ENGLISH C1000 WRITING HANDBOOK



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Pasadena City College



Academic Reading and Writing

by Pasadena City College

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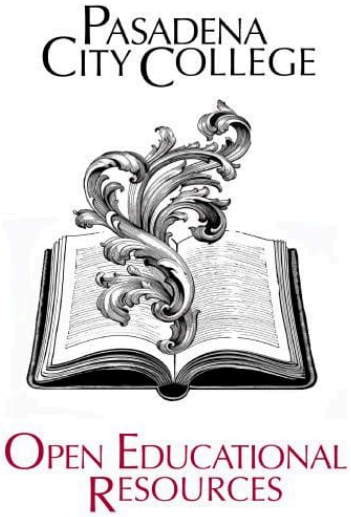
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO ARGUMENT AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

1.1: Welcome to Another Writing Class!
1.2: What Does the Instructor Want?
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1.1: Welcome to Another Writing Class!

Welcome to Another Writing Class!

Or, Why the &%# Am I Taking Writing Again?*

Rob Drummond

Let's begin by being real with each other: you're probably in this class because you have to be. It fulfills a gen ed writing requirement you need to graduate, and you wouldn't be here otherwise. And there is a good chance you're not absolutely thrilled about it.

That's OK. I think I understand, but let me take a stab at some of your potential reactions to finding yourself in this writing class this term:

- You're in kinesiology, business, psychology, dentistry, nursing, and so on, and you're *absolutely* ***positive*** you won't be doing any writing in your future professional life. This class is just one more hoop to jump through in your undergrad career, one more time the university takes your money through no choice of yours, slowing your progress through your major and toward that sweet j-o-b waiting at the end of it.
- And/or maybe you feel you've already taken a gazillion writing classes since you started school, which has only ever meant writing boring essays about *Romeo and Juliet* or *Animal Farm* or, even worse, poetry. The only thing you *actually* learned about writing in those classes was that your job as a student was to figure out a particular writing teacher's Secret Writing Formula and give it back to them, and you've done that plenty. So why do you have to do it again now, when you should be spending every class and dollar on your major that will lead to that j-o-b? Or worse still, those writing teachers' Secret Writing Formulas never seemed accessible to you, and you long ago threw up your hands in despair.
- Or you truly enjoyed your writing and literature courses—you may even possibly enjoy the act of writing (imagine!)—and, not for nothing, you feel like your writing is pretty darn good already, so you can't help but resent finding yourself in this required course among all these nonwriters because you already know all this stuff and more.

If any of these overlap with your feelings about being in this course, I get it. I also readily acknowledge that you might not fit neatly into any of these categories—one of the best things about Oregon State University is that our students come from all different cultures and stages of life and scholastic and socioeconomic backgrounds. So instead of trying to identify all of your individual circumstances, let me state two things everyone reading this shares:

1. You've all made it this far somehow, jumping through hoop after writing-requirement hoop, and
2. Your schooling is much closer to its end than its beginning.

Which means, in your immediate future, there will be no more teachers to please or impress and no more Secret Writing Formulas to decipher and reproduce. For most of you, this class represents your last—and in a tragedy for another day, possibly your first and only—course devoted solely to writing in your undergraduate career. You are spiraling at full tilt toward the moment when you will never again receive any help or advice or instruction on anything you've written, and you obviously won't get a grade on it, either.

You may silently or openly cheer as you read those sentences. Good riddance to writing and the teachers who teach it! But consider that no matter your major or your career, the one thing you'll *still* have to do from time to time in your done-with-school life is try to convince someone to do a thing you want them to do. And I'm sorry to add that sometimes you'll have to do it in writing.

You will, in other words, petition gatekeepers to open their gates for you. And as you may already know, these moments tend to be rather high-stakes in our lives.

So there you are: you *really* need another person to do something for you, to give you something, to let you into something, or to stop doing something, but if you can't apply the elements of strong, clear, and moving argument-making to your writing in those high-stakes moments, this person or organization won't just give you a C− and invite you to revise for a better grade.

They'll simply say *no*.

No, we're not giving you that raise. No, the city council rejects your proposal for a new business, thanks but no thanks for working on it for the last two years. No, we're not bringing you in for an interview for your dream job. Nope, you've failed to convince us that our grad school program is the right fit for you. No, you haven't convinced your uncle on social media to reconsider his stance on that far-out conspiracy theory, and the next family gathering is going to be a nightmare as a result. No, we're sorry to inform you that at this time, we are unable to fund your project; we received 374 more compelling and persuasive applications, and we have limited funds available. And no, I'd prefer not to marry you; I'm going to marry this other person who has proven far better at persuading me they will be a better roommate, partner, and co-parent.

