph you have just read, as though you were describing it to another person. Paraphrasing is different than summary because a paraphrase focuses on a particular, fairly short bit of text (like a phrase, sentence, or paragraph). You'll need to indicate when you are paraphrasing someone else's text by citing your source correctly, just as you would with a quotation.

When might you want to paraphrase?

1. Paraphrase when you want to introduce a writer's position, but his or her original words aren't special enough to quote.
2. Paraphrase when you are supporting a particular point and need to draw on a certain place in a text that supports your point—for example, when one paragraph in a source is especially relevant.
3. Paraphrase when you want to present a writer's view on a topic that differs from your position or that of another writer; you can then refute writer's specific points in your own words after you paraphrase.
4. Paraphrase when you want to comment on a particular example that another writer uses.
5. Paraphrase when you need to present information that's unlikely to be questioned.

Summary

When you summarize, you are offering an overview of an entire text, or at least a lengthy section of a text. Summary is useful when you are providing background information, grounding your own argument, or mentioning a source as a counter-argument. A summary is less nuanced than paraphrased material. It can be the most effective way to incorporate a large number of sources when you don't have a lot of space. When you are summarizing someone else's argument or ideas, be sure this is clear to the reader and cite your source appropriately.

Statistics, data, charts, graphs, photographs, illustrations

Sometimes the best evidence for your argument is a hard fact or visual representation of a fact. This type of evidence can be a solid backbone for your argument, but you still need to create context for your reader and draw the connections you want him or her to make. Remember that statistics, data, charts, graph, photographs, and illustrations are all open to interpretation. Guide the reader through the interpretation process. Again, always, cite the origin of your evidence if you didn't produce the material you are using yourself.

DO I NEED MORE EVIDENCE?

Let's say that you've identified some appropriate sources, found some evidence, explained to the reader how it fits into your overall argument, incorporated it into your draft effectively, and cited your sources. How do you tell whether you've got enough evidence and whether it's working well in the service of a strong argument or analysis? Here are some techniques you can use to review your draft and assess your use of evidence.

Make a reverse outline

A reverse outline is a great technique for helping you see how each paragraph contributes to proving your thesis. When you make a reverse outline, you record the main ideas in each paragraph in a shorter (outline-like) form so that you can see at a glance what is in your paper. The reverse outline is helpful in at least three ways. First, it lets you see where you have dealt with too many topics in one paragraph (in general, you should have one main idea per paragraph). Second, the reverse outline can help you see where you need more evidence to prove your point or more analysis of that evidence. Third, the reverse outline can help you write your topic sentences: once you have decided what you want each paragraph to be about, you can write topic sentences that explain the topics of the paragraphs and state the relationship of each topic to the overall thesis of the paper.

For tips on making a reverse outline, see our handout on [organization](#).

Color code your paper

You will need three highlighters or colored pencils for this exercise. Use one color to highlight general assertions. These will typically be the topic sentences in your paper. Next, use another color to highlight the specific evidence you provide for each assertion (including quotations, paraphrased or summarized material, statistics, examples, and your own ideas). Lastly, use another color to highlight analysis of your evidence. Which assertions are key to your overall argument? Which ones are especially contestable? How much evidence do you have for each assertion? How much analysis? In general, you should have at least as much analysis as you do evidence, or your paper runs the risk of being more summary than argument. The more controversial an assertion is, the more evidence you may need to provide in order to persuade your reader.

Play devil's advocate, act like a child, or doubt everything

This technique may be easiest to use with a partner. Ask your friend to take on one of the roles above, then read your paper aloud to him/her. After each section, pause and let your friend interrogate you. If your friend is playing devil's advocate, he or she will always take the opposing viewpoint and force you to keep defending yourself. If your friend is acting like a child, he or she will question every sentence, even seemingly self-explanatory ones. If your friend is a doubter, he or she won't believe anything you say. Justifying your position verbally or explaining yourself will force you to strengthen the evidence in your paper. If you already have enough evidence but haven't connected it clearly enough to your main argument, explaining to your friend how the evidence is relevant or what it proves may help you to do so.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- I have a general topic in mind; how can I develop it so I'll know what evidence I need? And how can I get ideas for more evidence? See our handout on [brainstorming](#).
- Who can help me find evidence on my topic? Check out [UNC Libraries](#).
- I'm writing for a specific purpose; how can I tell what kind of evidence my audience wants? See our handouts on [audience](#), [writing for specific disciplines](#), and [particular writing assignments](#).
- How should I read materials to gather evidence? See our handout on [reading to write](#).
- How can I make a good argument? Check out our handouts on [argument](#) and [thesis statements](#).
- How do I tell if my paragraphs and my paper are well-organized? Review our handouts on [paragraph development](#), [transitions](#), and [reorganizing drafts](#).
- How do I quote my sources and incorporate those quotes into my text? Our handouts on [quotations](#) and [avoiding plagiarism](#) offer useful tips.
- How do I cite my evidence? See the [UNC Libraries citation tutorial](#).
- I think that I'm giving evidence, but my instructor says I'm using too much summary. How can I tell? Check out our handout on using [summary](#) wisely.
- I want to use personal experience as evidence, but can I say "I"? We have a handout on [when to use "I."](#)

WORKS CONSULTED

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on

formatting citations, please see the [UNC Libraries citation tutorial](#).

Lunsford, Andrea A., and John J. Ruszkiewicz, John J. Everything's an argument. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999

Miller, Richard E., and Kurt Spellmeyer. The New Humanities Reader Home Page. 22 Feb. 2005 http://www.newhum.com/for_students/t...ama/index.html.

http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/library_guides_subject.html

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6.2: Integrating Quotes, Paraphrases, and Summaries

Writers use sources in three main ways:

Quoting

Using the exact words from a source.

Use quotes when the wording is powerful, precise, or hard to paraphrase.

Paraphrasing

Rewriting a source's idea completely in your own words and sentence structure.

Paraphrases should be roughly the same length as the original, but expressed differently.

Summarizing

Condensing the source's main ideas into a much shorter explanation.

Summaries focus on the essential points only.

Regardless of method, you must:

1. Introduce the source (signal phrase)
2. Present the quote/paraphrase/summary
3. Explain why it matters (analysis)
4. Cite the source

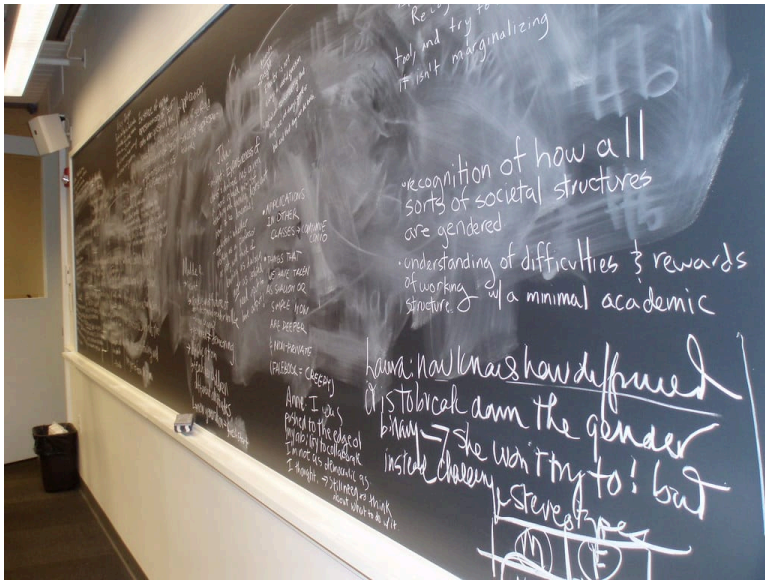
Example signal phrases:

- According to researchers...
- The article argues that...
- As Smith explains...

Recommended OER Readings

Integrating Academic Peer-Reviewed Sources into Your Writing

Integrating academic peer-reviewed sources into your writing is essential for producing high-quality, credible research. This process involves outlining your paper, properly citing sources in-text, understanding different citation styles (APA, MLA, Chicago), using block quotes appropriately, and compiling a reference list or works cited page. Below are key steps and guidelines to help you effectively incorporate sources into your academic writing.



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Outlining Your Paper

An effective outline provides a structured framework for your paper, ensuring your arguments flow logically and cohesively. Follow these steps to create a comprehensive outline:

1. **Introduction:** Start with a hook, provide background information, and end with a clear thesis statement.
2. **Body Paragraphs:** Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence, followed by evidence (such as peer-reviewed sources), analysis, and a concluding sentence. Organize paragraphs by themes or arguments.
3. **Conclusion:** Summarize the main points, restate the thesis in light of the evidence presented, and provide final thoughts or call to action.



Figure: Citation Manuals at Coalinga College Library [CC BY NC SA](#)

In-Text Citations

In-text citations give credit to the original authors of the sources you use and allow readers to locate the full references. Different citation styles have specific rules for in-text citations:

- **APA:** Author's last name and year of publication (e.g., Smith, 2020).
- **MLA:** Author's last name and page number (e.g., Smith 23).
- **Chicago:** Author's last name, year of publication, and page number for notes and bibliography style (e.g., Smith 2020, 23).

Citation Styles

Understanding and correctly applying different citation styles is crucial for academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism.

- **APA (American Psychological Association):** Common in social sciences. Emphasizes the author-date format for in-text citations and a comprehensive reference list.
 - Example: (Smith, 2020)
 - Reference: Smith, J. (2020). *Title of the Book*. Publisher.
- **MLA (Modern Language Association):** Used in humanities. Focuses on author-page number for in-text citations and a works cited page.
 - Example: (Smith 23)
 - Works Cited: Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.
- **Chicago:** Utilized in history and some social sciences. Offers two formats: notes and bibliography (footnotes/endnotes) and author-date.
 - Example (Notes and Bibliography): (John Smith, *Title of the Book* (Publisher, 2020), 23.)
 - Example (Author-Date): (Smith 2020, 23)
 - Bibliography: Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.



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Block Quotes

Block quotes are used for longer quotations (more than 40 words in APA or more than four lines in MLA) and are formatted differently from regular text:

- **APA:** Indent the entire quote 0.5 inches from the left margin, double-space the text, and do not use quotation marks. The citation comes after the punctuation.
 - Example:

This is an example of a block quote. The text is indented and does not use quotation marks. The citation appears after the punctuation. (Smith, 2020, p. 45)

- **MLA:** Indent the entire quote one inch from the left margin, double-space the text, and do not use quotation marks. The citation comes after the punctuation.
 - Example:

This is an example of a block quote. The text is indented, and there are no quotation marks. The citation appears after the punctuation. (Smith 23)

References/Works Cited

At the end of your paper, include a list of all sources cited in your text. This section is titled "References" in APA, "Works Cited" in MLA, and "Bibliography" in Chicago (notes and bibliography).

- **APA:**
 - References:
 - Smith, J. (2020). *Title of the Book*. Publisher.
 - Jones, A. (2019). Article Title. *Journal Name*, 23(4), 56-78. <https://doi.org/10.1234/journal.v23i4.12345>
- **MLA:**
 - Works Cited:
 - Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.
 - Jones, Ann. "Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2019, pp. 56-78. doi:10.1234/journal.v23i4.12345.
- **Chicago:**
 - Bibliography:
 - Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.
 - Jones, Ann. "Article Title." *Journal Name* 23, no. 4 (2019): 56-78. <https://doi.org/10.1234/journal.v23i4.12345>.

Example: Integrating a Peer-Reviewed Source

Suppose you are writing a paper on the health effects of caffeine. You might outline your argument to include a section on the benefits of caffeine consumption supported by peer-reviewed studies. Here's how you might integrate a source:

Outline:

- **Introduction:** Brief background on caffeine consumption and its relevance to health.
- **Body Paragraph:**
 - **Topic Sentence:** "Caffeine has been shown to have several health benefits."
 - **Evidence:** "According to Smith (2020), moderate caffeine consumption can improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of certain diseases (p. 45)."
 - **Analysis:** "These findings suggest that caffeine, when consumed in moderation, can be a valuable addition to a healthy lifestyle."
- **Conclusion:** Summarize key points and implications for further research.

In-Text Citation:

- APA: (Smith, 2020, p. 45)
- MLA: (Smith 45)
- Chicago: (Smith 2020, 45)

References/Works Cited:

- APA: Smith, J. (2020). *Title of the Book*. Publisher.
- MLA: Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.
- Chicago: Smith, John. *Title of the Book*. Publisher, 2020.

Conclusion

Integrating academic peer-reviewed sources into your writing is a fundamental skill in academic research. By outlining your paper, using appropriate in-text citations, understanding different citation styles, using block quotes correctly, and compiling accurate reference lists, you can ensure your research is credible, well-supported, and scholarly. This structured approach not only strengthens your arguments but also enhances your critical thinking and writing skills.



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6.3: Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words, ideas, images, or data without proper credit.

It can be intentional or accidental.

Plagiarism includes:

- Copying a sentence without quotation marks and citation
- Paraphrasing too closely to the original wording
- Using ideas or data without attribution
- Submitting someone else's work as your own
- Reusing your own previous work without permission (self-plagiarism)

To avoid plagiarism:

- Take careful notes
- Use quotation marks for exact wording
- Paraphrase using your own structure and vocabulary
- Cite all sources
- Ask your instructor when in doubt

Academic honesty builds trust between you, your instructor, and your readers.

Recommended OER Readings

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using another thinker's words or ideas without giving them credit. In most essays, this means you use someone else's words or ideas without citing them. Other examples of plagiarism include:

- Submitting an essay written by someone else, in whole or in part
- Copying and pasting from another source without citing them
- Attempting to cite sources, but doing so incorrectly or in a way where it is unclear which ideas came from your mind and which came from other sources
- Correctly citing all sources, but most of your essay is made up of the words and ideas of others with very little of your own original ideas
- Re-using an essay you wrote in a previous class without instructor permission

Video: What is Plagiarism? by Excelsior OWL

[Video Transcript](#)

What are the Consequences of Plagiarism?

Most academics consider plagiarism a serious violation of academic honesty. Basically, by plagiarizing, you are betraying the trust of your instructor, peers, and institution. Consequences for plagiarism can include:

- Having to rewrite an assignment
- Receiving an F on the assignment
- Receiving an F in the class
- Being kicked out of the class
- Being kicked out of school
- Having a permanent mark on your transcript
- Being stripped of your degree
- Public admonishment
- Being sued for copyright infringement, which, in extreme cases, can cost millions of dollars (!!!). For example, [Marvin Gaye's family was able to win over 5 million dollars when singers Pharrell Williams and Robin Thicke plagiarized one of Marvin Gaye's songs!](#)

In most cases, copyright holders will not go after students because students tend not to have a lot of money laying around. That being said, plagiarism can still have serious consequences. Students should avoid plagiarism at all costs.

The consequences of plagiarism depend on many factors, including:

- The severity of the plagiarism
- Repeated plagiarism behavior
- Your instructor
- The course syllabus, which often describes the class policies and consequences for plagiarism
- Your college
- Your college's student handbook, which often describes the campus policies and consequences for plagiarism

Be sure to consult with your instructor and college about their policies on plagiarism.

How Can Students Avoid Plagiarism?

There are many different tactics for avoiding plagiarism.

1. **Do your own work specifically for the class or context you're writing for.** Your instructor wants to read your ideas. They want to see you engaging with the course materials. The writing you produce for a given class should reflect your learning in that class.
2. **Ask for help and use your resources.** A lot of times students plagiarize because they are stressed/running short on time/ have a legitimate extenuating life circumstance that got in the way of their writing process/left an assignment to the last minute due to procrastination. They might plagiarize out of desperation. In situations like these, it is better to email your professor and explain the situation and/or ask for an extension than to plagiarize. If you're struggling on an assignment, visit your instructor's office hours or your campus writing center to get support.
3. **Use secondary sources to support your argument, not comprise it.** A lot of students new to a given writing context feel imposter syndrome. They do not feel confident in themselves or their knowledge, so they defer to experts like scholars who wrote on the topic. Unfortunately, this often means the student's smart ideas and writing voice can get smothered by secondary sources! Your instructor doesn't want to read what Famous Scholar X wrote on a topic. If they wanted to read that, they could go read that scholar's work themselves. Rather, they want to read how YOU engaged with the topic! While the expected ratio of your words to other sources will vary depending on the context of your writing situation, usually aim for 80-90% your original ideas, arguments, analysis, and explanation and 10-20% summary, quotation, and paraphrase from sources.
4. **Use Summary, Quotation, and Paraphrase with intention.** Summary generally works to show engagement with main ideas in a given discourse. Quotation is usually used to show specific wording or concepts for deeper analysis. Paraphrase works to convey basic facts or data that you put into your own words. For all three types of engagement with secondary sources, be sure to include in-text citations! It should always be clear which ideas are yours and which belong to your sources.
 1. See [Summary, Quotation, and Paraphrase resource](#) for more on this topic!
5. **Practice Ethical Attribution** by citing all sources both in-text AND on the Works Cited page
 1. **Caveat:** You don't have to cite common knowledge. Common knowledge is usually comprised of obvious or general information that your audience is likely to know already. For example, you probably wouldn't need to cite that the President of the United States is Joe Biden [or whoever the current President is as you are reading this], since most people in your audience (depending on the context) probably know this information. But you would likely have to cite statistics about his approval rating, since most of your audience probably doesn't know this information off the top of their heads. What an audience knows or doesn't know depends on the audience and context, so you'll have to think

critically about your audience.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Video by Excelsior OWL

[Video Transcript](#)

What is Ethical Attribution?

Ethical attribution is giving credit to those whose words and ideas you use in your essays. In most MLA-style essays, ethical attribution has three parts: attributive tags, in-text parenthetical citations, and a Works Cited page to give credit. (In other disciplines' citations and formatting styles, the Works Cited page might be called a References page or Bibliography).

Attributive Tags

Attributive Tags signal to the reader that material from a source is about to appear in the essay.

Example: According to literary critic Harold Bloom....

In-Text Citations

In-Text Parenthetical Citations tell the reader that the words or ideas from the source have ended. It also tells the reader where to find the original source information on the Works Cited page so they can see the original source themselves

Example: According to the literary critic Harold Bloom, "we are certain from the start that he is indeed King Hamlet's spirit," and not a demon as Horatio seems to suggest (Bloom 4).

Works Cited page

The Works Cited page gives more in-depth bibliographical information so that readers can find the original source. It appears at the end of the essay, on the last page. It should include all sources referenced in the essay.

Example:

Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*. New York: Riverhead, 2003.

Why Use Ethical Attribution?

There are several reasons to use ethical attribution

- **Builds Ethos.** By citing sources, you build credibility and trust with your audience. Readers are able to find the sources you cite. You also improve your essay's scholarly tone by using the formal conventions used by literary scholars, which include in-text and Works Cited citations.
- **Helps You Refine Your Own Ideas.** By clearly defining which ideas are your original ideas and which belong to other authors, you are better able to refine your ideas.
- **Helps You Avoid Plagiarism.** By citing sources correctly, you avoid plagiarism and its consequences.

Activity: Check Your Understanding of Plagiarism

Quiz from Excelsior OWL

Attribution

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6.4: Basics of Attribution and Citation

Attribution means giving credit to the source of an idea.

Citation refers to the specific formatting used to document that source.

Most Writing 101 courses use MLA or APA style. While details vary, both require:

In-Text Citations

Brief references in the sentence (e.g., author's name and page or year).

Examples:

- MLA: (Smith 42)
- APA: (Smith, 2020)

Works Cited / References Page

A list of complete source entries at the end of your essay.

Signal Phrases

Phrases that introduce evidence, such as:

- Smith argues...
- The report shows...

Citing sources:

- Shows academic honesty
- Helps readers verify information
- Strengthens your credibility as a writer

Recommended OER Readings

Learning Objectives

- Identify when to summarize, paraphrase, and directly quote information from research sources
- Identify when citations are needed
- Introduce sources
- Throughout the writing process, be scrupulous about documenting information taken from sources. The purpose of doing so is twofold:
 - To give credit to other writers or researchers for their ideas
 - To allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired

You will cite sources within the body of your paper and at the end of the paper in your references section. For this assignment, you will use the citation format used by the American Psychological Association (also known as APA style). Within this course and for all of your courses at JIBC, you will need to follow the [JIBC APA Reference Guide](#) when formatting citations and references within your papers.

This section covers the nitty-gritty details of in-text citations. You will learn how to format citations for different types of source

materials, whether you are citing brief quotations, paraphrasing ideas, or quoting longer passages. You will also learn techniques you can use to introduce quoted and paraphrased material effectively. Keep this section handy as a reference to consult while writing the body of your paper.