Skillful Persuasion Is Hard

So maybe take a pause on blindly celebrating that in ten short weeks, you'll be done with your life's writing instruction, and instead consider how little time you've spent in your schooling thinking about how to use your writing to get what you want, to get what you *need*.

Because when your cap and gown are in the rearview and you find yourself faced with a high-stakes writing task demanding that you move some powerful gatekeeper from a *no* to a crucial *yes*—your future, your happiness, your whole *life plan* depend on getting them to *yes*—you'll beg, borrow, and steal any concrete strategies that might work to persuade that powerful entity to open their specific gate to you.

Will you sometimes find yourself in situations that are more subtle and decidedly less "me versus them"?

Absolutely and of course. But I find it refreshing and helpful at the outset to set aside academese and focus on stripped-down persuasion in its most basic form, simply getting that important person from no to yes.

The problem? Getting someone, anyone, from no to yes is, well, *hard*. Maybe you're thinking, "Oh, please, it can't be *that* hard. I've written five-page papers in two hours with my eyes closed countless times and still gotten As. I'll be just fine out there." But alas, your past successes at reproducing a teacher's Secret Writing Formula or BSing your way to an A in eleventh grade won't actually help as much as you might think. Believe it or not, real-life human beings can actually see right through that stuff pretty quickly. (And newsflash: your writing teachers saw through it too. They just kept it to themselves in the name of higher-order concerns.)

In fact, I bet you'll find that getting an acceptable grade on an essay is far easier than changing another person's mind in the real world. Why? Human beings don't like changing their minds. We like to think we know what we want and don't want, we believe what we believe, we are quite sure we know what's best for our company, our medical school, our city, our lives, and we don't much listen to folks who want to convince us of something to the contrary.

If you're still viewing this class as just one more course disconnected from the important work you'll be doing once you land that sweet j-o-b, let me be more direct: there is no job, and no life situation, that won't involve persuading folks in all sorts of ways all the time. This course is going to teach you how to perceive and address the needs of those people so that you can have a shot to persuade them successfully.

Catch 'Em in the Act

To persuade is, technically, to move your audience to action. And to do it well, it pays to notice how you yourself are moved to actions by external forces. Because despite how set we humans are in our ways, we're nonetheless constantly succumbing to the quietly effective arguments that come at us all day every day and implicitly move us to action, most of the time without our awareness.

So in this course and with this text, we'll pay attention. How has this social media platform gotten me back on the app fifteen minutes after I closed it, vowing I wouldn't open it again until morning? Why am I drinking this neon-blue beverage no human should rightly consider drinkable or watching thirty-one women fight for one man to marry in a period of weeks on my TV? Why am I voting for this person instead of that one or not voting at all? Why do I believe this should happen with guns and that should happen with vaccines? Did I just decide about these things of my own free will? (No.) Or did something quietly, or not so quietly, persuade me to do or think them? (Yes.)

If you enjoy being manipulated into believing and doing things you might not otherwise believe or do, things that are very often not in your best interest, then OK, great—you do you. Someone has to fall for Ponzi schemes and keep the cable news networks on air. But if you want to start spotting the subtle and insidious persuasion tactics bombarding you constantly and shaping your actions and reactions before you catch them in the act (if you ever do), then pay attention, because once again, you've come to the right place.

Learning how to persuade entails understanding how you are persuaded. That means understanding how these implicit forces work, how they necessarily play on your deeply held cultural values, often by merely reinforcing the unexamined assumptions you already hold. We *must* understand how those latent beliefs work, in ourselves and in the audiences we're trying to convince, if we want to learn the art of persuasion.

Which is a fancy way of saying that in this writing class, we're not just trying to recognize those savvy persuasion tactics; we're looking to *steal* them. Well, at least the ethical and sound tactics. Our goal will always be to identify, isolate, and snatch the tools being used to persuade us and turn them back around to persuade *them*.

So the questions you should be asking yourself now, while there's still time to practice, are these: When I am out there in the world trying to get a real person to shift their thinking subtly or simply to say yes instead of no, what works? What doesn't? What is vital? What is a deal breaker? What will kill my request before it's even made? And what brings it home?

I'm so glad you asked, because that's precisely where our writing class comes in: a nice little class focused solely on teaching you to do that very thing and nothing else.