Formatting Cited Material: The Basics

In-text citations usually provide the name of the author(s) and the year the source was published. For direct quotations, the page number must also be included. Use past tense verbs when introducing a quote: for example, “Smith found....,” not “Smith finds....”

Citing Sources in the Body of Your Paper

In-text citations document your sources within the body of your paper. These include two vital pieces of information: the author’s name and the year the source material was published. When quoting a print source, also include in the citation the page number where the quoted material originally appears. The page number follows the year in the in-text citation. *Page numbers are necessary only when content has been directly quoted, not when it has been summarized or paraphrased.*

Using Source Material in Your Paper

One of the challenges of writing a research paper is successfully integrating your ideas with material from your sources. Your paper must explain what you think, or it will read like a disconnected string of facts and quotations. However, you also need to support your ideas with research, or they will seem insubstantial. How do you strike the right balance?

In your essay, the introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context. In the body paragraphs of your paper, you need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. You will use topic sentences in your paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or quotations you cite. You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or between paragraphs. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce paraphrased and quoted material.

Earlier you learned about summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting when taking notes. In the next few sections, you will learn how to use these techniques in the body of your paper to weave in source material to support your ideas.

Summarizing Sources

Look back at [Section 3.2](#) to refresh your memory of how Jorge summarized the article. As was mentioned there, when you are summarizing, you are focusing on identifying and sharing the main elements of a source. This is when you paraphrase the concepts and put them in your own words, demonstrating you have a firm understanding of the concepts presented and are able to incorporate them into your own paper.

Within a paragraph, this information may appear as part of your introduction to the material or as a parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence. Read the examples that follow.

Summary

Leibowitz (2008) found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and

control blood sugar levels.

The introduction to the source material (the **attributive tag**) includes the author's name followed by the year of publication in parentheses.

Summary

Low-carbohydrate diets often help subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood sugar levels (Leibowitz, 2008).

The parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence includes the author's name, a comma, and the year the source was published. The period at the end of the sentence comes after the parentheses.

Formatting Paraphrased and Summarized Material

When you paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you follow the same guidelines previously provided, except that you are not required to provide the page number where the ideas are located. If you are summing up the main findings of a research article, simply providing the author's name and publication year may suffice, but if you are paraphrasing a more specific idea, consider including the page number.

Read the following examples.

Chang (2008) pointed out that weight-bearing exercise has many potential benefits for women.

Here, the writer is summarizing a major idea that recurs throughout the source material. No page reference is needed.

Chang (2008) found that weight-bearing exercise could help women maintain or even increase bone density through middle age and beyond, reducing the likelihood that they will develop osteoporosis in later life (p. 86).

Although the writer is not directly quoting the source, this passage paraphrases a specific detail, so the writer chose to include the page number where the information is located.

Introducing Cited Material Effectively

Including an introductory phrase in your text, such as "Jackson wrote" or "Copeland found," often helps you integrate source material smoothly. This citation technique also helps convey that you are actively engaged with your source material. Unfortunately, during the process of writing your research paper, it is easy to fall into a rut and use the same few dull verbs repeatedly, such as "Jones said," "Smith stated," and so on.

Punch up your writing by using strong verbs that help your reader understand how the source material presents ideas. There is a world of difference between an author who "suggests" and one who "claims," one who "questions" and one who "criticizes." You do not need to consult your thesaurus every time you cite a source, but do think about which verbs will accurately represent the ideas and make your writing more engaging. **Table 9.1 Strong Verbs for Introducing Cited Material** shows some possibilities.

Table 9.1 - Strong Verbs for Introducing Cited Material

ask	suggest	question	recommend	determine	insist
explain	assert	claim	hypothesize	measure	argue
propose	compare	contrast	evaluate	conclude	find
study	sum up	believe	warn	point out	assess

When to Cite

Any idea or fact taken from an outside source must be cited, in both the body of your paper and the references. The only exceptions are facts or general statements that are common knowledge. Common knowledge facts or general statements are commonly supported by and found in multiple sources. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that most breads, pastas, and cereals are high in carbohydrates; this is well known and well documented. However, if a writer explained in detail the differences among the chemical structures of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite!

Fair Dealing

In recent years, issues related to the fair use of sources have been prevalent in popular culture. Recording artists, for example, may disagree about the extent to which one has the right to sample another's music. For academic purposes, however, the guidelines for fair dealing are reasonably straightforward.

Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. **Fair dealing** in copyright law allows a writer to legitimately use brief excerpts from source material to support and develop his or her own ideas. For instance, a columnist may excerpt a few sentences from a novel when writing a book review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work excessively, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair dealing.

As he worked on his draft, Jorge was careful to cite his sources correctly and not to rely excessively on any one source. Occasionally, however, he caught himself quoting a source at great length. In those instances, he highlighted the paragraph in question so that he could go back to it later and revise. Read the example, along with Jorge's revision.

Summary

Heinz (2009) found that "subjects in the low-carbohydrate group (30% carbohydrates; 40% protein, 30% fat) had a mean weight loss of 10 kg (22 lbs) over a four-month period." These results were "noticeably better than results for subjects on a low-fat diet (45% carbohydrates, 35% protein, 20% fat)" whose average weight loss was only "7 kg (15.4 lbs) in the same period." From this, it can be concluded that "low-carbohydrate diets obtain more rapid results." Other researchers agree that "at least in the short term, patients following low-carbohydrate diets enjoy greater success" than those who follow alternative plans (Johnson & Crowe, 2010).

Exercise 9.1

Paraphrasing practice is always a good thing! Take a look at Jorge's "summary" above. Notice he is not really summarizing but rather quoting. While this is technically not plagiarism, it does not show any processing of the information from the original source. It is just copying and pasting; the end result seems very choppy, and a lot of the information can be generalized.

For this exercise, try to rewrite Jorge's summary in your own words.

After reviewing the paragraph, Jorge realized that he had drifted into unoriginal writing. Most of the paragraph was taken verbatim from a single article. Although Jorge had enclosed the material in quotation marks, he knew it was not an appropriate way to use the research in his paper.

Summary

Low-carbohydrate diets may indeed be superior to other diet plans for short-term weight loss. In a study comparing low-carbohydrate diets and low-fat diets, Heinz (2009) found that subjects who followed a low-carbohydrate plan (30% of total calories) for four months lost, on average, about 3 kilograms more than subjects who followed a low-fat diet for the same time. Heinz concluded that these plans yield quick results, an idea supported by a similar study conducted by Johnson and Crowe (2010). What remains to be seen, however, is whether this initial success can be sustained for longer periods.

As Jorge revised the paragraph, he realized he did not need to quote these sources directly. Instead, he paraphrased their most important findings. He also made sure to include a topic sentence stating the main idea of the paragraph and a concluding sentence that transitioned to the next major topic in his essay.

Tip

It is extremely important to remember that even though you are summarizing and paraphrasing from another source—not quoting—you must still include a citation, including the last name(s) of the author(s) and the year of publication.

Example 6.4.1:

Additionally, marijuana burning creates toxins; this strategy is counterproductive, and there are numerous individual hazards associated with using the plant as medicine (Ogborne, Smart, & Adlaf, 2000).

Example taken from:

Writing Commons. (2014, September). Open Text. Retrieved from writingcommons.org/format/apa...quotations-apa

Writing at Work

It is important to accurately represent a colleague's ideas or communications in the workplace. When writing professional or academic papers, be mindful of how the words you use to describe someone's tone or ideas carry certain connotations. Do not say a source "argues" a particular point unless an argument is, in fact, presented. Use lively language, but avoid language that is emotionally charged. Doing so will ensure you have represented your colleague's words in an authentic and accurate way.

key takeaways

- An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas. The introduction and conclusion present and revisit the writer's thesis. The body of the paper develops the thesis and related points with information from research.
- Ideas and information taken from outside sources must be cited in the body of the paper and in the references section.
- Material taken from sources should be used to develop the writer's ideas. Summarizing and paraphrasing are usually most effective for this purpose.
- A summary concisely restates the main ideas of a source in the writer's own words.
- A paraphrase restates ideas from a source using the writer's own words and sentence structures.
- Direct quotations should be used sparingly. Ellipses and brackets must be used to indicate words that are omitted or changed for conciseness or grammatical correctness.
- Always represent material from outside sources accurately.
- Plagiarism has serious academic and professional consequences. To avoid accidental plagiarism, keep research materials organized, understand guidelines for fair dealing and appropriate citation of sources, and review the paper to make sure these guidelines are followed.

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6.5: USING VERIFICATION AND FACT-CHECKING SKILLS

College writers must ensure that the evidence they use is accurate and reliable. Verification and fact-checking help prevent the use of misinformation.

Steps for Verification

1. Check the original source.
2. Avoid relying on quotes shared on social media or copied incorrectly.
3. Look for multiple confirmations.
4. Reliable facts appear in multiple credible sources.
5. Evaluate the publisher.
6. Is the source peer-reviewed? Reputable? Nonprofit? Educational?
7. Check the date.
8. Some topics, like technology, science, and policy, change quickly.
9. Identify bias.
10. Ask: Why is this information being presented this way?

Useful Fact-Checking Tools

- Google Scholar
- FactCheck.org
- Snopes
- PolitiFact
- Library databases (EBSCO, JSTOR, etc.)

Recommended OER Readings

6.5.1: Why Fact-Checking?

6.5.2: The SIFT Method

6.5.3: Using Wikipedia Effectively

6.5.4: Fact-Checking Images and Memes

6.5.5: Conclusion

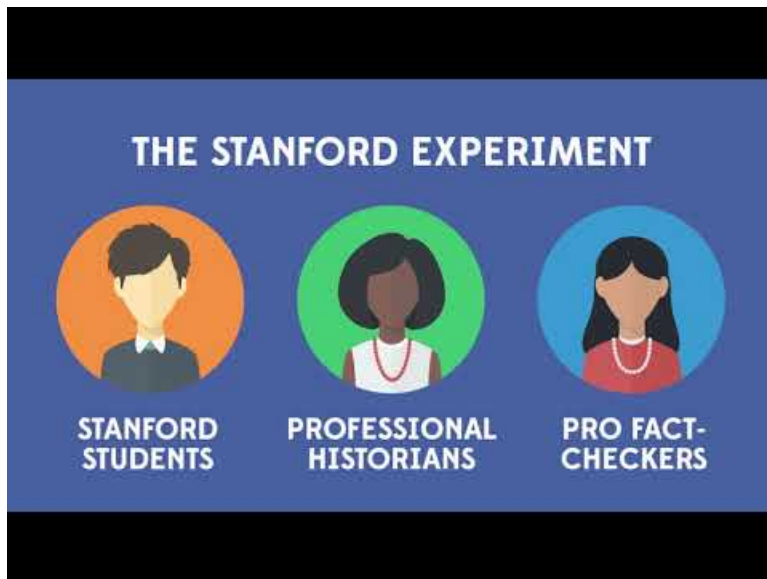
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6.5.1: Why Fact-Checking?

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](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3048994).

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6.5.2: 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.

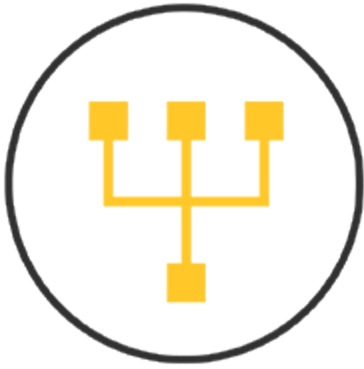
The point is that you're not wedded to using that initial source. We have the internet! You can go out and find a better source, and invest your time there. Please watch this video [4:10] that demonstrates this strategy and notes how fact-checkers build a library of trusted sources they can rely on to 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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6.5.3: 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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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. of Oxford, 2012. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Giles, Jim. “Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head.” *Nature*, vol. 438, 2005, pp. 900–901, doi.org/10.1038/438900a.

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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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6.5.4: 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.

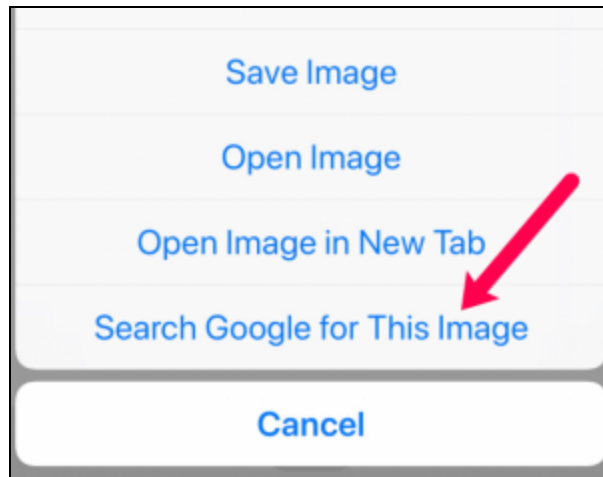
In the example below, we can do a reverse image search on this meme that suggests space lasers were responsible for the California wildfires.



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”

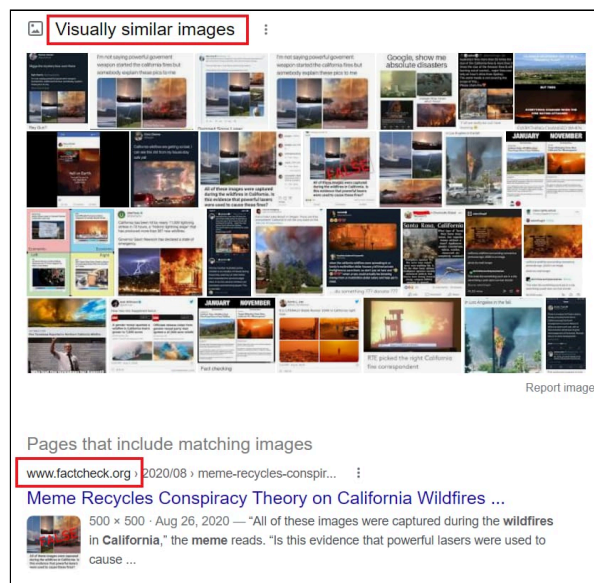


Although it is a bit more difficult, you can also conduct a reverse image search on your phone.

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

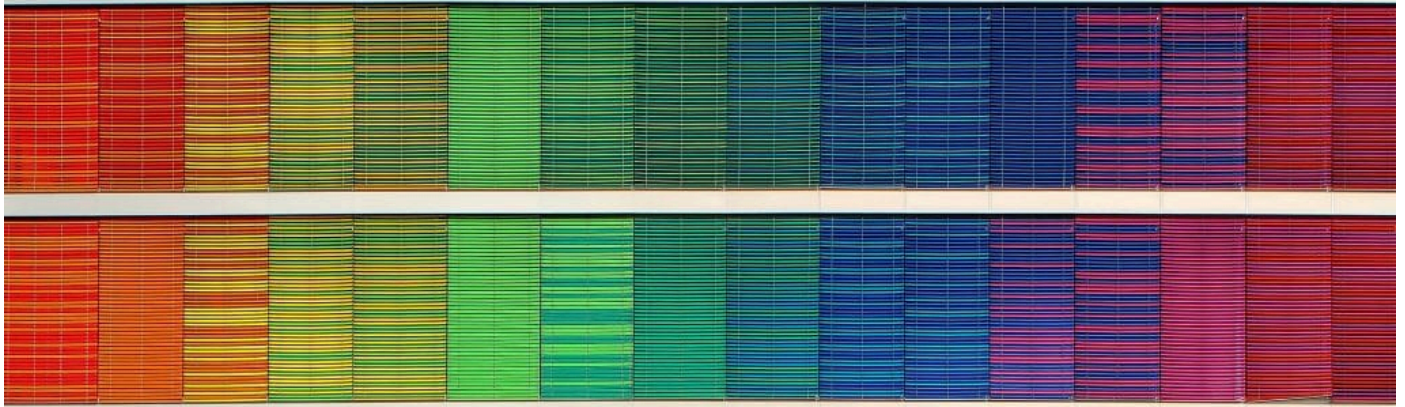
Find Trusted Coverage section adapted from “Check, Please! Starter Course,” licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

Reverse Image Search section adapted from “Library 10” by [Cabrillo College Library](#), licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

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6.5.5: 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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7: FOUR TYPES OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AT BENU

7.1: Textual Analysis

7.1.1: Writing Guide with Handbook

7.1.1.1: Breaking the Whole into Its Parts

7.1.1.2: Trailblazer

7.1.1.3: Glance at Genre- Rhetorical Strategies

7.1.1.4: Annotated Student Sample- "Rhetorical Analysis- Evicted by Matthew Desmond" by Eliana Evans

7.2: Ethnographic Analysis

7.3: Writing about Social Issues

7.4: Writing about Visual Culture

7.1: Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the close study of a written, visual, or multimedia text to understand how it creates meaning. In college writing, students do not simply summarize what a text says; they examine how the author uses:

- language
- structure
- evidence
- tone
- imagery
- organization
- rhetorical

A textual analysis may focus on an essay, article, speech, advertisement, poem, story, film scene, or other cultural text. The goal is to explain how specific choices within the text shape the reader's understanding and support the text's larger purpose.

Recommended Readings:

Michelle Bachelor Robinson and Maria Jerskey, featuring Toby Fulwiler, Writing Guide, Unit 1, "Experience, Culture, and Language" ([Intro](#) and [1.1](#))

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Interactive Content

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Michelle Bachelor Robinson and Maria Jerskey, featuring Toby Fulwiler, Writing Guide, Ch. 9, "Rhetorical Analysis" ([9.1 through 9.4](#))

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7.1.1: WRITING GUIDE WITH HANDBOOK

7.1.1.1: Breaking the Whole into Its Parts

7.1.1.2: Trailblazer

7.1.1.3: Glance at Genre- Rhetorical Strategies

7.1.1.4: Annotated Student Sample- "Rhetorical Analysis- Evicted by Matthew Desmond" by Eliana Evans

7.1.1.1: Breaking the Whole into Its Parts

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify and explain ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos.
- Identify and analyze logical fallacies used in persuasion.
- Explain how rhetorical strategies are used in real-life situations.

Visual & Auditory Learning Style Icons

Communicative situations nearly always contain **rhetoric**, the craft of persuading through writing or speaking. Think of your earliest instances of communication with parents or caregivers. Before you were proficient in language, you learned to navigate situations with your other senses, such as sight, sound, and touch. Consider people's facial expressions and tones of voice. How did you know when they were pleased, displeased, or confused by your actions? The emphasis is on the word *how*, because the *how* is what starts you on the path of analyzing the forms, intent, and effectiveness of communication. The point is that even facial expressions and tones of voice serve communicative functions and contain a rhetoric that one can observe, process, and analyze.

Voice to Text Icon

Now, as an adult, you have learned to use rhetoric to be persuasive and to recognize when others are trying to persuade you. Imagine the following situation. A basic question arises among roommates: *Where should we go for dinner?* Your roommates want to go to Emiliano's Pizza Pavilion again, and their reasoning seems sound. First, having tried all pizza places in town, they know Emiliano makes the tastiest pizza—just the right combination of spices, vegetables, and cheese, all perfectly baked in the right oven at the right temperature. Furthermore, the pizza is fairly cheap and probably will provide leftovers for tomorrow. And they add that you don't really want to stay home all alone by yourself.

You, on the other hand, are less keen on the idea; maybe you're tired of Emiliano's pizza or of pizza in general. You seem resistant to their suggestion, so they continue their attempts at persuasion by trying different tactics. They tell you that "everyone" is going to Emiliano's, not only because the food is good but because it's the place to be on a Thursday evening, hoping that others' decisions might convince you. Plus, Emiliano's has "a million things on the menu," so if you don't want pizza, you can have "anything you want." This evidence further strengthens their argument, or so they think.

Your roommates continue, playing on your personal experience, adding that the last time you didn't join them, you went somewhere else and then got the flu, so you shouldn't make the same mistake twice. They add details and try to entice you with images of the pizza—a delicious, jeweled circle of brilliant color that tastes like heaven, with bubbling cheese calling out to you to devour it. Finally, they try an extreme last-ditch accusation. They claim you could be hostile to immigrants such as Emiliano and his Haitian and Dominican staff, who are trying to succeed in the competitive pizza market, so your unwillingness to go will hurt their chances of making a living.

However, because you know something about rhetoric and how your roommates are using it to persuade, you can deconstruct their reasoning, some of which is flawed or even deceptive. Your decision is up to you, of course, and you will make it independent of (or dependent on) these rhetorical appeals and strategies.

Rhetorical Strategies

Language Lens Icon

As part of becoming familiar with rhetorical strategies in real life, you will recognize three essential building blocks of rhetoric:

- **Ethos** is the presentation of a believable, authoritative voice that elicits an audience's trust. In the case of the pizza example, the roommates have tried all other pizzerias in town and have a certain expertise.
- **Pathos** is the use of appeals to feelings and emotions shared by an audience. Emiliano's pizza tastes good, so it brings pleasure. Plus, you don't want to be all alone when others are enjoying themselves, nor do you want to feel responsible for the pizzeria's economic decline.
- **Logos** is the use of credible information—facts, reasons, examples—that moves toward a sensible and acceptable conclusion. Emiliano's is good value for the money and provides leftovers.

In addition to these strategies, the roommates in the example use more subtle ones, such as personification and sensory language. **Personification** is giving an inanimate object human traits or abilities (the cheese is calling out). **Sensory language** appeals to the five senses (a delicious, jeweled circle of brilliant color).

Logical Fallacies

Language Lens Icon

Familiar with the three main rhetorical strategies and literary language, you also recognize the “sneakier” uses of flawed reasoning, also known as logical fallacies. Some of the roommates' appeals are based on these fallacies:

- **Bandwagon:** argument that everyone is doing something, so you shouldn't be left behind by not doing it too. “Everyone” goes to Emiliano's, especially on Thursdays.
- **Hyperbole:** exaggeration. Emiliano's has “a million things on the menu,” and you can get “anything you want.”
- **Ad hominem:** attacking the person, not the argument. Because you are hesitant about joining your roommates, you are accused of hostility toward immigrants.
- **Causal fallacy:** claiming or implying that an event that follows another event is the result of it. Because you ate elsewhere, you got the flu.
- **Slippery slope:** argument that a single action could lead to disastrous consequences. If Emiliano's misses your business, they may go bankrupt.

In a matter of minutes, your roommates use all these strategies to try to persuade you to act or to agree with their thinking. Identifying and understanding such strategies, and others, is a key element of critical thinking. You can learn more about logical fallacies at the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (https://openstax.org/r/Purdue_University_Online).

Kairos

As a whole, rhetoric also depends on another Greek rhetorical strategy, **kairos**. Kairos is the idea that timing is important in trying to persuade an audience. An appeal may succeed or fail depending on when it is made. The moment must be right, and an effective communicator needs to be aware of their audience in terms of kairos. Going back to the roommates and pizza example, kairos might be an influence in your decision; if you were tired of pizza, had to save money, or wanted to study alone, your roommates would have less chance of persuasion. As a more serious example, if a recent series of car accidents has caused serious injuries on the freeway, an audience might be more receptive to a proposal to reassess speed limits and road signage. Awareness of rhetorical strategies in everyday situations such as this will help you recognize and evaluate them in matters ultimately more significant than pizza.

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7.1.1.2: Trailblazer

Rhetorical Analysis Trailblazer: Jamil Smith

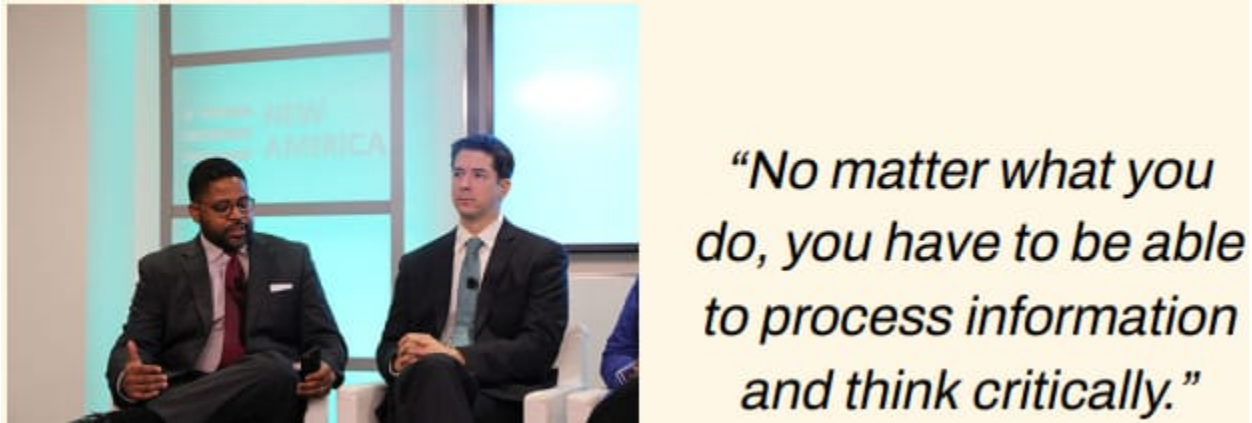


Figure 7.1.1.2.2: Jamil Smith, left (credit: “The Color of Debt: Investigating Debt Collection and the Racial Wealth Gap” by New America/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Whose Rhetoric?

Culture Lens Icon

Jamil Smith (b. 1975) is a well-recognized print and television journalist and commentator on politics, culture, and sports. He has won three Emmys for sports journalism and is best known for his articles in *Rolling Stone* and the *New Republic* and as a producer for MTV News, CNN, MSNBC, and *The Rachel Maddow Show*.

Smith grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended Shaker Heights High School. He has often written about Cleveland and his work there with the Minority Achievement Committee (MAC), which pairs accomplished minority achievers with their younger peers to encourage greater participation in education. Smith graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1997 with a degree in English.

Smith often focuses on the full range of Black life in culture, politics, sports, and media. In guest appearances and interviews, he emphasizes the overriding need for minority journalists to use rhetorical powers of persuasion and to assert their place alongside traditionally White-dominated media voices. When Smith became senior editor at the *New Republic* in 2015, he explained his task as being “to help usher this magazine into a different era” (Connor). He recognized his presence there as an opportunity for his writing to serve as a moving force for social change and even the radical transformation of American journalism.

For the February 19, 2018, cover story of *Time* magazine, Smith wrote an extensive essay on the film *Black Panther* (2018) and its significance for Black American culture. The superhero film, based on a Marvel Comics story, grossed about \$1.3 billion and was hailed as one of the outstanding films of the year, winning three Oscars out of a total of seven nominations. In his essay, Smith attaches great importance to the movie for its ability to address “what it means to be black in both America and Africa—and, more broadly, in the world” (Smith, “Revolutionary”).

Smith used the film as a vehicle for expressing his belief in the compelling role that representation—being a presence, even an unexpected one—plays in communication. He has stated in an interview, “I really truly believe in the power of storytelling.” His fervor and commitment to creating a new understanding of Black life are based on his taking the personal risk to establish credibility as someone proudly unafraid to open himself to the audience: “My mission is to reflect the experiences of and tell the stories of people who have been ignored and erased” (Smith, “Cleveland”).

In his writings, Smith uses ethos to portray himself as a Black Clevelander, well acquainted with discrimination and prejudice, who speaks personally from his experiences and seeks to reach the general population as a whole. Smith wishes for readers to feel, as he does, that life needs to be complex, with “infinite versions” of the self, from executives to garbage collectors and all positions in between. He says that most White people know this already and see it reflected in films that represent their lives, but Black Americans have not yet experienced this and consequently are emotionally “poorer” without the “boundless” paths that White people have open to them (Smith, “Revolutionary”).

Smith’s review of *Black Panther*, which garnered an award from the New York chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, also relies on Smith’s knowledge of culture and history. For example, he points out that the character King T’Challa, introduced in Marvel Comics in 1966, reappears in the film at a time when the United States still has not met demands for equal opportunities. Smith capsulizes the aims and key events of the Black Power movement of the 1960s and names its leaders. He also quotes the Federal Reserve statistic that in 2016, a typical Black family “had a median net worth of \$17,600,” whereas a White family “had a median net worth of \$171,000.” He uses such statistics to claim that the movie conceives and portrays a world in which Black people have the resources to “level the playing field” worldwide (Smith, “Revolutionary”).

Given Smith’s position and recognition in the journalistic profession, readers find his cultural criticism of subjects in Black life and culture both logical and convincing. The example of Smith as a **cultural critic**—a person who writes opinion pieces about the art, music, movies, and books of a particular culture—is especially relevant in contemporary times. As people’s lives change continually, new influences on culture may emerge from the margins and come to be recognized. Language changes are a leading indicator of social change as well, especially in audiences that themselves are not one-dimensional and will interpret the language differently. In time, as with trends and fashions, diverse rhetoric may change a society and become widely accepted and even emulated. In this light, read Jamil Smith’s entire review (<https://openstax.org/r/review1>).

Another important figure you may wish to explore is Ta-Nehisi Coates (<https://openstax.org/r/Ta-Nehisi>). Coates is a leading journalist and creative writer whose *Black Panther* graphic novels, written for Marvel Comics, closely parallel the film. His use of rhetorical language particular to the Black experience in America has won numerous awards and recognition. You can read more about Coates in Memoir Trailblazer: Ta-Nehisi Coates.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jamil Smith use contemporary culture to make persuasive points?
2. How has Smith established credibility with readers?
3. In what ways does Smith appeal to readers’ emotions?
4. How does Smith’s use of logos support his claims of racial inequality?

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7.1.1.3: Glance at Genre- Rhetorical Strategies

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify key rhetorical strategies that authors use to persuade readers.
- Analyze texts to demonstrate understanding of key rhetorical concepts.
- Identify genre conventions and explain how they are shaped by purpose, culture, and expectation.

Language & Culture Lens Icons

Rhetorical analysis is the **genre**, or type of writing, that examines the way writers and speakers use language to influence readers. Rather than describing or summarizing content—the *what* of characters or themes—rhetorical analysis focuses on the individual parts of a text to show *how* language works to create the effects the writer wants. In other words, in addition to content, writers use rhetorical strategies to deliver and strengthen their ideas and thus influence their readers. A **rhetorical analysis** should, therefore, address the rhetorical situation, or conditions of communication that surround the rhetoric. These consist of the author (who), message (what), readers (to whom), purpose (why), means (how), context (where and when), and culture (community)

Culture refers to the way of life that a defined group of people establish. Their beliefs, laws, customs, and habits represent them as a group and may provide a signature to identify who they are and what they have accomplished. Rhetorical analysis must take these factors into full consideration, especially because cultural patterns are constantly changing and evolving with new knowledge and behaviors. Moreover, culture will vary greatly from group to group. Subgroups within a larger culture—for example, minorities within a majority population—may have distinct expressions of culture. When rhetorical analysis approaches language of a particular culture, questions may arise about who is best equipped to do the analysis and on what criteria, based on time and place.

Writers of rhetorical analyses consider these elements carefully and ask questions based on them. *What are the goals of the author of the text? What factors are at play in the author's choice of strategies used to make a rhetorical impact? What may occur in the interaction between the writer and reader? Will readers approach the piece neutrally, with no previous opinions? Are they likely to agree because they are of the same opinion, or are they hostile and ready to reject the arguments? Have they heard or read the ideas before? Will the ideas be too radical or too familiar? Are readers likely to see the author as sharing the field with them or as a stranger who must win their confidence?*

The Workings of Rhetorical Analysis

The aim of rhetorical analysis is not to find agreement with or praise for the writer, although either may be implied or stated. The essential task of analyzing requires a detachment that will convince the readers of the *validity* and *effectiveness* (or lack thereof) of the writing by identifying the writer's tools and what they accomplish.

As you formulate your rhetorical analysis, be aware of the following approaches and strategies that writers use to persuade an audience. Your goal will be to identify them in your analysis, explain their use, and evaluate their effectiveness.

- **Establishing credibility.** Writers include their credentials or experience with the subject to ensure that readers will take them seriously as someone who knows what they're talking about. To reinforce their authority, they cite reliable sources as support for their points.
- **Sharing personal experience.** Sharing a personal experience related to the subject enhances credibility and may also appeal to readers' emotions.
- **Targeting emotional concerns.** By specifically addressing those incidents or outcomes that readers may fear or desire, the author can rally them to take a particular position. Emotional concerns also include appeals to the five senses and to broader sentiments such as love, loyalty, anger, justice, or patriotism.

- **Using devices that draw attention to claims.** These include literary devices such as parallelism, repetition, and rhetorical questions that writers and speakers use to emphasize points and unify a text.
- **Supporting claims with convincing evidence.** Ways of supporting claims include quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing expert opinions; relating anecdotes and examples; and citing appropriate statistics and facts.
- **Acknowledging the opposition.** If a writer makes a point of explaining other groups' positions carefully and respectfully, readers from those groups, as well as the target audience, are more likely to be responsive to the writer. By acknowledging the opposition, writers show they have considered opposing views and can then demonstrate that their position is preferable.
- **Questioning the motivation of the opposition.** By exposing others' possibly conflicting interests, the writer can undermine the credibility of an opponent's character or argument.

In addition to these, writers may use more questionable rhetorical devices to persuade readers. While the techniques of each strategy differ, all lead away from the actual argument and seek to persuade through means other than reasonable, logical thought. Such strategies include bandwagon, ad hominem (name-calling), bait and switch, and more. Recall the roommates' use of some of these in their efforts at persuasion in *Breaking the Whole into Its Parts*.

Rhetorical Strategies in Advertising and Public Policy

Language Lens, Visual Learning Style, & Auditory Learning Style Icons

The strategies and other devices of rhetorical writing that are open to analysis are present in many types of communication, including multimodal examples such as advertisements that combine visuals with carefully crafted texts, dialogue, and voice-over.



Figure 7.1.1.3.3: M&Ms (credit: "Plain M&Ms Pile" by Evan-Amos/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Look at the M&Ms commercial, for example, in this collection (<https://openstax.org/r/this-collection>) of Super Bowl ads. Starting at minute 4:57, the prize-winning ad for M&Ms initially shows the widely recognizable candy in its multiple colors as both speaking cartoon figures and symbols of human behavior. The simple pitch: when people have offended others in one of a range of interpersonal blunders, the candy is offered as a peace offering. For example, the first image shows a man on a plane bumping into another passenger's seat, causing him to spill his drink. The offender then offers the passenger a package of M&Ms. What is the rhetorical strategy behind the situation and the gesture? The ad appeals to pathos in the sense that people feel the need to be liked. Despite the humorous twist in the comment that he kicked the seat on purpose, the offending man nonetheless doesn't want to be disliked. Nor do the others who commit other blunders. The sense of taste—sweetness—also comes into play, appealing to the senses, as does the sense of sight in the images of the colorful candy.

Furthermore, placing the ad during the Super Bowl targets an audience of game watchers whose ages, interests, and habits have been studied. They may be in a snacking frame of mind, so the appeal of candy is timely (kairos). The ad combines sophistication, appropriate adult behavior, and childish amusing animation and personification. Seeing the product makes it more memorable. On the other hand, note the subtle use of the bandwagon fallacy: different people in different situations are doing the same thing—offering M&Ms. The bandwagon implication is that if you do something you're sorry for or should be sorry for (or even if you don't), giving out M&Ms is the way to apologize and be likable. Because travelers, businesspeople, the religiously observant, and others from different walks of life are doing it, so should you.



Figure 9.4 Smokey Bear has been the symbol of wildfire prevention since 1944. (credit: “Dear Smokey” by Rudy Wendelin/ Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library, Public Domain)

Figure 7.1.1.3.4: is an image from the U.S. Forest Service that also reflects the use of rhetorical strategies. Smokey Bear is a symbol created in 1944 to raise awareness of the danger of forest fires. Images of this gentle, personified bear are often accompanied by the slogan “Remember . . . only you can prevent forest fires” or a variation of it. The image shows Smokey dressed in rolled-up jeans, a name belt, and a ranger’s hat. He is reading letters delivered by a mail truck and sent to his own ZIP code, 20252, from children and adults promising to cooperate with his environmental efforts. The entire image is among the most recognizable of American cultural symbols.

The continuing identification of the bear and his appeal over decades is an example of the powerful use of rhetorical devices that speak without seeming to become dated and lose impact. First, a wild and dangerous animal is personified and made credible so that the credibility (ethos) of Smokey as a domesticated father figure with a fuzzy, playful cub climbing on the family mailbox removes any sense of danger and instead makes him into a believable voice for safety. No humans are emphasized in the illustration; the mail truck is seen only in the distance after having delivered another stack of fan mail. Other small animals are present in the background, as are familiar household items such as a shovel, a mailbox, an American flag, a boat on crystal clear water, and the playful images of the ranger’s hat and rolled-up jeans on crossed legs. The drawing features bright primary colors and the dark forest green of bountiful nature. The print medium in the center of the illustration, the sign reading “Prevent forest fires,” unifies the visual.

Because the images are emotionally accessible to children as well as adults, they appeal to widely shared pathos. The unspoken implication is that preventing forest fires will allow these young animals and forest plants to live rather than die in a carelessly started—and deadly—fire. In addition, it will allow human life to continue safely and pleasurably, as viewers can see, far in the background, people sailing and enjoying the water. If children’s wisdom and receptivity to images are present, this idealized picture has great appeal. Rather than a harsh rebuke for adult negligence, the lesson of Smokey relies on the power of rhetoric to modify behavior with specific, carefully crafted appeals. Yet the most frequently used slogan, “Only you can prevent forest fires,” is an example of hyperbole. Certainly “you” are not the sole person responsible for starting or preventing fires. Other people and other factors are at work aside from yourself.

More explicit, however, is this earlier image:



Figure 7.1.1.3.5: Dating from about 1960, this image shows a member of the Boy Scouts and a member of the Camp Fire Girls with Smokey. (credit: “Smokey with Scouts” by United States Department of Agriculture/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

The rhetorical strategy again is pathos, appealing to a sense of guilt. If these children can help prevent fires, then surely adults can do the same, as they are likely more knowledgeable and care for the safety and health of their children.

Rhetorical Analysis: Key Terms

Rhetorical Appeals

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these appeals writers use to persuade their audiences.

- **Ethos:** believable, authoritative voice that elicits credibility and audience trust.
- **Kairos:** sense of appropriate timing when attempting to persuade.
- **Logos:** credible information—facts, reasons, or examples—presented as evidence that moves toward a sensible and acceptable conclusion.
- **Pathos:** the use of appeals to feelings and emotions shared by an audience. Some of the general categories are fear, guilt, anger, love, loyalty, patriotism, and duty.

Rhetorical Devices and Language Use

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these devices writers use to organize and emphasize their writing.

- **Figurative language:** similes and metaphors. Comparing one aspect of things that in other ways are completely different is an essential part of rhetorical language. Simile example: “The treasure chest of nature’s wonders shone like a pirate’s gold tooth.” Metaphor example: “The pizza was a disk of saucy sunlight.”
- **Numerical data:** statistics and figures. When accurate, numerical data can strengthen an argument.
- **Parallel structure:** repetition of the same pattern of words to show that ideas are equally significant. Parallel structure, or parallelism, calls attention to these ideas, achieves balance, and makes the statements more memorable. Example: “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.”
- **Personification:** giving an inanimate or nonhuman object human characteristics to make it seem alive and relatable. Examples: “The virus packed its bags and spread across the ocean”; “Twitter erupted in outrage.”
- **Repetition:** repeating a single word or group of words to build emphasis. Example: “The first cause is poverty; the second cause is poor health; the third cause is discrimination. These causes have been studied, but to what effect?”
- **Rhetorical question:** a question that is not expected to be answered, one for which there is no answer, or one that creates a dramatic effect. Examples: “Has it occurred to you to ask why the economy is so unstable? A first point to consider is . . .”;

“Do you think poverty will go away by itself?”

- **Understatement:** presenting something as less important than it is as a way of distancing from the truth. Understatement is often used sarcastically or ironically. Example: “It may not have occurred to politicians that poverty leads to a host of health-related issues.”

Rhetorical Fallacies

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these fallacies writers may use to unethically persuade their audiences.

- **Ad hominem:** logical fallacy that attempts to discredit a person, not an argument. Ad hominem, meaning “against the man,” is often termed name-calling. Examples: “She’s just a leftover from another era who can’t accept change”; “He’s a stupid bully and an outright thief.”
- **Bait and switch:** logical fallacy that introduces a point about one thing that is likely to be accepted and then changes the terms once initial agreement occurs. Example: “Buy these phones at this price before they’re all gone!” When you go to buy one, moments later, the phones are gone—and they’re far more expensive.
- **Bandwagon:** logical fallacy often used in advertising and propaganda. It tries to make people do something or think a certain way because everyone is doing it, and if they don’t go along, they will be excluded. Example: “Everyone is buying these sneakers; get yours now before you’re left out.” Negative example: “This style is so dated; no one wears things like this now.”
- **Causal fallacy:** the faulty logic of claiming or believing that an event that follows another event is the result of it. For example, losing your keys after going to a concert does not mean the events are connected causally; going to the concert did not cause you to lose your keys.
- **Hyperbole:** exaggeration. Hyperbole is one of the staples of advertising language. Examples: “Season’s Best Peppermint Glazed Delights”; “I have a ton of homework.”