No eight-page analysis of chapter 14 of *The Catcher in the Rye*, no two-thousand-word explication of a single sonnet, just, can you move that gatekeeper to the action you want to move them toward or not? Can you build an ethical, well-supported argument that evokes the necessary emotion at just the right time with just the right tone and style and support and logic to make the thing happen, or will you stay in that dead-end job until you die?

Writing Is Hard

- You are in fact going to have to write things in your postcollege future,
- The things you'll very often have to write will be attempts to persuade people to change their thinking and do a thing for you, and
- Persuasion is difficult, and we need all the practice we can get before we fly from our undergraduate nest.

You know what else is very difficult? Writing. Even harder? Writing well. And definitely writing well in support of getting that thing you want and need.

For proof that writing is hard, consider that there are few activities we procrastinate more than writing. Most people will use a toothbrush to clean the bathroom they share with six roommates sooner than tackle a high-stakes writing project; they will get two root canals and do their back taxes before they'll sit down to write a persuasive argument.

And that's for good reason. Our brains rebel from the blank page; the higher the stakes, the more our brains rebel. After all, the writing task demands all parts of the brain to kick into overdrive at once. You need logic; you need to consider the audience and the situation; you need to organize your thinking and translate that thinking to black symbols on a white page; you need to attend to the order and sequence of those black symbols in every way, from grammar to the active voice to transitions to openers and closers; you need research and citations and formatting and more. And at the exact same time, you need to activate the creative part of your brain; to write anything, no matter how boring, is truly an act of creation, because the thing (an essay, a cover letter, a please-take-me-back-I'm-so-sorry email) literally doesn't exist until you create it. It's just you and that blank page and your cursor taunting you with every blink. And because none of us are born writers, you have to work at it. You have to *practice*.

And here again, like magic, you find yourself in a class equally devoted to that challenging enterprise. So

while our thematic focus in this writing class is persuasion and argumentation, we're also, of course, focused on your writing itself—voice, tone, style, concision, precision, all of it.

What follows in this text on your screen is about half-and-half: half devoted to analyzing our own and others' persuasion techniques and half to writing strategies—and all about their constant and necessary overlap. We are going to infuse you with tools to take on that blank page with laser-focused, tried-and-true strategies and, crucially, with an added dose of confidence: "I know I have the necessary tools in my bag to move through this prewriting anxiety phase and produce something that will be, after revision, not just well written but also highly persuasive."

We've curated this text for this class at Oregon State specifically. And not for nothing, your instructor has devoted their professional life to helping people write well. If you want to get your money's worth this term or if you just want to stick it to the powers that be as you jump through this particular hoop, why not take full advantage of these two resources at your disposal while you still can?

The Real Rip-Off

So to return to the top and your objections to having to take this writing class, consider that the real rip-off is not that you are forced to take this one ten-week course but rather that this is the *only* course you get to develop these crucial skills you'll need for the rest of your life—at least if you want to get what you want and have a real shot at being happy.

So I invite you to tune in to this text with care and diligence while you can. Because while after this term you will never again have to write an argument of definition (or write about weird things like discourse communities or develop revisionist profiles or write a discussion board about catching rhetorical moves in the wild), you will without question encounter in your future personal and professional life multiple high-stakes writing tasks in which a very big chunk of your potential happiness or misery will depend keenly on your ability to move a crucial audience to action. And in those moments, you'll have to transfer everything you learn in this class to a task that is well outside your comfort zone. When that moment comes (repeatedly and sooner than you think), knowing how to read the rhetorical situation, determining exactly when to inject your plea with a dose of pathos and when to lean hard on logos, and figuring out just exactly how to address that daunting counterargument you can't necessarily defeat—either these skills will be there, in your pocket, ready to roll, or they won't.

And whether you have them at the ready will absolutely mean the difference between a no and the yes you *need*.

So read up. Listen well. Heed all the wisdom that comes out of your instructor's mouth, and maybe even a classmate or two. Practice. Ask questions. Stretch your brain and consider new approaches to drafting and researching. Revisit your good and bad writing habits, become mindful of the ways you procrastinate, make major and minor adjustments to your researching and argument-growing—in short, roll up your sleeves one more time, and soak up every drop of advice you can get.

Your future depends on it.