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7.1.1.4: Annotated Student Sample- "Rhetorical Analysis- Evicted by Matthew Desmond" by Eliana Evans

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify the ways a student writer has analyzed the rhetorical strategies in a persuasive text.
- Demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving when reading a rhetorical analysis.

Introduction

Matthew Desmond (b. 1979 or 1980) is a sociology professor at Princeton University. He has published four books, each addressing issues of poverty or racial inequality in American life. He has been recognized by the Politico 50 list as an important contributing voice to national political debate. In the analysis that follows, student Eliana Evans examines Desmond's work from a rhetorical perspective.



Figure 7.1.1.4.6: Matthew Desmond discusses *Evicted* at the Library of Congress. (credit: "Matthew Desmond at 2017 National Book Festival" by United States Library of Congress/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Living By Their Own Words

Story as Persuasion

Imagine it's Friday—payday. One American worker picks up her check for \$637. Now, imagine that \$550 will go toward rent, leaving only a small amount for everything else. The remaining \$87 must be divided among food, utilities, childcare, and medical treatment. Unfortunately, many of the nation's poor don't have to imagine this troubling scenario because this is their reality. In his book *Evicted: Poverty and Place in Milwaukee*, ethnographer and author Matthew Desmond follows eight poor families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as they struggle to establish and maintain one of humanity's most basic needs: housing. As an ethnographer, Desmond gathers research to promote the study and documentation of human culture: how people live under all kinds of conditions.

Note

Ethos. By mentioning Desmond's qualifications as an ethnographer, Eliana Evans appeals to ethos: Desmond is an authority whose opinions can be taken seriously.

Introductory Anecdote. By beginning with a real-life example and addressing the reader directly, the writer immediately emphasizes Desmond's hard-hitting point. This strategy engages readers from the start.

Living and working in the typical mid-size American city of Milwaukee in the early 2000s, Desmond highlights the source of the cyclical poverty he observes around him. He concludes that unstable housing is "deeply . . . implicated in the creation of poverty" (5).

Note

Thesis Statement. The writer notes that Desmond offers his thesis statement, or the main point of his argument, without delay, building off the specific example in the introduction.

Throughout his book, Desmond explains that inflated rents and evictions— the forced loss of housing—create power imbalances between landlords and tenants. Legal and economic systems rigged against the poor are to blame for creating an unbreakable cycle of poverty for renters. To advance his deductive argument, Desmond largely employs emotional anecdotal evidence, introducing readers to the real-life circumstances of eight families, thus using pathos to reach his readers. To reinforce this anecdotal evidence, he also employs logical statistical evidence as well as emotional allusions to the nation's founding principle of equality.

To bring his book to life, Desmond uses many quotations from the people he portrays in the cycle of poverty. Early in the book, he describes the life of Sherrena Tarver, an entrepreneur landlord who owns and manages numerous properties and has to evict nonpaying tenants in the most difficult circumstance. At one point, she faces a tough decision about Lamar, a legless man who occupies an apartment where he helps neighborhood boys stay in school and control their lives. He simply cannot meet his financial responsibilities, and Sherrena is torn between helping him and protecting her own bottom line. "I guess I got to stop feeling sorry for these people because nobody is feeling sorry for me," she states (11). She will have to pay her own mortgage on the property. No connection exists if others do not feel sorry for Sherrena, who has to face her own inner conflict about Lamar.

Note

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. Desmond speaks with authority as someone who cares deeply about the injustices of the housing situation. Evans notes that Desmond also relies on emotional and logical thought and examples, and she shows this in his quotations.

Although his book identifies unstable housing as a cause of poverty, Desmond writes for the purpose of creating empathy in voters and establishing facts that policy makers cannot ignore to remedy the housing trap. The moving description of eviction and its effects allows readers to fully appreciate his proposed solutions. As a main point, Desmond advocates for legislation that would establish a universal housing voucher program combined with government regulation to stabilize rents. He explains that voucher "programs lift roughly 2.8 million people out of poverty" each year (302). If these programs were expanded and supported by laws that would prevent landlords from establishing exploitative rents, many more people could be helped. Desmond hopes to convince voters who have been moved by his ethnographic discussion to elect candidates who are serious about ending poverty and creating a more equal America.

Note

Language Use. Evans uses the phrase "as a main point" to emphasize to readers that Desmond strongly believes in the voucher system.

In support of his argument, Desmond presents multiple anecdotal examples to illustrate the root of the cyclical poverty his subjects face. For example, in Chapter 16, Kamala, a middle-aged mother of three, leaves her children for one evening in the care of Devon, their father. Later, a fire caused by a lamp kills their eight-month-old daughter. The apartment is uninhabitable, but the landlord, Sherrena, keeps the month's rent. The police report that the three children, abandoned by Devon, were alone in the apartment. The high cost of monthly rent leaves Kamala with few options for proper childcare, and without childcare, she has few options for employment. The exploitation by landlords such as Sherrena only intensifies the tenant's poverty. Kamala, who still has two children to support, is left with no home, no money, and little means of survival. Her story, and the stories of the many others Desmond chronicles, supports the argument that unstable housing is a cause of poverty, not a condition.

Note

Examples and Pathos. Desmond's discussion gains emotional strength from the story of a child's needless death.

Pathos and Logos. The logic of the situation is that a family must endure hardship with little support. The overwhelming need and the trap of poverty in poor housing make for strong logical and emotional persuasion

Desmond relays the stories of Kamala and others to generate empathy with readers. These stories create emotional appeal in that they allow readers to experience the spiraling effects of poverty along with people they come to care about. Indeed, Desmond relies on the intensity of Kamala's story to give poverty a face. Kamala is no longer a nameless, faceless statistic. She is a real woman who experiences the loss of a child as a result of circumstances beyond her control. Kamala's story helps break the preconception that poor people are lazy and make individual choices to perpetuate their own poverty. Her situation illustrates a cycle of unbreakable tragedy and poverty that begins with her inability to secure affordable and stable housing. The details of her story make it hard for the public to ignore.

Desmond does not rely on anecdotal evidence alone. He also includes statistical evidence to support his argument.

Note

Logical Evidence. The writer notes Desmond's use of quantitative evidence—an appeal to logic. Readers are eager to learn facts that will strengthen the impact of Desmond's argument.

In the prologue, Desmond explains that Arleen pays “88 percent of [her] \$628-a-month welfare check” in rent (3). This disproportionate sum creates a situation in which “1 in 8 poor renting families nationwide [are] unable to pay all of their rent” (5). In Milwaukee, “landlords evict roughly 16,000 adults and children each year” (4). Such numbers go beyond empathy and instead appeal to logic. Policy makers are likely to reject the idea of drafting laws to relieve poverty based on feelings or empathy. Statistics, however, provide hard numbers that are not subject to debate and that reinforce the need for logical and realistic solutions. Desmond also notes that eviction and its effects have been vastly ignored by sociologists. These statistics fight preconceptions such as *Why don't poor people just get jobs?* In addition, by using personification, Desmond explains that poverty is a formidable enemy that a minimum-wage job cannot defeat.

Note

Logos. As a skilled writer, Desmond knows that if political action is called for, he will have to present a heavy dose of facts and numbers. Evans notes that readers are more likely to be persuaded by a combination of different rhetorical strategies, such as pathos and logos.

Personification. Evans notes that Desmond uses figurative language to personify the idea of poverty, calling it “a formidable enemy?”

Finally, Desmond appeals to his readers' sense of right and wrong when he asks a key rhetorical question: Is housing a fundamental American right? If readers answer “yes,” then it is un-American to systematically lock poor people away from the founding ideals of the country through housing, banking, and legal systems that work to guarantee their poverty. The American dream is one of equal opportunity. Yet, despite the constitutional guarantee of civil rights, the poor people who

struggle to maintain housing in Desmond's Milwaukee are further separated from the American dream by race.

For example, in Chapter 3, Desmond describes the segregation that has long plagued Milwaukee: despite the "open housing measure" guaranteed by "the 1968 Civil Rights Act," Milwaukee "remain[s] one of the most racially divided cities in the nation" (34). The housing divide in Milwaukee not only keeps poor people from achieving the American dream of stable and affordable housing, but it also supports a system of segregation that goes against the founding ideal of equality.

Note

Logos and Pathos. Desmond addresses the issue of right vs. wrong. He attempts to persuade readers by offering examples that make them think about the legal aspects of housing (logos) and the effects that deprivation have on individuals (pathos).

Desmond's argument is enticing in many ways. However, critics point out that he proposes a solution that fixes only the short-term problem of sustaining stable housing with a universal voucher program that provides no incentive for work. The long-term problem, which Desmond never addresses, would have to include a solution that would raise a massive number of people out of poverty by enabling them to sustain reliable housing, along with other living expenses, without relying heavily on government assistance. Vouchers may begin to eat away at the root of poverty, but they are a short-term, rather than a long-term, fix.

Note

Addressing Counterclaims. Evans is careful to include some possibly negative views of Desmond's main points to indicate that she has considered all sides before reaching a final verdict on the validity of his argument.

In the end, though, Desmond's argument is effective because he provides ample evidence with varying appeals to support his claims. The use of anecdotes allows readers to feel the pain of poverty. Desmond's statistical research shows logical reasons to end poverty through universal housing. The mentions of founding principles such as equality show that readers have a moral obligation as Americans to participate in a solution to the housing crisis.

Although much of Desmond's book relies on its anecdotal evidence and emotional appeal, it is his logic that ultimately proves convincing. He identifies a tangible cause of poverty, then offers an equally tangible solution to the problem he describes. If having stable and affordable housing will help end poverty and thus improve society, then the government should provide this through vouchers and rent regulation.

Note

Conclusion and Thesis Statement Reaffirmed. Evans praises Desmond for his rhetorical ability to appeal to readers in different ways. She claims that his logical approach, presenting facts and figures along with emotional appeals, should be enough to convince the government to act.

Work Cited

Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Broadway Books, 2016.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Eliana Evans begins her rhetorical analysis with an example about the problems of paying rent and living on a reduced income?
2. How does Evans portray Desmond as someone worth listening to?
3. How does Evans evaluate Desmond's use of logic in arguing his points?
4. According to Evans, how does Desmond use pathos in persuading readers?
5. What is Evans's final opinion of Desmond's ability to persuade? Explain.

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7.2: Ethnographic Analysis

Through observation and interpretation, ethnographic analysis is a form of writing that studies:

- people
- communities
- cultures
- social practices.

In college writing, students may observe a group, place, event, or everyday practice and then analyze what those observations reveal about values, behaviors, identity, communication, or community norms. Ethnographic writing often combines description, field notes, interviews, and reflection.

The goal is not just to describe what happened, but to interpret the meaning of social behavior within a specific cultural context.

Recommended Readings:

Seth Kahn

If you're like most students, you may wonder why your writing instructor is asking you to do *ethnographic writing*.^{*} You may have a vague idea of what ethnography is—what anthropologists do when they live in faraway places for long stretches of time, trying to understand what makes a culture unique or interesting. You may wonder what studying cultures in detail, conducting fieldwork and interviews, has to do with writing papers for your college classes.

Anthropologists James Spradley and David McCurdy answer the question concisely when they say, “A good writer must be a good ethnographer” (4). Ethnographic writing challenges you to consider everything that's interesting and difficult about writing; it pushes you to *generate*, *collect*, *analyze*, and *synthesize* more material than you've probably had to work with in one paper before. Moreover, because ethnographies are about actual people, the assignment makes you think about *ethics* (how you're presenting information, how that information might affect people if made public, being as accurate as you can) and *knowledge* (what it is you really know at the end of the project and how you present that knowledge without sounding more confident than you should). And finally, because these projects generally take a long time and you write constantly while doing them, you'll have plenty of time to reflect on and understand how you're learning and changing as writers along the way.

Along with the benefits to your writing, ethnography really highlights and emphasizes human relationships: between participants and researchers; between writers and readers of ethnographic narratives/reports; between students and teachers in classrooms. If all goes well, you'll find that your writing helps you navigate those relationships. That is, ethnographic writing can, when it works well, do more than produce interesting papers: it can improve your understanding of people and their ways of thinking/talking; it can improve the lives of the people you write about; it can help you reflect on your own positions within cultures.

One big lesson you should learn is that ethnographic writing, when it works well, does not—in fact cannot—follow a conventional formula for essays. It requires you to experiment with style, voice, structure, and purpose in ways you probably haven't before. To help you see what I mean by that, I'll at times evoke my own experiences as an ethnographer and teacher of ethnographic writing; the mixture of narrative and analysis should give you an idea—not necessarily a model—of the ways that traditional and non-traditional academic writing conventions work for this kind of project.

7.3: Writing about Social Issues

Writing about social issues asks students to examine problems, debates, or conditions that affect communities and society.

These topics may include:

- education
- technology
- poverty
- health care
- immigration
- race
- gender
- labor
- the environment
- media influence

In college writing, students move beyond personal opinion by using credible evidence, considering multiple perspectives, and explaining why the issue matters. The goal is to develop a clear, informed argument that helps readers better understand the causes, effects, and possible responses to a real-world concern.

Recommended Readings

Michelle Bachelor Robinson and Maria Jerskey, featuring Toby Fulwiler, Writing Guide, Ch. 12 ([12.5](#), “Writing Process: Integrating Research” only); Integrating sources/summary-paraphrase-quotation

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7.4: Writing about Visual Culture

Writing about visual culture focuses on how images, media, design, and visual objects shape meaning in society.

Students may analyze:

- advertisements
- films
- television
- social media posts
- photographs
- artwork
- video games
- memes
- architecture
- fashion
- public spaces

In college writing, the goal is not only to describe what something looks like, but to explain how visual choices such as color, layout, framing, symbols, style, and audience expectations create meaning.

Writing about visual culture helps students understand how images influence identity, values, beliefs, and public opinion.

Recommended Readings:

Michelle Bachelor Robinson and Maria Jerskey, featuring Toby Fulwiler, Writing Guide, Ch. 17, “Image Analysis” ([17.1](#) and [17.8](#))

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8: RESEARCH BASICS

8.1: What Research Means in a WRIT 1101 Class

8.2: Finding Good Sources (Library, Articles, Credible Websites)

8.3: Evaluating Online Information

8.4: Creating a Simple Annotated Bibliography

8.5: Synthesizing Multiple Sources

8.1: What Research Means in a WRIT 1101 Class

In this course, “research” does not mean reading hundreds of pages or using advanced theory. Research means:

- Asking a genuine question
- Looking for trustworthy information
- Reading and evaluating sources
- Taking notes and keeping track of where ideas come from
- Using sources to support or explore your own ideas
- Citing everything correctly

The purpose of research in Writing 1101 is to help you become:

- A more informed thinker
- A better writer
- A more critical and independent learner

In academic writing, research strengthens your claims and helps readers trust your argument.

Recommended OER Readings

Learning Objectives

- Explain the essential components of research writing

What is Research?

At its most basic level, research is anything you have to do to find out something you didn’t already know. That definition might seem simple and obvious, but it contains some key assumptions that might not be as obvious. Understanding these assumptions is going to be essential to your success in this course (and in your life after college), so let’s look at them carefully.



Figure 1. Research means searching for the answer to your research question and compiling the information you find in a useful and meaningful way.

First, research is about acquiring new information or new knowledge, which means that it always begins from a gap in your knowledge—that is, something you don't know. More importantly, research is always goal-directed: that is, it always begins from a specific question you need to answer (a specific gap in your body of information that you need to fill) in order to accomplish some particular goal. This **research question** is the statement of the thing you don't know that motivates your research.

Sometimes the answer to your question already exists in exactly the form you need. For example,

1. Does Columbus, Ohio, have a commercial airport?

The answer to this turns out to be yes, and the time to find the answer is about ten seconds. A Google search of “airports in Ohio” produces a Wikipedia entry titled “List of airports in Ohio.” A quick glance at this document shows that Columbus does indeed have a commercial airport, and that it is one of the three largest airports in Ohio.

2. Do any airlines offer direct flights from Kansas City to Columbus?

The answer to this appears to be no, and the time to find the answer is about two minutes. Using Travelocity.com and searching for flights from MCI (Kansas City International Airport) to CMH (Port Columbus International Airport) gets the message “We’ve searched more than 400 airlines we sell and couldn’t find any flights from Kansas City (MCI) ... [to] Columbus (CMH).” Doing the same search on Expedia.com and Orbitz.com yields the same answer. There appear to be no direct flights from Kansas City to Columbus, Ohio.

Often, however, the questions we need to have answered are more complicated, which means that the answer comes with some assembly required.

3. What’s the best way to get from Kansas City to Columbus, Ohio?

To answer this question requires a two-step process of gathering information about travel options and then evaluating the results based on parameters not stated in the question. We already know that it is possible to fly to Columbus, although no direct flights are available. A quick look at a map shows that it is also a relatively straightforward drive of about 650 miles. That’s the information-gathering stage. Now we have to evaluate the results based on things like cost, time and effort required, practicality given the purpose of the trip, and the personal preferences of the traveler. For a business traveler for whom shortest possible travel time is more important than lowest cost, the final decision may be very different than for a college student with a large dog.

Although all three questions require information gathering, for the purposes of this course we are going to call questions like #1 and #2 “homework questions” (because you can find the answer just by going to a single reference source and looking it up) and save the designation “research question” for questions like #3 for which developing a fully functional answer requires both gathering relevant information and then assembling it in a meaningful way.

For the purposes of this course, **research** is the process of finding the information needed to answer your research question and then deriving or building the answer from the information you found.

Research Writing

Some high school and first-year college writing courses use the term “research paper” or “research writing” to apply to any situation in which students use information from an outside source in writing a paper. The logic behind this is that if the writer has to go find information from a source, that action of going and finding information is similar to research, so it is convenient to call that kind of writing task a “research paper.” However, it is only true research if it starts from a *question* to which the writer genuinely doesn’t know the answer and if the writer then develops or builds the answer to the question through gathering and processing information.

One way to consider this distinction is to think of research as the goal-directed process of gathering information and building the answer to a research question, and source-based writing to refer to the many other types of information gathering and source-based writing one might do.



Figure 2. In true research-based writing, you begin with a research question and go hunt for the answer.

One important indicator of the difference between research and other source-based writing tasks is when in the process you develop the thesis (main point) of your paper. In a research project, you begin with a question, gather the data from which you will derive or build the answer to the question, build the answer, and then state your answer in a single sentence. This one-sentence statement of your answer to your research question then becomes your thesis statement and serves as the main point of your paper.

Any assignment you begin by developing a thesis that you then go out and gather information to support is source-based writing, but it is not technically “research” because it begins from the answer instead of the question.

Being aware of this distinction is helpful, as it can shape the way you approach your writing assignments, whether they be true research papers or source-based writing tasks. The work processes that lead to efficiency and success with research projects are different from the work processes you may have used successfully for other types of source-based papers. Both offer valuable learning experiences, but it is important to understand which type of assignment you are being asked to do so that you can plan your work.

Think of the most recent writing project you have done that required sources. Based on this definition, was it a research project or a source-based writing project?

Research Writing

We defined research as the physical process of gathering information plus the mental process of deriving the answer to your research question from the information you gather. **Research writing**, then, is the process of sharing the answer to your research question along with the evidence on which your answer is based, the sources you use, and your own reasoning and explanation. The essential components or building blocks of research writing are the same no matter what kind of question you are answering or what kind of reader you are assuming as you share your answer.

The Essential Building Blocks of Research Writing

These guidelines will help you as you approach research writing.

1. Begin with a question to which you don’t know the answer and that can’t be answered just by going to the appropriate reference source. That is, begin from a research question, not a homework question.
 1. Decide what kind of information or data will be needed in order to build the answer to the question.
 2. Gather information and/or collect data.
 3. Work with the information/data to construct your answer.
2. Do real research

1. This is the *research process*, and it happens before you begin to write your paper. Without research, you can't have research writing, so don't shortchange this part of the process.
3. Create a one-sentence answer to your research question.
 1. This will become the thesis statement/main point/controlling idea of your research paper.
4. Share your answer to research questions in a way that makes it believable, understandable, and usable for your readers. To do this:
 1. Include plentiful and well-chosen examples from the data/information you gathered
 2. Indicate the validity of your data by accurately reporting your research method (field or lab research)
 3. Indicate the quality of your information by accurately citing your sources (source-based research)

Try It

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<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/20289>

Learning Objectives

homework question: a question for which a definite answer exists and can easily be found by consulting the appropriate reference source

research: the physical process of gathering information plus the mental process of deriving the answer to your research question from the information you gathered

research question: a question that can be answered through a process of collecting relevant information and then building the answer from the relevant information

research writing: the process of sharing the answer to your research question along with the evidence on which your answer is based, the sources you use, and your own reasoning and explanation

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8.2: Finding Good Sources (Library, Articles, Credible Websites)

Good research begins with good sources. You can find reliable information in several places:

Library Databases

These contain peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports.

Examples include JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest, and others your library provides.

Library sources are strong because they are:

- Reviewed by experts
- Fact-checked
- Published by reputable organizations
- Often more reliable than general internet searches

Books and eBooks

Books provide depth and background information. Many libraries offer instant access through eBook platforms.

Credible Websites

Good websites usually end in:

- .edu (universities)
- .gov (government agencies)
- .org (nonprofits or research groups)

Use caution with .com sites. They can be useful but must be evaluated carefully.

Avoid Weak Sources

- Anonymous blogs
- Clickbait or sensationalized news
- Wikipedia as a final source (OK for background, not for citation)
- Social media posts

Recommended OER Readings



Figure: Image from Pixabay

Assessing and Evaluating Sources

Critical thinking is interwoven in all steps of the research process, and one of the places you will definitely use it is when you evaluate your sources. As you researched your sources, you may have developed a good sense of which sources are going to be the most useful in supporting your research question. However, the credibility of your research paper relates directly to your sources. Are your sources themselves valid? You need to consciously evaluate your sources in order to make final choices about using them in your research essay.

The two main questions you should ask yourself when evaluating sources are the following:

1. Is this source suitable?
2. Is this source trustworthy?

Not every suitable source is trustworthy, and not every trustworthy source is suitable. In Miguel's example that follows, you'll see that the writing professor encourages Miguel to *talk* to the right sources as part of the conversation on his topic. To do this, he needs to find authors who are trustworthy *and* knowledgeable.

Miguel: If I used a university or government website on bottled water quality, would readers trust me more than if I just used a bottled water company website?

Prof: Yes. Refresh my memory. What kinds of questions do you need answers to before you can write your paper?

Miguel: Well, I need to know if bottled water is truly healthier, like the beverage companies claim. Or would I be just as well off drinking tap water?

Prof: To answer this question, you'll want to find out who's *talking* about these issues in the overall conversation (or *discourse*) about bottled water. The authors of texts aren't speaking aloud, of course, but they're making written statements that others can "listen" and "respond" to. Knowing which texts you can trust means understanding which authors you can trust.

Miguel: How do I figure that out?

Prof: It helps to know who the authors are. What they're saying. Where, when, and to whom they're saying it. To go into more depth into questions about suitability and trustworthiness of sources, consider the following.

Determining Suitability

Your task as a researcher is to determine the appropriateness of the information your source contains for your particular research project. Ask this simple question: Will this source help me answer my research questions? Will it help me learn as much as I can about my topic? Will it help me write an interesting, convincing essay for my readers?

Suitable sources:

- Contain facts/opinions that help answer your research question,
- May contain illustrations or data that help answer your research question,
- Clearly explain their information,
- Are/were written by a well known authority or expert, and
- Carefully cite the sources they used.

Unsuitable sources:

- May not offer any relevant, important information or counter-argument,
- May not contain any new information that advances your understanding of your topic,
- May be too narrow or too broad in coverage of your topic,
- May be from very general sources and not from a scholarly journal or peer-reviewed source,
- May be from a scholarly journal but be too technical or difficult for you to understand,
- May be out of date, or
- Do not cite the sources they used.

Determining Trustworthiness

To determine the trustworthiness and credibility of a source, you want to ensure that a source is current, written by an expert, accurate, and unbiased. You'll want to consider the rhetorical context of a source, including its purpose, audience, and focus.

View the following video, which clearly identifies a variety of questions to ask in order to evaluate sources.

YouTube Video

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

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Video 8.2.1

Evaluating Sources to Find Quality Research. **Authored by:** PCC Library. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube license.

Evaluating the credibility and validity of a resource can be very difficult, particularly when doing research using the Internet. Below are some basic guidelines to help you select reliable resources and use those to glean, or find, accurate information about a given subject.

Characteristics of Reliable Sources

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's or authors' purpose in presenting the information. Few sources present facts completely objectively. In some cases, however, the source's content and tone are significantly influenced by biases or hidden agendas.

Bias refers to favoritism or prejudice toward a particular person or group. For instance, an author may be biased against a certain political party and present information in a way that subtly—or not so subtly—makes that organization look bad. Bias can lead an author to present facts selectively, edit quotations to misrepresent someone's words, and distort information.

Hidden agendas are goals that are not immediately obvious but influence how an author presents the facts. For instance, an article about the role of beef in a healthy diet would be questionable if it were written by a representative of the beef industry—or by the president of an animal-rights organization. In both cases, the author would likely have a hidden agenda.

As Miguel conducted his research, he read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. He also noticed that many studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. Miguel read these studies with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

When using websites for research, check to see when the site was last updated. Many sites publish this information on the homepage, and some, such as news sites, are updated daily or weekly. Many nonfunctioning links are a sign that a website is not regularly updated. Do not be afraid to ask your professor for suggestions if you find that many of your most relevant sources are not especially reliable—or that the most reliable sources are not relevant. If you are finding your sources on the internet, it is also important to think about who is sponsoring the information. The URL can provide information about the origin of the resource. The following are examples of ways you can determine the type of organization that is sponsoring the content for a specific website.

Sites ending in....

.edu are usually educational institutions and generally a good source of information.

.gov are government websites and usually good sources for statistical information

.org are typically non-profit organizations often set up as a public service. Be on the lookout for political agendas and biases.

Example: If you are looking for information about gun control, then you might check .gov sites for statistics related to gun ownership, laws, etc. Sites affiliated with specific biases on gun ownership will probably be listed on .org sites (handguncontrol.org or nrahg.org).

Blogs

While interesting, these are usually not fact-based and as a general rule should not be used for conducting research.

Online magazines or journals

These articles often contain a detailed bibliography and site specific resources as evidence for claims and statistics.

Online news sources

Virtually every network and cable news station has an online site as do local affiliates. It is important to realize that while they do provide news, they are also involved in the entertainment industry and may present some information that is based in opinion and not necessarily facts.

Television/Internet video news broadcasts

When viewing video, keep in mind that if it is not from a source that can be accurately documented with origin, date, and key information like who, what, when, where, why and how, then the source may not be credible.

Source Rankings

High Quality Sources These sources provide the most in-depth information. They are researched and written by subject matter experts and are carefully reviewed.	• Scholarly books and articles in scholarly journals • Trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as <i>Smithsonian Magazine</i> or <i>Nature</i> • Government documents, such as books, reports, and web pages • Documents posted online by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes • Textbooks and reference books, which are usually reliable but may not cover a topic in great depth
Varied-Quality Sources These sources are often useful. However, they do not cover subjects in as much depth as high-quality sources, and they are not always rigorously researched and reviewed. Some, such as popular magazine articles or company brochures, may be written to market a product or a cause. Use them with caution.	• News stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as <i>Newsweek</i> or the Public Broadcasting Service • Popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked • Documents published by businesses and nonprofit organizations
Questionable Sources These sources should be avoided. They are often written primarily to attract a large readership or present the author's opinions and are not subject to careful review.	• Loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk radio shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms

Free online encyclopedias and wikis may seem like a great source of information. They usually appear among the first few results of a web search. They cover thousands of topics, and many articles use an informal, straightforward writing style. Unfortunately, these sites have no control system for researching, writing, and reviewing articles. Instead, they rely on a community of users to police themselves. At best, these sites can be a starting point for finding other, more trustworthy sources. Never use them as final sources.

Questions to ask yourself when determining the credibility of an academic paper/study are:

- Who funded the study?
- Are there any professional links between the author and the funder?
- Do the authors explain where the data comes from and how they obtained it?
- Who are the authors? Are they experts in their fields (i.e., what is their authority?) Keep in mind that expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another, unrelated area. For instance, an author may have an advanced degree in physics, but this credential is not a valid qualification for writing about psychology. Check credentials carefully.
- What does the author's purpose seem to be?
- How recent is the source?
- Does the writing have a lot of emotionally laden words (i.e., is it not objective)?
- Does the author cite their own sources?

Exercise 1

Choose one of your articles you've gathered for your research paper. Answer the following questions, and then write a summary explaining whether and why you believe the source is credible enough to act as one of your sources.

1. Who funded the study/article?
2. Who owns the publication? Do they have a commercial or political purpose?
3. Are there any professional links between the author and the funder?
4. Do the authors explain where the data comes from and how they obtained it?
5. Who are the authors? Are they experts in their fields?
6. What does the author's seem to be?
7. How recent is the source?
8. Does the writing have a lot of emotionally laden words, indicating it may not be objective?
9. Do the authors cite their sources

Avoiding Conspiracy Theories and Fake News

Avoiding conspiracy theories and fake news is essential for conducting credible research. The following guides have helpful resources to help you determine whether a news story you are considering is legitimate or not. The second source allows you to search and find out if a conspiracy theory or urban legend is true or not.

How to Spot Fake News (Harvard University Library)

www.snopes.com

Strategy: The CRAAP Test

One excellent tool to examine both the suitability and trustworthiness of a source is the CRAAP method, which stands for:

- **Currency:** the timeliness of the information
- **Relevance:** the importance of the information for your needs
- **Authority:** the source of the information
- **Accuracy:** the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the information
- **Purpose:** the reason the information exists

The following video offers a good explanation of these points of analysis.

YouTube Video

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

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Study Help: Evaluating Information. Authored by: University of South Australia. License: All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube license.

Currency: The Timeliness of the Information

Key Question: When was the item of information published or produced?

Determining when an item of information was published or produced is an aspect of evaluating information. The date the information was published or produced tells you how current it is or how relevant it is to the topic you are researching. For example, if you were writing a research paper on the survival of passengers in car crashes, you would need the most recent information on automobile crash tests, structural strength of materials, car wreck mortality statistics, etc. If, on the other hand, you were writing a research paper on the feelings of college students about the Vietnam War during the 1960s, you would need information written in the 1960s by college students (primary sources) as well as materials written since then about college students in the 1960s (secondary sources). Key indicators of the currency of the information are:

- date of copyright
- date of publication
- date of revision or edition
- dates of sources cited
- date of patent or trademark

Relevance: The Importance of the Information for Your Needs

Key Question: How does this source contribute to my research paper?

When you read through your source, consider how the source will effectively support your argument and how you can use the source in your research essay. You should also consider whether the source provides sufficient coverage of the topic. Information sources with broad, shallow coverage mean that you need to find other sources of information to obtain adequate details about your topic. Information sources with a very narrow focus or a distinct bias mean that you need to find additional sources to obtain the information on other aspects of your topic. Some questions to consider are:

- Does the information relate to my topic, research question, or angle in my working thesis?
- Who is the source's intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (e.g., not too simple or advanced) for my needs?
- Did I look at a variety of sources before deciding to use this one?

Authority: The Source of the Information

Key Question: Is the person, organization, or institution responsible for the intellectual content of the information knowledgeable in that subject?

Determining the knowledge and expertise of the author is an important aspect of evaluating the reliability of information. Anyone can make an assertion or a statement about some thing, event, or idea, but only someone who knows or understands what that thing, event, or idea is can make a reasonably reliable assertion about it. Some external indications of expertise are:

- a formal academic degree in a subject area
- professional or work-related experience, e.g., businessmen, government agency personnel, sports figures, etc. who have expertise in their areas of work
- active involvement in a subject or organization by serious amateurs who spend substantial amounts of personal time researching and studying that subject area
- organizations, agencies, institutions, corporations with active involvement or work in a particular subject area.

HINT: Be careful of opinions stated by professionals outside of their area of work expertise.

Accuracy: The Reliability, Truthfulness, and Correctness of the Information

Key Question: How free from error is this piece of information?

Establishing the accuracy, or relative accuracy, of information is an important part of evaluating the reliability of information. It is easier to establish the accuracy of facts than it is opinions, interpretations, or ideas. The more an idea, opinion, or other piece of information varies from the accepted point of view on a particular topic, the harder it is to establish its accuracy. An important aspect of accuracy is the intellectual integrity of the item:

- Are the sources appropriately cited in the text and listed in the references?
- Are quotations cited correctly and in context? Out-of-context quotations can be misleading and sometimes completely erroneous.
- Are there exaggerations, omissions, or errors? These are difficult to identify if you use only one source of information, so always use several different sources of information. Analyzing what different sources say about a topic is one way to determine exaggerations, omissions, and errors.

In addition to errors of fact and integrity, you need to watch for errors of logic. Errors of logic occur primarily in the presentation of conclusions, opinions, interpretations, editorials, ideas, etc. Some indications that information is accurate are:

- the same information can be found in other reliable but different sources
- the experiment can be replicated and returns the same results
- the documentation provided in support of the information is substantive
- the sources used for documentation are generally reliable
- the author of the information is known to have expertise on that subject
- the presentation is free from logical fallacies or errors
- quotations are “in context” so that the intended meaning of the information quoted is retained
- quotations, paraphrases, and summaries are correctly cited

Some indications that information may **not** be accurate are:

- facts cannot be verified or are contradicted in other sources
- sources used are known to be unreliable or highly biased
- bibliography of sources used is inadequate or non-existent
- quotations are taken out of context and given a different meaning
- presence of one or more logical fallacies
- authority cited is another part of the same organization
- inclusion of emotionally laden language

Purpose: The Reason the Information Exists

Key Question: Who is this information written for, and what is the author’s purpose?

Identifying the intended audience of the information and identifying the author’s purpose are other important aspects of evaluating information. The intended audience of an item generally determines the style of presentation, the level of technical detail, and the depth of coverage. Determining the intended audience of a particular piece of information will help you decide whether or not the information is too basic, too technical, too general, or just right for your needs. The intended audience can also indicate the potential reliability of the item because some audiences require more documentation than others. For example, items produced for scholarly or professional audiences are generally produced by experts and go through a peer review process. Items produced for the mass market frequently are not produced by experts and generally do not go through an evaluation process. Some indications of the intended audience are:

- Highly technical language, complex analysis, very sophisticated/technical tools can indicate a technical, professional, or scholarly audience.
- How-to information or current practices in “X” are frequently written by experts for practitioners in that field.
- Substantive and serious presentations of a topic with not too much technical language are generally written for the educated lay audience.
- Popular language, fairly simple presentations of a topic, with little or no analysis, can indicate a general or popular audience.
- Bibliographies, especially long bibliographies, are generally compiled by and for those doing research on that topic.

You should also consider the author's purpose. Is the information intended to inform or persuade? Does the author intend to present a bias? While it is unlikely that anything humans do is ever absolutely objective, it is important to establish that the information you intend to use is reasonably objective, or if it is not, to establish exactly what the point of view or bias is. There are times when information expressing a particular point of view or bias is useful, but you must use it consciously. You must know what the point of view is and why that point of view is important to your project.

Exercise 2

Review the steps of the CRAAP method and practice evaluating sources in [the following tutorial](#) from Eastern Michigan University. Be sure to [complete the practice exercises](#) at the end of the tutorial. (You may also access the tutorial and activity in a [text format](#).)

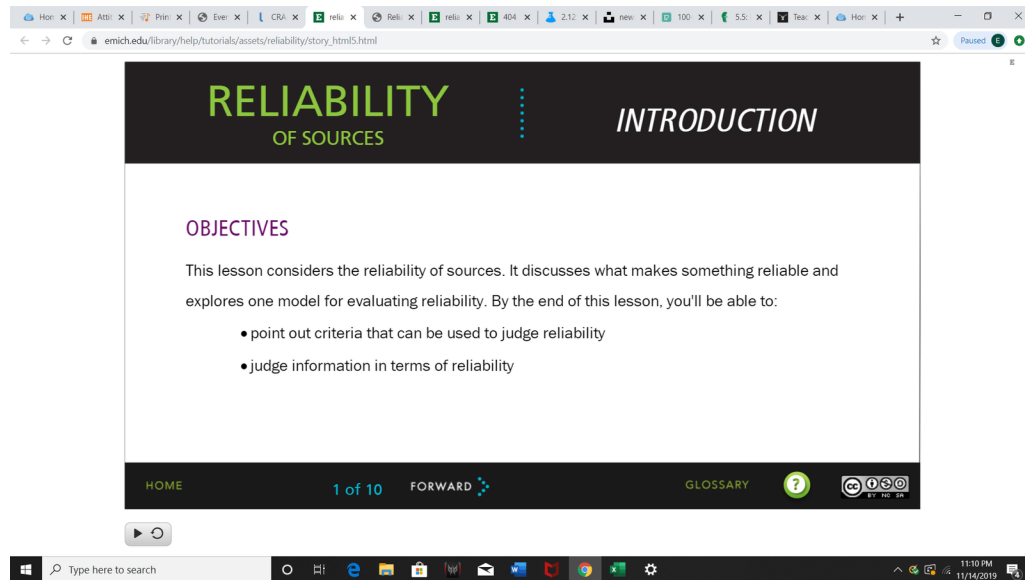


Figure: Some additional questions to keep in mind when evaluating websites follow.

Design

- Is the source professional?
- Does it seem like current design?
- Is the website user-friendly?
- What kinds of images are used?
- Is the navigation menu well-labeled?
- Are there spelling or grammar errors?
- Do the pages appear uncluttered?
- Are there ads or pop-ups on the page?
- Are links working?

Originality

- Was it reproduced? If so, from where? Type a sentence in Google to verify.
- If it was reproduced, was it done so with permission? Are a copyright and/or disclaimer included?

Keep in mind that everything is written from a particular social, cultural, and political perspective. Realize that some publications tend to be "slanted" towards a certain viewpoint. For example, the CATO Institute is known for being libertarian, while The Nation is known to lean left. Keep these slants in mind when you are researching.

Exercise 3

Evaluate each of the sources you plan to use for your research paper by applying the questions of the CRAAP test. Summarize your findings for each of the sources. For those sources that are websites, also evaluate the design and the originality of the source.

Writing at Work

The critical thinking skills you use to evaluate research sources as a student are equally valuable when you conduct research on the job. If you follow certain periodicals or websites, you have probably identified publications that consistently provide reliable information. Reading blogs and online discussion groups is a great way to identify new trends and hot topics in a particular field, but these sources should not be used for substantial research.

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8.3: Evaluating Online Information

Not all online information is trustworthy. To evaluate a source, consider:

Authority

Who wrote it? What are their qualifications?

Accuracy

Is the information supported by evidence? Are there citations?

Purpose

Is the site trying to inform, sell, persuade, entertain, or shock?

Currency

How recently was it published or updated?

Bias

Does the author present multiple perspectives or only one side?

A common tool is the CRAAP test:

- Currency
- Relevance
- Authority
- Accuracy

Purpose

Use it to decide if a website belongs in an academic essay.

Recommended OER Readings

Evaluating Online Sources



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <http://pb.libretexts.org/ccomp/?p=174>

You may have seen the commercial above making a point about how you have to be careful of what you find on the internet. This is true in life and in your efforts to find quality sources for academic papers.

The internet is particularly challenging because anyone can really post anything they want on the internet. At the same time, there are some really quality sources out there, such as online journals.

The important thing is to use skepticism, use the guidelines you have read about in this section of Research, and be sure to ask your professor if general web sources are even allowed. Sometimes, in an effort to have students steer clear of inaccurate information, professors will forbid general web sources for a paper, but this is not always the case. If you are allowed to go to the web to locate sources, just remember to check for **suitability**, **credibility**, and **timeliness** using the guidelines presented in this section of the Excelsior OWL.

Using the **Evaluation Checklist** will also give you some good guidelines to remember, no matter where you found your source.

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8.4: Creating a Simple Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of sources with brief explanations.

Each entry includes:

1. Citation (MLA or APA format)
2. Annotation: Usually 3–5 sentences that:
 - Summarize the main idea
 - Describe the type of source
 - Explain how it will help your project

Example annotation:

This article explains how social media distractions impact student study habits. The author uses survey data from 200 college students. This source will help me support my claim that phone use reduces academic focus.

Annotated bibliographies help you:

- Keep track of your sources
- Evaluate their usefulness
- Begin synthesizing information for your final paper

Recommended OER Readings

Your final essay for the class will be a Toulmin Analysis/Research Essay (I'll teach you how to do this!) of an article you will choose about the effects of social media on society (from the "Social Media Articles for Final Essay" tab on the left side navigation bar). Although the article you choose will be the primary source of your analysis, you will also need to do a good deal of external research to help you develop an objective, academic and analytical approach to your critique. Two weeks before your final essay is due, you will turn in an annotated bibliography of at least ten sources related to your research topic. These should not be the only ten sources you examine but rather most useful or influential ones. Your grade will be based on the variety and relevance of the sources and on the insight and clarity of your annotations.