Discussion Questions

1. What rhetorical strategies does the delusional author of this chapter use to persuade you that this class matters? Why do you think the author made these choices? Are they effective?
2. What have been your experiences with writing classes leading into this class? Do you resonate with this chapter's discussion of the Secret Writing Formula? How much effort have you had to put into getting a good grade in writing classes in the past?
3. Do you find persuasion difficult? How so? How do you get past those moments of writing stress or writer's block?
4. What are some ways that persuasion has worked on you, either explicitly or implicitly? What was the last time you found yourself doing something without exactly knowing why?

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1.2: What Does the Instructor Want?

What Does the Instructor Want?

Understanding the Assignment

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Writing for Whom? Writing for What?

The first principle of good communication is knowing your audience. This is where writing papers for class gets kind of weird. As Peter Elbow explains,

> *When you write for a teacher you are usually swimming against the stream of natural communication. The natural direction of communication is to explain what you understand to someone who doesn't understand it. But in writing an essay for a teacher your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better. (255)*

Often when you write for an audience of one, you write a letter or email. But college papers aren't written like letters; they're written like articles for a hypothetical group of readers that you don't actually know much about. There's a fundamental mismatch between the real-life audience and the form your writing takes. It's kind of bizarre, really.

It helps to remember the key tenet of the university model: you're a junior scholar joining the academic community. Academic papers, in which scholars report the results of their research and thinking to one another, are the lifeblood of the scholarly world, carrying useful ideas and information to all parts of the academic corpus. Unless there is a particular audience specified in the assignment, you would do well to imagine yourself writing for a group of peers who have some introductory knowledge of the field but are unfamiliar with the specific topic you're discussing. Imagine them being interested in your topic but also busy; try to write something that is well worth your readers' time. Keeping an audience like this in mind will help you distinguish common knowledge in the field from that which must be defined and explained in your paper. Understanding your audience like this also resolves the audience mismatch that Elbow describes. As he notes, "You don't write *to* teachers, you write *for* them" (220).

Another basic tenet of good communication is clarifying the purpose of the communication and letting that purpose shape your decisions. Your professor wants to see you work through complex ideas and deepen your knowledge through the process of producing the paper. Each assignment—be it an argumentative paper, reaction paper, reflective paper, lab report, discussion question, blog post, essay exam, project proposal, or what have you—is ultimately about your learning. To succeed with writing assignments (and benefit from them), you first have to understand their learning-related purposes. As you write for the hypothetical audience of peer junior scholars, you're demonstrating to your professor how far you've gotten in analyzing your topic.

Timothée Pizarro

writing student

> *Don't be scared whenever you are given an assignment. Professors know what it was like to be in college and write all kinds of papers. They aren't trying to make your lives difficult, but it is their job to make us think and ponder about many things. Take your time and enjoy the paper. Make sure you answer the question being asked rather than rant on about something that is irrelevant to the prompt.*

Instructors don't assign writing lightly. Grading student writing is generally the hardest, most intensive work instructors do. You would do well to approach every assignment by putting yourself in the shoes of your instructor and asking yourself, "Why did they give me this assignment? How does it fit into the learning goals of the course? Why is this question/topic/problem so important to my instructor that they are willing to spend evenings and weekends reading and commenting on several dozen papers on it?"

Most instructors do a lot to make their pedagogical goals and expectations transparent to students: they explain the course learning goals associated with assignments, provide grading rubrics in advance, and describe several strategies for succeeding. Other instructors…not so much. Some students perceive more open-ended assignments as evidence of a lazy, uncaring, or even incompetent instructor. Not so fast! Instructors certainly vary in the quantity and specificity of the guidelines and suggestions they distribute with each writing assignment.

It is understandably frustrating when you feel you don't know how to direct your efforts to succeed with an assignment. However, except for rare egregious situations, you would do well to assume the best of your instructor and to appreciate the diversity of learning opportunities you have access to in college. Like one first-year student told Keith Hjortshoj, "I think that every course, every assignment, is a different little puzzle I have to solve. What do I need to do here? When do I need to do it, and how long will it take? What does this teacher expect of me?" (4). The transparency that you get from some professors—along with guides like this one—will be a big help to you in situations where you have to be scrappier and more proactive, piecing together the clues you get from your professors, the readings, and other course documents.

The Prompt: What Does "Analyze" Mean Anyway?

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

Focus on the Verb

Look for verbs like "compare," "explain," "justify," "reflect," or the all-purpose "analyze." You're not just producing a paper as an artifact; you're conveying, in written communication, some intellectual work you have done. So the question is, What kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning?