Definition

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) one has used for researching a topic. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and/or evaluation. Therefore, an annotated bibliography includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources.

For your assignment, your annotations must do all of the following:

Summarize: What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say?

Assess : After summarizing a source, it is helpful to evaluate it. How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable, relevant and authoritative? How can you tell? Is this source inappropriately biased or relatively objective? What is the goal of this source?

Reflect: Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits specifically into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Purpose

To learn about your topic: Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information.

To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

To develop enough authoritative, relevant and reliable support for your topic: Most topics that you will be writing about in college classes are very complex and multi-faceted. Usually just finding a single source or two on a topic will not be sufficient to really understand all of the angles and nuances of the topic under consideration. A well researched and well written annotated bibliography will help you to be thorough and exhaustive in your research and guard against oversimplification and other forms of research-related blind spots.

Format

The bibliographic information: The bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in MLA format.

The annotations: The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose and the particular complexity of each source.

- **View:** [Example of an Annotated Bibliography](#)

Annotated Bibliography Checklist

Before your final essay is due, you will turn in an Annotated Bibliography of at least TEN sources related to your topic. *These should not be the only sources you have examined but rather most useful ones.* Your grade will be based on the variety and relevance of the sources as well as on the insight and clarity of your annotations.

- Consult the handout on Annotated Bibliographies for information on the purpose, scope and content of the assignment.
- Your annotations should be listed alphabetically, by the last name of the primary author of the selection and in proper MLA format.
- At least TWO of your sources should be books (if possible).
- At least THREE of your sources must be academic, scholarly or peer-reviewed journals.
- At least TWO of your annotations must be longer and more thorough (at least a page each).
- Be as specific as possible with your summaries, analyses and reflections on the relevancy of each source. Don't just tell me it is a good source or that it is very useful. I am assuming this since it is one of the ones you have selected to annotate. Tell me exactly *why* it is a good source and exactly *how* it is useful to your topic.
- Be sure to use the citation builder websites to help you build your entries in proper MLA format. They can be found on the Library website and on the our WR 122 Library Guide in the "Citation Style Guides" section.
- Sources found in the MHCC library databases are already in MLA format. Scroll down to the end of the article and the entry will be posted in full MLA format. Just copy and past it into your Bibliography. (Make sure to make it double-spaced and in "hanging" format as well.)

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8.5: Synthesizing Multiple Sources

Synthesis means putting sources in conversation with one another.

Instead of reporting each source separately (“Source A says... Source B says...”), synthesis asks you to:

- Look for patterns
- Compare and contrast ideas
- Identify agreements and disagreements
- Connect evidence to your own thesis
- Show how the sources collectively help answer your research question

Synthesis moves beyond summary. It creates new insight by combining information.

Example synthesis statement:

While Smith argues that phone addiction reduces focus, Chen provides evidence that structured breaks can reduce this effect. Together, these findings suggest that the problem is not phone use itself, but how students manage it.

Recommended OER Readings

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate how good source synthesis and integration builds credibility

What is Synthesis?

Synthesis is the combining of two or more things to produce something new. When you read and write, you will be asked to synthesize by taking ideas from what you read and combining them to form new ideas.

Synthesizing Sources

Once you have analyzed the texts involved in your research and taken notes, you must turn to the task of writing your essay. The goal here is not simply to summarize your findings. *Critical writing requires that you communicate your analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of those findings to your audience.*

You analyze and synthesize even before you compose your first draft. In an article called, “Teaching Conventions of Academic Discourse,” Teresa Thonney outlines six standard features of academic writing. Use the list to help frame your purpose and to ensure that you are adopting the characteristics of a strong academic writer as you synthesize from various sources:

1. Writers state the value of their work and announce their plan for their papers.
2. Writers adopt a voice of authority.
3. Writers respond to what others have said about their topic.
4. Writers acknowledge that others might disagree with the position they have taken.
5. Writers use academic and discipline-specific vocabulary.
6. Writers emphasize evidence, often in tables, graphs, and images.

Cooking With Your Sources

Let's return to the example of Marvin, who is working on his research assignment. Marvin already learned from the online professor that he should spend time **walking** with his sources (knowing where to find them) and **talking** to his sources (knowing who is conversing about them and what they are saying). Now Marvin will learn the importance of **cooking** with his sources, or creating the right recipe for an excellent paper.

O-Prof: Let's take a look at the third metaphor: *cooking*. When you *cook* with sources, you process them in new ways. Cooking, like writing, involves a lot of decisions. For instance, you might decide to combine ingredients in a way that keeps the full flavor and character of each ingredient.

Marvin: Kind of like chili cheese fries? I can taste the flavor of the chili, the cheese, and the fries separately.

O-Prof: Yes. But other food preparation processes can change the character of the various ingredients. You probably wouldn't enjoy gobbling down a stick of butter, two raw eggs, a cup of flour, or a cup of sugar (well, maybe the sugar!). But if you mix these ingredients and expose them to a 375-degree temperature, chemical reactions transform them into something good to eat, like a cake.

Marvin: You're making me hungry. But what do chili cheese fries and cakes have to do with writing?

O-Prof: Sometimes, you might use direct quotes from your sources, as if you were throwing walnuts whole into a salad. The reader will definitely "taste" your original source. Other times, you might paraphrase ideas and combine them into an intricate argument. The flavor of the original source might be more subtle in the latter case, with only your source documentation indicating where your ideas came from. In some ways, the writing assignments your professors give you are like recipes. As an apprentice writing *cook*, you should analyze your assignments to determine what "ingredients" (sources) to use, what "cooking processes" to follow, and what the final "dish" (paper) should look like. Let's try a few sample assignments. Here's one:

Assignment 1: Critique (given in a human development course)

We've read and studied Freud's theory of how the human psyche develops; now it's time to evaluate the theory. Read at least two articles that critique Freud's theory, chosen from the list I provided in class. Then, write an essay discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Freud's theory.

Assume you're a student in this course. Given this assignment, how would you describe the required ingredients, processes, and product?

Marvin thinks for a minute, while chewing and swallowing a mouthful of apple.

Marvin: Let's see if I can break it down:

Ingredients

- everything we've read about Freud's theory
- our class discussions about the theory
- two articles of my choice taken from the list provided by the instructor

Processes: I have to read those two articles to see their criticisms of Freud's theory. I can also review my notes from class, since we discussed various critiques. I have to think about what aspects of Freud's theory explain human development well, and where the theory falls short—like in class, we discussed how Freud's theory reduces human development to sexuality alone.

Product: The final essay needs to include both strengths and weaknesses of Freud's theory. The professor didn't specifically say this, but it's also clear I need to incorporate some ideas from the two articles I read—otherwise why would she have assigned those articles?

O-Prof: Good. How about this one?

Assignment 3: Research Paper (given in a health and environment course)

Write a 6–8-page paper in which you explain a health problem related to water pollution (e.g., arsenic poisoning, gastrointestinal illness, skin disease, etc.). Recommend a potential way or ways this health problem might be addressed. Be sure to cite and document the sources you use for your paper.

Marvin:

Ingredients: No specific guidance here, except that sources have to relate to water pollution and health. I've already decided I'm interested in how bottled water might help with health where there's water pollution. I'll have to pick a health problem and find sources about how water pollution can cause that problem. Gastrointestinal illness sounds promising. I'll ask the reference librarian where I'd be likely to find good articles about water pollution, bottled water, and gastrointestinal illness.

Process: There's not very specific information here about what process to use, but our conversation's given me some ideas. I'll use scholarly articles to find the connection between water pollution and gastrointestinal problems, and whether bottled water could prevent those problems.

Product: Obviously, my paper will explain the connection between water and gastrointestinal health. It'll evaluate whether bottled water provides a good option in places where the water's polluted, then give a recommendation about what people should do. The professor did say I should address any objections readers might raise—for instance, bottled water may turn out to be a good option, but it's a lot more expensive than tap water. Finally, I'll need to provide in-text citations and document my sources in a reference list.

O-Prof: You're on your way. Think for a minute about these assignments. Did you notice that the “recipes” varied in their specificity?

Marvin: Yeah. The first assignment gave me very specific information about exactly what source “ingredients” to use. But in the second assignment, I had to figure it out on my own. And the processes varied, too. In the second assignment—my own assignment—I'll have to use content from my sources to support my recommendation.

O-Prof: Different professors provide different levels of specificity in their writing assignments. If you have trouble figuring out the “recipe,” ask the professor for more information. Keep in mind that when it comes to “cooking with sources,” no one expects you to be an executive chef the first day you get to college. Over time, you'll become more expert at writing with sources, more able to choose and use sources on your own.

Watch It

Watch this video to learn more about the synthesis process.

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

You can view the [transcript for “Synthesis: Definition & Examples” here \(opens in new window\)](#).

Building Credibility through Source Integration

Writers are delighted when they find good sources because they know they can use those sources to make their writing stronger. Skillful integration of those sources adds to an argument's persuasiveness but also builds the credibility of the argument and the writer.

Well-integrated sources build credibility in several ways. First, the source material adds evidence and support to your argument, making it more persuasive. Second, the signal phrase highlights the reputation and qualifications of the source, thereby adding to the source material's credibility. Third, effective citation makes it easy for your reader to find and investigate the original source, building your credibility as a trustworthy writer. Finally, your thorough explanation of the source's relevance to your argument demonstrates **your critical thinking and reasoning**, another avenue to increased credibility.

Notice in the example below how the student is able to synthesize multiple sources on the minimum wage in the United States in

order to demonstrate familiarity with and respond to other voices on the topic. The writer is also able to state with authority their own perspective on the minimum wage and economic inequality based on the effective discussion and synthesis of sources.

Student Example

The U.S. minimum wage is out of line with other industrialized nations. As the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, it should not have citizens that live at such a low standard of life compared to the rest of its population. University of Connecticut Professor of Law and author of *Economism: Bad Economics and the Rise of Inequality* James Kwak notes in an article in *The Atlantic*, “The United States currently has the lowest minimum wage, as proportion of its average wage, of any advanced economy.” European countries that the U.S. helped rebuild after World War II have seen wages much higher than the rest of the globe. A graph in the May 20, 2015 issue of *The Economist* shows that for the United States to be on par with other economies in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the minimum wage should be approximately \$12 an hour (“Pay”). The United States risks falling behind not only in global economic growth but also in prestige as it neglects to raise the minimum wage and allows the divide between the rich and the poor to continue growing.

Comment [KFF1]: Signal phrase builds credibility. This signal phrase highlights the source’s reputation and qualifications, adding to the source material’s credibility.

Effective Citation Builds Credibility. The writer incorporates the author’s last name which matches the entry on the reference page. A reader could easily track down the source, even without an in-text citation, thereby adding to the writer’s trustworthiness.

Comment [KFF2]: Evidence builds credibility. This evidence from a highly-respected source provides good support for the writer’s point. Rather than relying solely on his opinion, the writer integrates solid evidence from a credible source.

Comment [KFF3]: Evidence builds credibility. This evidence bolsters the writer’s point with solid information from a reputable and much-consulted publication on economic policy.

Comment [KFF4]: Effective citation builds credibility. Here the writer uses a key word from the title of the article, which matches the entry on the reference page. A reader could easily track down the source, even with no source author, adding to the writer’s trustworthiness.

Comment [KFF5]: Explanation of source’s relevance builds credibility. Here the writer ties the evidence to the thesis of his paper, demonstrating his critical thinking and reasoning, thereby adding to his credibility.

[Download the PDF](#)

In the activity below, you’ll practice building your synthesis based on your analysis and thinking about other source material.

Try It

Examine the use of signal phrases, direct quotations from an outside source, citation, and explanation of relevance to consider how well the writer’s source integration builds credibility.

<https://lumenlearning.h5p.com/content/1291006520432442118/embed>

Synthesis, then, is the final step in the process of using sources. Good writers strive to include other voices in conversation, and they do so using direct quotes, paraphrase, and summary. The most important step, however, in integrating source material, is synthesis where we compare, contrast, and combine those other voices in order to fairly and accurately represent the existing conversation on the topic and thus to demonstrate how our ideas fit into or respond to that existing conversation.

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9: STYLE, CLARITY, AND VOICE

9.1: Choosing Clear and Effective Words

9.2: Avoiding Wordiness and Common Errors

9.3: Sentence Variety

9.4: Tone, Audience, and Academic Voice

9.5: How to Revise for Clarity

9.1: Choosing Clear and Effective Words

Clear writing starts with choosing words that communicate your meaning accurately.

Effective college writing avoids unnecessary complexity and focuses on precision.

Guidelines for choosing clear words:

- Use familiar vocabulary rather than inflated or overly academic terms.
- Weak: Utilize → Stronger: Use
- Weak: Commence → Stronger: Begin
- Choose specific words instead of vague ones.
- Vague: Things, stuff, a lot, kind of?
- Clearer: Requirements, challenges, evidence, dozens
- Avoid clichés that add little meaning.
- Examples: at the end of the day, in today's society, a win-win situation, in this time and age, back then
- Use concrete nouns and active verbs when possible.
- Passive: Mistakes were made.
- Active: The committee made mistakes.

Clear words help your audience focus on your ideas, not your vocabulary.

Recommended OER Readings

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some free writing exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words. The danger of being picky about your words as you draft (especially during your first draft) is that you may end up forgetting what you want to write while you search for that perfect word. This can cripple your writing process and create writer's block. One way to make sure that -- at some point in your writing process -- that you do choose the exact word that you mean is to place question marks "?" by the word you can't think of or that you think you might want to change, and then continue to draft. Once you are ready to edit your work at the sentence level (all of your content development and organization are complete) then you can search for question marks to find the places where you wanted to consider the word choice more carefully. Also, you may receive feedback from readers about word choice they find confusing or that you may want to re-consider.

Use the following strategies to help you with your word choice. Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely

on dictionaries and thesauruses to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and their multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries and thesauruses.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling.** How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- **Pronunciation.** How to say the word.
- **Part of speech.** The function of the word.
- **Definition.** The meaning of the word.
- **Synonyms.** Words that have similar meanings.
- **Etymology.** The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry and see which of the preceding information you can identify:

Definition

myth, *mith*, *n.* [Gr. *mythos*, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—**myth • ic, myth • i • cal**

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly.

Definition

precocious *adj.* *She's such a precocious little girl!:* uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

Ant. slow, backward, stupid.

Exercise 1

Choose the correct synonym.

- lenient _____ (relaxed, callous)
- abandon _____ (vacate, deceive)
- berate _____ (criticize, encourage)
- experienced _____ (callow, matured)
- spiteful _____ (malevolent, mellow)
- tame _____ (subdued, wild)
- tasty _____ (savory, bland)
- banal _____ (common, interesting)
- contradict _____ (deny, revolt)
- vain _____ (boastful, simple)

Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word. Using a thesaurus can be difficult sometimes if one doesn't know the connotations of a word because you risk using a word in the wrong way. If you aren't sure whether you are using a word with the right connotation, look up the word in sentences on the internet and see how its used in context. You can also ask your instructor or a tutor but if you are not sure about the connotation of a word, do a little research to figure it out.

The three following words (scrawny, skinny, and lean) all describe someone who weighs less than average, but they all have different connotations.

Scrawny

- **Denotation:** Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- **Word used in a sentence:** Although he was a premature baby and a **scrawny** child, Martin has developed into a strong man.
- **Connotation:** (Negative) In this sentence the word *scrawny* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

Skinny

- **Denotation:** Lacking sufficient flesh or meat, very thin or narrow.
- **Word used in a sentence:** **Skinny** jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.
- **Connotation:** (Neutral) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive or negative connotations of the word *skinny*.

Lean

- **Denotation:** Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- **Word used in a sentence:** My brother has a **lean** figure whereas I have a more muscular build.
- **Connotation:** (Neutral) In this sentence, *lean* has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word *scrawny*, nor does imply the positive cultural impressions of the word *skinny*. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ. This video explains it more.

YouTube Video

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Video 9.1.1

Word Choice. **Authored by:** Prof Myhen. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 2

In each of the following word sets, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

1. curious, nosy, interested
2. lazy, relaxed, slow
3. courageous, foolhardy, assured
4. new, newfangled, modern
5. mansion, shack, residence
6. spinster, unmarried woman, career woman
7. giggle, laugh, cackle
8. boring, routine, prosaic
9. noted, notorious, famous
10. assertive, confident, pushy

Positive	Negative	Neutral

Avoiding Slang

Hey guys, let's learn about slang and other cool stuff like that! It will be awesome, trust me. This section is off the hook!

What do you notice about the previous paragraph? You might notice that the language sounds informal, or casual, like someone might talk with a friend or family member, but with the purpose of this chapter, that seems odd, doesn't it? The paragraph also uses a lot of slang. Slang is a type of language that is informal and playful. It often changes over time. The slang of the past is different than the slang of today, but some slang has carried over into the present. Slang also varies by region and culture. There are literally thousands of slang words and expressions. The following table explains just a few of the common ones.

Slang Expressions	
Slang Word or Phrase	Meaning
check it out, check this out	look at, watch, examine
chocoholic, workaholic, shopaholic	a person who loves, or is addicted to chocolate, work, or shopping
stuff	things
have some tea	gossip
crack up	to laugh uncontrollably
veg, kick it	relax and do nothing

dude, man	person, man
cool, hip, bad	good, fashionable
gross, nasty	disgusting
pig out	overeat
screw up	make a bad mistake
awesome	great, terrific
the shit	the best

Words are the basis of how a reader or listener judges you, the writer and speaker. When you write an academic paper or speak in a business interview, you want to be sure to choose your words carefully. In our casual, everyday talk, we often use a lot of "ums," "likes," "yeahs," and so on. This everyday language is not appropriate for formal contexts, such as academic papers and business interviews. You should switch between different ways of speaking and writing depending on whether the context is formal or informal. Ultimately, this is part of the message that is a result of the rhetorical context in which you are writing or speaking (see "[The Art of Rhetoric](#)").

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing. It is also not appropriate to use profanity in academic writing, unless -- of course -- you are quoting a profane word from an assigned reading. However, when writing expository writing, another word will almost always fulfill the meaning and emphasis that a profane word may provide in other contexts.

Writing at Work 9.1.1

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture desensitizes many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional e-mails or during meetings may convey the wrong message or even mistakenly offend someone.

Exercise 3

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying "like" and "um," and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I've been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don't enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I'm surprised that people didn't boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 4

Edit the business email by replacing any slang words with more formal language.

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

I am writing to follow up on my interview from last week. First of all, it was awesome to meet you. You are a really cool lady. I believe I would be a pro at all the stuff you mentioned that would be required of me in this job. I am not a workaholic, but I do work hard and "take care of business." Haha. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

M. Ernest Anderson

Answer available at the end of this section.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- **Clichéd:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my **blood boil**.
- **Plain:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
- **Original:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.
2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
3. Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.
5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.
6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"
9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.
10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.

Idioms

Idioms are expressions that have a meaning different from the dictionary definition of the individual words in the expression. Because English contains many idioms, newer English speakers have difficulties making logical sense of idioms and idiomatic expressions. The more you are exposed to English, however, the more idioms you will come to understand. Until then, memorizing the more common idioms may be of some help.

Idioms	
Idiom	Definition
A blessing in disguise	A good thing you do not recognize as "good" at first
A piece of cake	Easy to do

Better late than never	It is better to do something late than not at all
Get over it	Recover from something (a perceived insult)
I have no idea	I don't know
Not a chance	It will definitely not happen
On pins and needles	Very nervous about something that is or may be happening
On top of the world	Feeling great
Pulling your leg	Making a joke by tricking you
The sky is the limit	The possibilities are endless

What if you come across an idiom you do not understand? Context clues that can help you. Context clues are words or phrases around the unknown word or phrase that may help you decipher the meaning.

1. **Definition or explanation clue.** An idiom may be explained immediately after its use.

- **Sentence:** I felt like I was sitting on *pins and needles*, **I was so nervous.**

2. **Restatement or synonym clues.** An idiom may be simplified or restated.

- **Sentence:** The young girl felt as though she had been *sent to the dog house* when her mother **punished her** for fighting in school.

3. **Contrast or antonym clues.** An idiom may be clarified by a contrasting phrase or antonym that is near it.

- **Sentence:** Chynna thought the 5k race would be a *piece of cake*, **but it turned out to be very difficult.**

Pay attention to the signal word *but*, which tells the reader that an opposite thought or concept is occurring.

Using Specific Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- **General:** My new puppy is cute.
- **Specific:** My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.
- **General:** My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
- **Specific:** My teacher, Ms. Atwater, explained how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

Exercise 6

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.
2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
5. The dog walked up the street.
6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
7. The tropical fish are pretty.
8. I sweat a lot after running.
9. The goalie blocked the shot.

10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.

Choose Strong, Descriptive Verbs

When used as main verbs, the following words are weak and almost meaningless: have, do, make, went/gone, and the "to be" verbs. Some of these verbs are just fine as linking verbs, but not as main verbs. Choose a more descriptive verb to replace these weak, almost meaningless verbs. This video will explain.

YouTube Video

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Video 9.1.1

Strong Verbs. Authored by: Curriculum Pathways. License: *All Rights Reserved*. License Terms: Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 7

In this exercise, replace the weak verbs with stronger, more descriptive verbs. You may need to replace more than one weak verb in a sentence.

1. Bethany's mother made her do her homework before Bethany could go out to play.
2. Michael went to play video games with his buddy, Pat, at Pat's house.
3. Chris and Sam went to prom and then hung out with friends afterward. They didn't get home until 3 a.m.!
4. Donna was doing her best, but it was sometimes hard to keep up and balance work and school.
5. The three-year-old was being childish when throwing her sibling's toy across the room.

Exercise 8

Rewrite the following personal essay by replacing the slang, clichés, and overly general language with stronger, more precise language.

My biggest regret happened in high school. I had always felt like a fish out of water, so during my sophomore year I was determined to fit in with the cool people. Man, was that an uphill battle. I don't even know why I tried, but hindsight is 20/20 I guess. The first thing I did was change the way I dressed. I went from wearing clothes I was comfortable in to wearing stuff that was so not me. Then I started wearing a ton of makeup, and my brother was all like,

“What happened to your face?” Not only did my looks change, my personality changed a lot too. I started to act all stuck up and bossy with my friends, and they didn’t know how to respond to this person that used to be me. Luckily, this phase didn’t last more than a couple of months. I decided it was more fun to be me than to try to be someone else. I guess you can’t fit a square peg in a round hole after all.

Collaboration

Compare your changes with a classmate.

Exercise 9

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences with slang, clichés, or overly general words and rewrite them using stronger language.

Synonyms

Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word. You can say an “easy task” or a “simple task” because *easy* and *simple* are synonyms. You can say Hong Kong is a “large city” or a “metropolis” because *city* and *metropolis* are synonyms.

However, it is important to remember that not all pairs of words in the English language are so easily interchangeable. The slight but important differences in meaning between synonyms can make a big difference in your writing. For example, the words *boring* and *insipid* may have similar meanings, but the subtle differences between the two will affect the message your writing conveys. The word *insipid* evokes a scholarly and perhaps more pretentious message than *boring*.

The English language is full of pairs of words that have subtle distinctions between them. All writers, professionals and beginners alike, face the challenge of choosing the most appropriate synonym to best convey their ideas. When you pay particular attention to synonyms in your writing, it comes across to your reader. The sentences become much more clear and rich in meaning.

Writing at Work

Any writing you do at work involves a careful choice of words. For example, if you are writing an e-mail to your employer regarding your earnings, you can use the word *pay*, *salary*, or hourly *wage*. There are also other synonyms to choose from. Just keep in mind that the word you choose will have an effect on the reader, so you want to choose wisely to get the desired effect.

Exercise 10

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence with each of the following words that illustrates the specific meaning of each synonym.

1. leave, abandon
2. mad, insane
3. outside, exterior
4. poor, destitute
5. quiet, peaceful
6. riot, revolt
7. rude, impolite

8. talk, conversation
9. hug, embrace
10. home, residence

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Antonyms

Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of a given word. The study of antonyms will not only help you choose the most appropriate word as you write; it will also sharpen your overall sense of language. Table 4.3 “Common Antonyms” lists common words and their antonyms.

Table 4.3 - Common Antonyms

Word	Antonym	Word	Antonym
absence	presence	frequent	seldom
accept	refuse	harmful	harmless
accurate	inaccurate	horizontal	vertical
advantage	disadvantage	imitation	genuine
ancient	modern	inhabited	uninhabited
abundant	scarce	inferior	superior
artificial	natural	intentional	accidental
attractive	repulsive	justice	injustice
borrow	lend	knowledge	ignorance
bravery	cowardice	landlord	tenant
create	destroy, demolish	likely	unlikely
bold	timid, meek	minority	majority
capable	incapable	miser	spendthrift
combine	separate	obedient	disobedient
conceal	reveal	optimist	pessimist
common	rare	permanent	temporary
decrease	increase	plentiful	scarce
definite	indefinite	private	public
despair	hope	prudent	imprudent
discourage	encourage	qualified	unqualified
employer	employee	satisfactory	unsatisfactory
expand	contract	tame	wild
forget	remember	vacant	occupied

Tip

Learning antonyms is an effective way to increase your vocabulary. Memorizing words in combination with or in relation to other words often helps us retain them.

Exercise 11

Correct the following sentences by replacing the underlined words with an antonym. Write the antonym on your own sheet of paper.

1. The pilot who landed the plane was a coward because no one was injured.
2. Even though the botany lecture was two hours long, Gerard found it incredibly dull.
3. My mother says it is impolite to say thank you like you really mean it.
4. Although I have learned a lot of information through textbooks, it is life experience that has given me ignorance.
5. When our instructor said the final paper was compulsory, it was music to my ears!
6. My only virtues are coffee, video games, and really loud music.
7. Elvin was so bold when he walked in the classroom that he sat in the back row and did not participate.
8. Maria thinks elephants who live in freedom have a sad look in their eyes.
9. The teacher filled her students' minds with gloomy thoughts about their futures.
10. The quest attended to every one of our needs.

Contributors

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Answers

Exercise 4

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9.2: Avoiding Wordiness and Common Errors

Wordiness makes writing hard to follow. College readers value clarity and efficiency.

Strategies to avoid wordiness:

- Remove filler phrases
- Wordy: In my opinion, I think that...
- Clear: I believe...
- Cut unnecessary qualifiers
- Wordy: really, very, totally, quite
- Clear: remove them unless truly needed.
- Simplify long phrases
- Wordy: due to the fact that
- Clear: because
- Eliminate repetitions
- Wordy: Each and every student → Every student

Common sentence-level errors to watch for:

- Fragments , incomplete sentences
- Run-ons , sentences without proper punctuation
- Comma splices , two sentences joined only by a comma
- Misplaced modifiers , confusing word order

Learning to spot these errors will make your writing cleaner and easier to revise.

Recommended OER Readings

What is wordiness?

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. This is called “wordiness.” Your sentences can become cluttered like the counter in figure 6.8.1. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.



Figure 9.2.1: "Into the (Food) Desert: Day 3" by Mark Bonica is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Examples of wordiness

Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft.

Sentences that begin with "There is" or "There are"

- **Wordy:** **There is** an abundance of agriculture in California.
- **Revised:** Agriculture is abundant in California.

Empty phrases

Be careful when you use phrases such as "these days," "in terms of," "due to the fact that," "on the subject of," "more or less," and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point.

- **Wordy:** **These days**, food deserts exist in many parts of the state; a food desert is a place where people do not have access to fresh, affordable foods **due to** a variety of reasons.
- **Revised:** Food deserts exist in many parts of the state; a food desert is a place where people do not have access to fresh, affordable foods for a variety of reasons.

Constructions that can be shortened

The words and phrases in the following examples can sound important and even formal, but they tend to be empty in meaning and can be eliminated or replaced with more concise wording.

- **Wordy:** **In order to** combat skepticism about **phenomena such as** gentrification, it's **absolutely** essential that community members are **invited to be involved** in opening new supermarkets in their own communities.
- **Revised:** To combat skepticism about gentrification, it's essential that community members be involved in opening new supermarkets in their own communities.

Identifying wordiness

Now let's take a look at the student essay in terms of wordiness:

Try this!

Look again at the introduction to Amanda's essay.

- Can you identify some strengths?
- What suggestions do you have for improvement? Specifically, think about areas of wordiness. What could be phrased more succinctly?

Have you ever had trouble finding a supermarket when you wanted to purchase fresh vegetables and fruits? Have you ever wondered why there are no supermarkets in certain areas? This phenomenon has become especially evident as people pay more attention to a healthy diet and lean towards purchasing healthy food. As explained by Michael Pollan, a food detective and expert also known as the author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, organic food is considered healthy food due to the fact that "it is grown without chemical fertilizers or pesticides" (133). Even though there are organic grocery stores like Whole Foods seemingly everywhere, it is difficult for some people of lower socioeconomic status, who live in food deserts, to access healthy food due to lack of accessibility and affordability. According to American FactFinder, the median family income in the United States was 70,850 dollars in 2017 ("American FactFinder—Results"). This means that families with a median income below 70,850 dollars are considered in lower socioeconomic status. Gloria Howerton, a professor of the Geography Department at the University of Georgia and the author of "Oh Honey, Don't You Know?" The Social Construction of Food Access in a Food Desert," mentions that people of lower socioeconomic status usually live in food deserts (741). An area where there's a lack of fresh vegetables and fruits providers, such as supermarkets or farmer's markets, is known as a food desert. This paper will attempt to show why it is difficult for people of lower socioeconomic status to access healthy food by examining the area of West Oakland as a case study, as well as discussing solutions that are in place to improve this situation.

Revising for wordiness

Now let's apply this to your own writing:

Apply this!

Take a piece of writing you are working on and read it over.

- What aspects of wordiness, if any, can you identify?
- For example, can you find sentences beginning with "there is" or "there are"?
- What about sentences with empty phrases?

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Sample paragraphs on food deserts are adapted from "[Accessibility and Affordability of Healthy Food Dependent Upon Socioeconomic Status](#)" by Amanda Wu.

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Examples of wordiness adapted from Lynne Bost, et al. *Successful College Composition, Edition 2* "Transitions, Wordiness, and Clarity" from Georgia State University's Perimeter College (CC BY).

Adapted from Gabriel Winer and Elizabeth Wadell [Reading, Writing, Research, and Reasoning: An Advanced ESL Text](#)

9.3: Sentence Variety

Variety helps your writing stay engaging. Using only short sentences can feel choppy; using only long sentences can overwhelm readers.

Ways to create sentence variety:

- Vary sentence length
- Mix short, medium, and long sentences.
- Vary sentence openings
- Start with a phrase, a question, or an introductory clause.
- Example: Although the study was small, it offers useful insights.
- Use different sentence types
- Simple: College writing requires practice.
- Compound: College writing requires practice, and revision improves it further.
- Complex: Although writing is challenging, regular practice builds confidence.
- Combine related ideas to show relationships more clearly.

Effective variety helps your writing reflect your thinking more naturally.

Recommended OER Readings

The stage of proofreading is often focused solely on “correctness”: making sure that all the details are right, and that language is used according to the rules. Proofreading also offers a great opportunity to address more personal concerns, however. It’s a chance to focus on your **style**, and allows you to craft the final product that best represents your unique perspective.



A writer’s style is what sets his or her writing apart. Style is the way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific context, purpose, or audience. Word choice, sentence fluency, and the writer’s voice — all contribute to the style of a piece of writing. How a writer chooses words and structures sentences to achieve a certain effect is also an element of style. When Thomas Paine wrote “These are the times that try men’s souls,” he arranged his words to convey a sense of urgency

and desperation. Had he written “These are bad times,” it’s likely he wouldn’t have made such an impact!

Style is usually considered to be the province of literary writers. Novelists such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are well known for their distinctive literary styles. But journalists, scientists, historians, and mathematicians also have distinctive styles, and they need to know how to vary their styles to fit different audiences. For example, the first-person narrative style of a popular magazine like *National Geographic* is quite different from the objective, third-person expository style of a research journal like *Scientific American*, even though both are written for informational purposes.

Not just right and wrong

Style is not a matter of right and wrong but of what is appropriate for a particular setting and audience. Consider the following two passages, which were written by the same author on the same topic with the same main idea, yet have very different styles:

“Experiments show that *Heliconius* butterflies are less likely to oviposit on host plants that possess eggs or egg-like structures. These egg mimics are an unambiguous example of a plant trait evolved in response to a host-restricted group of insect herbivores.”

“*Heliconius* butterflies lay their eggs on *Passiflora* vines. In defense the vines seem to have evolved fake eggs that make it look to the butterflies as if eggs have already been laid on them.” (Example from Myers, G. (1992). *Writing biology: Texts in the social construction of scientific knowledge*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p. 150.)

What changed was the audience. The first passage was written for a professional journal read by other biologists, so the style is authoritative and impersonal, using technical terminology suited to a professional audience. The second passage, written for a popular science magazine, uses a more dramatic style, setting up a conflict between the butterflies and the vines, and using familiar words to help readers from non-scientific backgrounds visualize the scientific concept being described. Each style is appropriate for the particular audience.

Elements of style

Many elements of writing contribute to an author’s style, but three of the most important are word choice, sentence fluency, and voice.

Word Choice

Good writers are concise and precise, weeding out unnecessary words and c



choosing the exact word to convey meaning. Precise words—active verbs, concrete nouns, specific adjectives—help the reader visualize the sentence. Good writers use adjectives sparingly and adverbs rarely, letting their nouns and verbs do the work.

Good writers also choose words that contribute to the flow of a sentence. Polysyllabic words, alliteration, and consonance can be

used to create sentences that roll off the tongue. Onomatopoeia and short, staccato words can be used to break up the rhythm of a sentence.

Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the flow and rhythm of phrases and sentences. Good writers use a variety of sentences with different lengths and rhythms to achieve different effects. They use parallel structures within sentences and paragraphs to reflect parallel ideas, but also know how to avoid monotony by varying their sentence structures.

Good writers also arrange their ideas within a sentence for greatest effect. They avoid loose sentences, deleting extraneous words and rearranging their ideas for effect. Many students initially write with a looser oral style, adding words on to the end of a sentence in the order they come to mind. This rambling style is often described as a “word dump” where everything in a student’s mind is dumped onto the paper in no particular order. There is nothing wrong with a word dump as a starting point: the advantage of writing over speaking is that writers can return to their words, rethink them, and revise them for effect. Tighter, more readable style results when writers choose their words carefully, delete redundancies, make vague words more specific, and use subordinate clauses and phrases to rearrange their ideas for the greatest effect.

Voice

Because voice is difficult to measure reliably, it is often left out of scoring formulas for writing tests. Yet voice is an essential element of style that reveals the writer’s personality. A writer’s voice can be impersonal or chatty, authoritative or reflective, objective or passionate, serious or funny.

Strategies to Revise for Style

Read an essay draft out loud, preferably to another person. Better yet, have another person read your draft to you. Note how that person interprets your words. Does it come across as you had meant it originally? If not, revise.

Adopt a persona that’s related to your topic. Write from the perspective of this person you create: what language would a young woman who’d just spent two years in the peace corps use, for instance, if the essay were about the value of volunteer work? How would the words on the page of a project about gun control look coming from the perspective of a very conservative gun owner?

Combine (some) short sentences, or break apart (some) long sentences. Sentence length variety is an asset to your readers, as noted above. If you find a stretch of your essay that uses many sentences of approximately the same length close together, focus on combining or breaking apart there.

Punch up the word choice. Not every word in an essay can be a “special” word, nor should they be. But if your writing in an area feels a little flat, the injection of a livelier word can have strong rhetorical and emotional impact on your reader. Think of these words as jewels in the right setting. Often swapping out “to be” verbs (is, was, were, etc.) with more action-packed verbs has immediate, positive impact. Adjectives are also good candidates for updating—look for “things” and “stuff,” or “very” and “many,” to replace with more precise terminology.

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9.4: Tone, Audience, and Academic Voice

Tone

Tone is the attitude your writing conveys.

Academic writing typically uses a tone that is:

- Respectful
- Reasoned
- Neutral or evidence-based

But the tone may shift depending on the assignment, some essays may allow more personal voice.

Audience

Consider who will read your writing:

- Your instructor?
- Classmates?
- A general public audience?

Your choices, word choice, detail level, examples, should match what the audience needs.

Academic Voice

Academic voice does not mean sounding robotic or overly formal.

It means being:

- Clear
- Precise
- Evidence-based
- Professional

Examples of improving academic voice:

- Weak: This article is kinda confusing.
- Stronger: This article uses technical language that may be challenging for new readers.

Recommended OER Readings

Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. One technique that effective writers use is to begin a fresh paragraph for each new idea they introduce. Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. One paragraph focuses on only one main idea and presents coherent sentences to support that one point.

Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand on its own. To create longer assignments and to discuss more than one point, writers group together paragraphs. Just like a piece of writing as a whole (see [rhetorical analysis](#)), three elements shape the content of each paragraph:

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

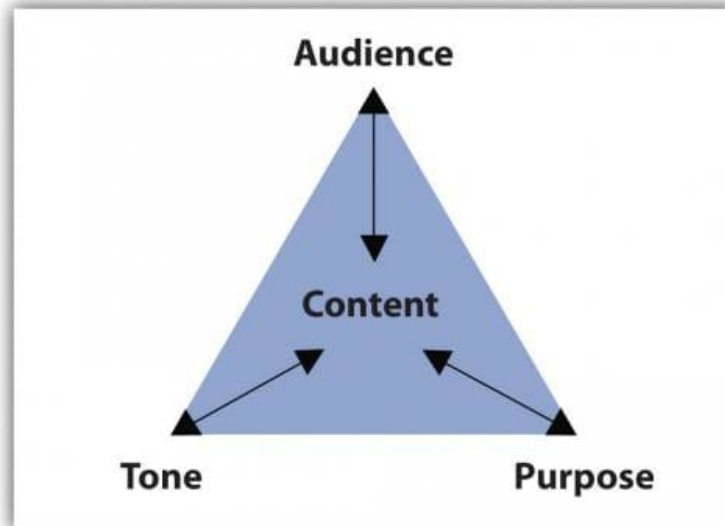


Figure: Amazon.

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

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

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

Identifying the Audience

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

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

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

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

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

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

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

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

Exercise 1

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

- Whereas economist Holmes contends that the financial crisis is far from over, the presidential advisor Jones points out that it is vital to catch the first wave of opportunity to increase market share. We can use elements of both experts' visions. Let me explain how.
 - In 2000, foreign money flowed into the United States, contributing to easy credit conditions. People bought larger houses than they could afford, eventually defaulting on their loans as interest rates rose.
 - The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, known by most of us as the humongous government bailout, caused mixed reactions. Although supported by many political leaders, the statute provoked outrage among grassroots groups. In their opinion, the government was actually rewarding banks for their appalling behavior.
-
- Audience: An instructor
 - Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis
 - Content:
 - Audience: Classmates
 - Purpose: To summarize the effects of the \$700 billion government bailout
 - Content:
 - Audience: An employer
 - Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery
 - Content:

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

Exercise 2

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

My assignment:

My purpose:

My audience:

My tone:

My content ideas:

Managing Your Time

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

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

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

Tip:

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

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

Table 4.5.1 -- Time-Planning Example

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

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9.5: How to Revise for Clarity

Revision is where writing becomes clear. The goal is to help readers understand your thinking with minimal effort.

Revision strategies for clarity:

- Read your draft aloud.
- If you stumble, the sentence may be too long or confusing.
- Check sentence focus.
- Each sentence should express one clear idea.
- Cut unnecessary words.
- Ask: Does this phrase actually help my reader?
- Strengthen verbs.
- Replace weak or vague verbs with stronger ones.
- Use transitions to guide your reader.
- Words like however, for example, therefore help show relationships.
- Ask a peer to reflect back what they think you meant.
- Misunderstandings often reveal unclear writing.

Recommended OER Readings

What makes a complex line of thinking easy to follow? The tricks of cohesion and coherence, discussed in [Chapter 6](#), are a big help. 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:³

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:⁴

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 years⁵; 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 nouns⁷ (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.

10: GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS (ESSENTIALS)

10.1: Overview

10.2: Sentence Boundaries- Fragments, Run-ons, Comma Splices

10.3: Punctuation Basics

10.4: Proofreading Strategies

10.1: Overview

Grammar and mechanics are important in college writing but sometimes students get confused and think grammar is just about rules and memorization and that's not really the point. The point is clarity and making sure your reader understands what you're trying to say.

This unit is going to focus on the most common grammar problems students have in first year writing classes. Not every single rule because that would take forever and honestly most of them are not needed at this level.

The goal is not to be perfect, it's to have more control over your sentences.

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10.2: Sentence Boundaries- Fragments, Run-ons, Comma Splices

Sentence Boundaries

One of the biggest issues in freshman writing is sentence boundary problems. Basically students either don't finish a sentence or they connect sentences the wrong way.

A sentence needs:

- a subject
- a verb
- and a complete thought

If its missing one of those things its probably not a full sentence.

Fragments

A fragment is when you write something that looks like a sentence but isnt actually complete.

Example:

Because students procrastinate.

That is not a complete idea. It makes the reader confused and waiting for the rest of the thought.

Corrected:

Because students procrastinate, they feel stressed before the deadline.

Fragments often happen when:

- dependent clauses stand alone
- there's no subject
- there's no verb
- you start with "which" or "because" and forget to finish

Sometimes students don't even realize they wrote a fragment.

Run On Sentences

Run on sentences are when two sentences get smashed together without the correct punctuation.

Example:

Incorrect:

Students struggle with grammar they dont always understand the rules.

That should either have a period or a conjunction.

Correct:

Students struggle with grammar because they don't always understand the rules.

OR

Students struggle with grammar. They do not always understand the rules.

Comma Splices

A comma splice is when you put a comma between two full sentences and that's it.

Incorrect:

Students want better grades, they wait until the last minute to study.

This is wrong because a comma isn't strong enough to hold two sentences together.

Correct:

Students want better grades, but they wait until the last minute to study.

OR

Students want better grades; however, they wait until the last minute.

Sentence boundary mistakes can make your writing look rushed or unpolished even if your ideas are strong.

10.3: Punctuation Basics

Punctuation tells the reader how to read your sentence. Without it writing can be confusing and hard to follow.

Periods

Periods end a sentence. That's pretty straight forward.

Students sometimes forget periods or use too many commas instead.

Commas

Commas are used in a lot of places which is why they are confusing.

You use commas:

- in a list
- after an intro phrase
- between two sentences with and, but, or, so

Common mistake:

Putting a comma between subject and verb.

Wrong:

The students in this class, struggle with revision.

Right:

The students in this class struggle with revision.

Semicolons

Semicolons connect two related sentences. They are stronger than commas but weaker than periods.

Students often either never use them or use them randomly.

Correct:

Students revised carefully; their essays improved.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes show possession or contractions.

Common mistake:

Its vs it's

Its = possession

It's = it is

Students mix these up all the time because they sound the same.

Commonly Confused Words

There are a lot of words that sound the same but mean different things.

Their / There / They're

Your / You're

Its / It's

Then / Than

To / Too / Two

Affect / Effect

Students sometimes rely on spell check but spell check won't catch these because they are all real words.

Strategy:

Say the sentence out loud.

Replace "you're" with "you are" to see if it works.

Example:

Your going to class.

This is wrong because "you are going" works.

Subject Verb Agreement (basic)

Subjects and verbs need to match. If the subject is singular the verb should be singular. If its plural the verb should be plural.

Correct:

The student writes clearly.

The students write clearly.

Students get confused when the subject is far away from the verb.

Example:

The list of assignments are long.

That is wrong because the subject is list not assignments.

Correction:

The list of assignments is long.

10.4: Proofreading Strategies

Proofreading is different than revising but students often mix them up.

- Revising is about big ideas.
- Proofreading is about small errors.

Strategies:

1. Read your paper out loud.
2. Read it backwards.
3. Look for your usual mistakes.
4. Dont just trust spellcheck.
5. Take a break before editing.

Careful!

- Editing while drafting sometimes messes up your thinking because you focus too much on little mistakes.

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11: MULTIMODAL AND DIGITAL WRITING

11.1: Unit Overview

11.2: Learning Outcomes

11.3: What Counts as “Writing” Online?

11.4: Visual Rhetoric Basics

11.5: Integrating Images, Charts, or Media

11.6: Creating Accessible Digital Documents

11.7: Writing for Real Audiences

11.8: Common Challenges in Digital Writing

11.9: Practice Activity

11.1: Unit Overview

Writing today happens in many spaces beyond the traditional academic essay.

Students write emails, discussion board posts, social media updates, slide presentations, digital reports, and multimedia projects. These forms of communication still require clarity, purpose, organization, and awareness of audience.

Multimodal writing refers to communication that combines more than one mode. A mode is a way of communicating meaning.

- Written language is one mode.
- Images are another.
- Sound, layout, color, and design are also modes.
- When writers combine text with visuals or other media, they are working multimodally.

In this unit, you will learn how digital writing works, how visuals persuade, how to integrate media responsibly, how to create accessible documents, and how to write effectively for real-world audiences.

11.2: Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Define multimodal writing
- Analyze visual rhetoric in digital texts
- Integrate images and media effectively and ethically
- Create accessible digital documents
- Adapt writing for real audiences in digital spaces

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11.3: What Counts as “Writing” Online?

Many students associate writing with essays. However, digital environments expand what writing can be.

Online writing includes:

- Emails
- Discussion board posts
- Blog entries
- Social media captions
- Digital posters
- Slide presentations
- Website content
- Infographics
- Multimedia essays

In each of these contexts, writers still make rhetorical choices. They consider:

- Audience
- Purpose
- Tone
- Organization
- Evidence

The difference is that digital writing often involves design and layout choices alongside words.

For example, a short discussion post should still:

- Address the prompt clearly
- Use complete sentences
- Respond thoughtfully to others
- Maintain a respectful tone

Even brief writing in digital spaces shapes your credibility.

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11.4: Visual Rhetoric Basics

Visual rhetoric refers to how images and design elements communicate meaning.

Images are not neutral. They suggest attitudes, emotions, and assumptions. For example:

- A dark, dramatic photo may create a serious tone.
- Bright colors may create energy or optimism.
- A cluttered slide may feel overwhelming.
- A clean layout with white space may feel organized and professional.

Visual elements include:

- Color
- Font style and size
- Layout
- Spacing
- Images and icons
- Charts and graphs

When using visuals, ask:

- What does this image suggest?
- Does it support my message?
- Could it be interpreted differently by different audiences?

Visual rhetoric is persuasive. Design choices shape how readers interpret your message.

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11.5: Integrating Images, Charts, or Media

Images and media should support your ideas, not replace explanation.

If you include a chart, you must:

- Introduce it
- Explain what it shows
- Interpret its significance
- Connect it to your claim

Do not assume the reader will draw the same conclusion you did.

For example:

Weak integration:

This chart shows the increase in tuition.

Stronger integration:

As the chart demonstrates, tuition has increased steadily over the past decade, rising by nearly 30 percent. This upward trend supports the argument that affordability is becoming a growing concern for students.

Media integration also requires ethical responsibility:

- Cite images and media sources
- Respect copyright
- Use open-access or licensed materials when possible
- Provide clear attribution

Digital writing still follows academic integrity standards.

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11.6: Creating Accessible Digital Documents

Under construction.jpg

Under Construction

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11.7: Writing for Real Audiences

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11.8: Common Challenges in Digital Writing

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11.9: Practice Activity

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12: STUDENT MODELS AND PRACTICE

12.1: Unit Overview

12.2: Learning Outcomes

12.3: Example Paragraphs- Good, Better, and Revised Versions

12.4: Example Essays with Annotations

12.5: Practice Exercises for Each Unit

12.6: Peer Review Checklists

12.7: Self-Assessment Tools

12.8: Building a Culture of Practice and Growth

12.1: Unit Overview

Learning to write well does not happen by memorizing rules alone. It happens through seeing examples, practicing specific skills, receiving feedback, and reflecting on growth.

This unit focuses on making writing visible. Instead of only discussing what strong writing looks like, this unit provides:

- models
- guided practice
- peer review tools
- self-assessment strategies

By studying examples and engaging in structured practice, students gain a clearer understanding of expectations and develop confidence in their own writing process.

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12.2: Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Analyze model paragraphs and essays
- Identify strengths and areas for revision in sample writing
- Apply writing strategies through guided practice
- Provide constructive peer feedback
- Reflect on their own writing strengths and areas for growth

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12.3: Example Paragraphs- Good, Better, and Revised Versions

Many students benefit from seeing multiple versions of the same paragraph. A “good” paragraph may meet the basic requirements: it has a topic sentence, some support, and a clear focus. However, a “better” paragraph may show stronger development, clearer transitions, and more specific evidence. A revised version often demonstrates how small changes improve clarity and organization.

For example, a basic paragraph might introduce an idea but provide limited explanation.

A stronger revision might:

- Add more specific evidence
- Clarify connections between ideas
- Improve transitions
- Eliminate repetition
- Strengthen sentence clarity

By comparing versions, students see that revision is not about fixing a few grammar errors. Revision often involves rethinking structure, refining claims, and strengthening analysis. This comparison process helps demystify writing and shows that strong writing develops over time.

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12.4: Example Essays with Annotations

Annotated model essays provide insight into how academic writing works. An annotation is a brief explanation placed alongside a text to highlight specific features.

Annotations may identify:

- The thesis statement
- The introduction's purpose
- Topic sentences
- Use of evidence
- Transitions
- Counterarguments
- Conclusion strategies

Instead of presenting a model essay as something perfect or unattainable, annotated examples explain why certain choices are effective. Students learn to recognize writing strategies in context rather than in isolation.

Annotated essays also clarify instructor expectations.

- When students understand how strong writing functions, they are better prepared to apply similar strategies in their own work.

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12.5: Practice Exercises for Each Unit

Writing improves through repetition and focused practice. Each unit includes short exercises that allow students to apply specific skills before completing larger assignments.

Examples of practice exercises include:

- Revising a weak thesis statement
- Identifying and correcting sentence boundary errors
- Writing a topic sentence for a given paragraph
- Integrating a quotation into a short paragraph
- Improving transitions between sentences

These exercises are low-stakes opportunities to experiment and refine skills. They also allow instructors to identify common challenges and address them before major assignments are submitted.

Practice helps build fluency and confidence. Writing becomes less intimidating when students work in manageable steps.

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12.6: Peer Review Checklists

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12.7: Self-Assessment Tools

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12.8: Building a Culture of Practice and Growth

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13: FINAL PROJECT

13.1: Unit Overview

13.2: Learning Outcomes

13.3: Choosing a Topic

13.4: Gathering and Evaluating Sources

13.5: Drafting a Research-Informed Essay

13.6: Revising and Editing for Submission

13.7: Final Reflection- What I Learned About Writing

13.1: Unit Overview

The final project is the culmination of the skills you have developed throughout this course. It brings together topic development, research, drafting, revision, organization, evidence integration, grammar awareness, and reflection. Rather than introducing entirely new skills, this unit asks you to apply what you already know in a more sustained and thoughtful way.

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13.2: Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Develop a focused, researchable topic
- Locate and evaluate credible sources
- Draft a clear, organized research-informed essay
- Revise and edit for clarity, coherence, and correctness
- Reflect thoughtfully on their growth as writers

13.3: Choosing a Topic

Selecting a topic is the first and often most important step in the final project. A strong topic is focused, researchable, and meaningful to the writer.

A topic that is too broad can become overwhelming. For example, a subject like “education” or “technology” is too general to explore effectively in a short academic essay. A stronger approach is to narrow the focus by asking a specific question.

For example:

- How does part-time employment affect college student performance?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of online learning in first-year college courses?
- How does social media influence political awareness among young adults?

Beginning with a focused question helps guide research and keeps the essay manageable.

A strong topic should:

- Be specific enough to explore in depth
- Have available research and credible sources
- Connect to a broader issue or conversation
- Sustain your interest throughout drafting and revision

Topics may evolve as research progresses. Adjusting or refining a topic is a normal part of the writing process.

13.4: Gathering and Evaluating Sources

Research strengthens your writing by grounding your ideas in credible information. However, not all sources are equally reliable.

Strong academic sources typically include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Scholarly books
- Reputable news organizations
- Government or educational websites
- Established research institutions

When evaluating a source, consider:

- Who is the author?
- What are their qualifications?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Is the source current?
- Does it show bias or a specific agenda?

Research should support your ideas, not replace them. Instead of collecting sources that all repeat the same information, look for sources that contribute different perspectives or evidence. Effective research involves putting sources into conversation with one another and with your own argument.

Keeping careful notes and documenting sources accurately prevents plagiarism and strengthens credibility.

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13.5: Drafting a Research-Informed Essay

Once you have a focused topic and credible sources, you can begin drafting your essay. A research-informed essay follows the same structure as other academic essays, but it integrates outside evidence throughout.

A strong research essay typically includes:

- An introduction that provides context and presents a clear thesis
- Body paragraphs that develop specific points
- Evidence from sources integrated smoothly into analysis
- Clear explanations connecting evidence to the thesis
- A conclusion that reflects on the significance of the argument

When drafting, focus on clarity and organization. Avoid relying too heavily on quotations. Your voice and analysis should guide the essay. Each source should be introduced, explained, and connected to your claim.

Drafting is exploratory.

- It is acceptable if your ideas shift or become clearer during this stage.
- The goal of drafting is to build a complete version of your argument that can later be revised.

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13.6: Revising and Editing for Submission

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13.7: Final Reflection- What I Learned About Writing

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14: APPENDICES

14.1: Quick Grammar Guide

14.2: Citation Guides (MLA/APA basics)

14.3: Writing Templates (essay outlines, paragraph organizers)

14.4: Accessibility and Technology Tips

14.5: Glossary of Key Terms

14.1: Quick Grammar Guide

PDF Resource

Google Drive File

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14.2: Citation Guides (MLA/APA basics)

Citation Guides: MLA and APA

Interactive Content

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If the citation guide does not display, [open the MLA and APA citation guide here \(opens in new window\)](#).

14.3: Writing Templates (essay outlines, paragraph organizers)

Writing Templates: Essay Outlines and Paragraph Organizers

Essay Outline Guide

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Paragraph Organizer Guide

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14.4: Accessibility and Technology Tips

Accessibility and Technology Tips

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Glossary of Key Terms

Academic Essay

A focused piece of writing that presents a main point or argument and supports it with reasoning, evidence, and analysis.

Academic Integrity

The practice of giving proper credit to sources and completing academic work honestly. Academic integrity includes avoiding plagiarism and citing words, ideas, images, and data correctly.

Academic Voice

A clear, professional, and evidence-based style of writing appropriate for college-level work. Academic voice does not need to sound overly formal or complicated.

Accessibility

The practice of designing writing, documents, and digital materials so that people with different abilities and technologies can use them. Accessibility may include headings, alt text, captions, readable fonts, and strong color contrast.

Active Reading

Reading with attention and purpose by previewing, annotating, asking questions, identifying claims, and noticing evidence.

Analysis

The process of breaking down a text, issue, image, or idea into parts in order to explain how it works and why it matters.

Annotated Bibliography

A list of sources that includes citation information and a short explanation of each source's main idea, credibility, and usefulness for a project.

Annotating

Marking or taking notes on a text while reading. Annotations may include questions, summaries, reactions, key terms, claims, or evidence.

Argument

A claim or position supported by reasons and evidence. In college writing, an argument should be logical, focused, and connected to credible support.

Audience

The person or group who will read, view, or listen to a piece of writing. Audience affects tone, examples, detail, language, and organization.

Bias

A particular perspective, preference, or leaning in a source. Bias becomes a problem when a source ignores evidence, presents only one side, or uses emotion instead of reasoning.

Body Paragraph

A paragraph in the middle of an essay that develops one part of the thesis with evidence, explanation, and analysis.

Brainstorming

A prewriting strategy used to generate ideas before drafting. Brainstorming may include listing, mapping, questioning, or freewriting.

Citation

Formal information that identifies a source. Citations help readers locate sources and show that the writer is giving proper credit.

Claim

A statement that expresses a writer's main point, position, or interpretation. Strong claims are specific and supportable.

Coherence

The logical flow of ideas in a paragraph or essay. Coherence helps readers understand how sentences and paragraphs connect.

Comma Splice

A sentence error that occurs when two complete sentences are joined with only a comma.

Conclusion

The final section of an essay. A conclusion brings the essay to a thoughtful close by reinforcing key ideas, explaining significance, or offering a final insight.

Context

The situation, expectations, background, or conditions surrounding a piece of writing. Context may include the assignment, course goals, academic norms, or cultural background.

Controlling Idea

The specific point a paragraph makes about its topic. The controlling idea keeps the paragraph focused.

Credibility

The trustworthiness of a source or writer. Credible sources usually have clear authorship, evidence, citations, publication information, and appropriate expertise.

Critical Reading

Reading that goes beyond basic understanding to examine how a text works, what evidence it uses, what assumptions it makes, and what perspectives may be missing.

Drafting

The stage of the writing process in which a writer turns ideas into sentences and paragraphs. Drafts do not need to be perfect.

Editing

The stage of writing focused on sentence-level issues such as grammar, punctuation, word choice, clarity, and citation formatting.

Ethnographic Analysis

A type of writing that studies people, communities, cultures, behaviors, or social practices through observation, description, reflection, and analysis.

Evidence

Information used to support a claim. Evidence may include examples, facts, statistics, expert opinions, research findings, quotations, paraphrases, summaries, or logical reasoning.

Feedback

Comments or responses from instructors, peers, or the writer that help improve a draft. Feedback is part of the writing process.

Fragment

An incomplete sentence that is missing a subject, verb, or complete thought.

Freewriting

A prewriting strategy in which a writer writes continuously for a short period without worrying about grammar, organization, or correctness.

Growth Mindset

The belief that writing ability can improve through practice, feedback, revision, and persistence.

In-Text Citation

A brief citation placed inside the essay near borrowed information. In-text citations usually point readers to a full entry on a Works Cited or References page.

Introduction

The opening section of an essay. An introduction gives context, prepares the reader, and usually presents the thesis.

Main Idea

The central point or message of a text, paragraph, or essay.

Mechanics

The technical features of writing, including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, formatting, and sentence boundaries.

Metacognition

Thinking about one's own thinking or learning. In writing, metacognition often happens through reflection and self-assessment.

MLA Style

A citation and formatting style commonly used in humanities courses. MLA often uses author-page in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

Multimodal Writing

Writing that combines more than one mode of communication, such as words, images, sound, layout, color, charts, or video.

Organization

The arrangement of ideas in a paragraph, essay, or project. Strong organization helps readers follow the writer's thinking.

Paragraph

A focused group of sentences that develops one main idea with explanation, evidence, and analysis.

Paraphrase

A restatement of a source's idea in the writer's own words and sentence structure. Paraphrases still require citation.

Peer Review

A process in which classmates read and respond to each other's drafts. Peer review helps writers improve clarity, organization, evidence, and development.

Plagiarism

Using someone else's words, ideas, images, data, or work without proper credit. Plagiarism can be intentional or accidental.

Prewriting

The early stage of the writing process when writers explore ideas, ask questions, plan, gather information, or organize thoughts before drafting.

Proofreading

The final check for small errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, formatting, and mechanics before submitting a piece of writing.

Purpose

The reason for writing. A writer's purpose may be to explain, argue, analyze, reflect, inform, persuade, or respond.

Quotation

The exact words from a source placed in quotation marks or block quote format. Quotations must be introduced, explained, and cited.

Reflection

Writing or thinking about one's own learning, writing process, choices, challenges, and growth.

Research

The process of asking questions, finding credible information, reading sources, evaluating evidence, and using sources to support or explore ideas.

Revision

The stage of writing focused on re-seeing and improving ideas, organization, clarity, evidence, and logic. Revision often involves larger changes than editing.

Run-On Sentence

A sentence error that occurs when two or more complete sentences are joined incorrectly without proper punctuation or connecting words.

Signal Phrase

A phrase that introduces source material, such as "According to Smith" or "The article argues." Signal phrases help integrate

evidence smoothly.

Source

Any text, image, video, article, book, website, or other material used to gather information or support writing.

Summary

A shortened, objective version of a text's main ideas written in the writer's own words.

Supporting Details

Examples, explanations, evidence, facts, statistics, or reasoning used to develop and support a main idea.

Synthesis

The process of combining ideas from multiple sources to show patterns, relationships, agreements, disagreements, or new insights.

Thesis Statement

The central claim or main point of an essay. A strong thesis is specific, focused, and guides the entire essay.

Tone

The attitude or feeling conveyed through writing. Tone may be formal, informal, respectful, serious, reflective, persuasive, or conversational depending on the audience and purpose.

Topic Sentence

A sentence, often near the beginning of a paragraph, that states the paragraph's main idea.

Transition

A word, phrase, or sentence that connects ideas and helps readers follow the writer's logic. Examples include however, for example, therefore, in addition, and as a result.

Visual Analysis

A type of writing that examines how images, design, layout, color, symbols, and visual choices communicate meaning.

Visual Rhetoric

The way images and design elements persuade or communicate ideas. Visual rhetoric includes choices about color, layout, spacing, font, images, and emphasis.

Works Cited / References Page

The final list of sources used in an essay. MLA uses "Works Cited," while APA uses "References."

Writing Process

The cycle writers use to develop and improve writing. Common stages include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing or submission.

15: Resource List



-   [Topic hierarchy](#)   

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