Put the Assignment in Context

Many professors think in terms of assignment sequences. For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, arguing from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then make the first draft, then make the final draft, and finally, perhaps, create a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you're on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing your discussion. (Most instructors are perpetually frustrated with the "one-and-done" attitude that most students bring to their work, and some sequences are specifically designed to force you to really rethink your conclusions.)

If the assignment isn't part of a sequence, think about where it falls in the semester and how it relates to readings and other assignments. Are there headings on the syllabus that indicate larger units of material? For example, if you see that a paper comes at the end of a three-week unit on the role of the internet in organizational behavior, then your professor likely wants you to synthesize that material in your own way. You should also check your notes and online course resources for any other guidelines about the workflow. Maybe you got a rubric a couple of weeks ago and forgot about it. Maybe your instructor posted a link about "how to make an annotated bibliography" but then forgot to mention it in class.

Try a Freewrite

When I hand out an assignment, I often ask students to do a five-minute or ten-minute freewrite. A freewrite

is when you just write, without stopping, for a set period of time. That doesn't sound very "free"; it actually sounds kind of coerced. The "free" part is what you write—it can be whatever comes to mind. Professional writers use freewriting to get started on a challenging (or distasteful) writing task or to overcome writer's block or a powerful urge to procrastinate. The idea is that if you just make yourself write, you can't help but produce some kind of useful nugget. Thus, even if the first eight sentences of your freewrite are all variations on "I don't understand this" or "I'd really rather be doing something else," eventually you'll write something like "I guess the main point of this is…" and—booyah!—you're off and running. As an instructor, I've found that asking students to do a brief freewrite right after I hand out an assignment generates useful clarification questions. If your instructor doesn't make time for that in class, a quick freewrite on your own will quickly reveal whether you need clarification about the assignment and, often, what questions to ask.

Ask for Clarification the Right Way

Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, especially because students' familiarity with the field can vary enormously. Asking for clarification is a good thing. Be aware, though, that instructors get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and instead receive an exact recipe for an A paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification, but try to convey that you want to learn and you're ready to work. In general, avoid starting a question with "Do we have to…" because I can guarantee that your instructor is thinking, "You don't have to do anything. You're an adult. You chose college. You chose this class. You're free to exercise your right to fail." Similarly, avoid asking the professor about what he or she "wants." You're not performing some service for the instructor when you write a paper. What they "want" is for you to really think about the material.

Table 1.2.1. Suggested alternatives to frequently asked (and potentially annoying) questions

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

Rubrics as Road Maps

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

your writing time.

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

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

What's Critical about Critical Thinking?

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

Despite the prevalent ambiguities, critical thinking actually does mean something. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) usefully defines it as "a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion" ("Value Rubrics").

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

The critical thinking rubric produced by the AAC&U describes the relevant activities of critical thinking in more detail. To think critically, you need to establish the question or problem, evaluate your sources, interrogate the assumptions informing the ideas you encounter, and develop a nuanced position that accounts for multiple perspectives ("Value Rubrics").

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

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

Critical thinking is hard work. Even those who actively choose to do it experience it as tedious, difficult, and sometimes surprisingly emotional. Nobel Prize–winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains that our brains aren't designed to think; rather, they're designed to save us from having to think (44). Our brains are great at developing routines and repertoires that enable us to accomplish fairly complex tasks like driving cars, choosing groceries, and having conversations without thinking consciously and thoroughly about every move we make. Kahneman calls this "fast thinking." "Slow thinking," which is deliberate and painstaking, is something our brains seek to avoid. That built-in tendency can lead us astray. Kahneman and his colleagues often used problems like this one in experiments to gauge how people used fast and slow thinking in different contexts (44):

> A bat and ball cost $1.10
> The bat costs one dollar more than the ball
> How much does the ball cost
> Most people automatically say the ball costs $0.10.

However, if the bat costs $1 more, then the bat would cost $1.10, leading to the incorrect total of $1.20. The ball costs $0.05. Kahneman notes, "Many thousands of university students have answered the bat-and-ball puzzle, and the results are shocking. More than 50% of students at Harvard, MIT, and Princeton gave the intuitive—incorrect—answer." These and other results confirm that "many people are overconfident, prone to place too much faith in their intuitions" (45). Thinking critically—thoroughly questioning your immediate intuitive responses—is difficult work, but every organization and business in the world needs people who can do that effectively. Some students assume that an unpleasant critical-thinking experience means either that they're doing something wrong or that it's an inherently uninteresting (and oppressive) activity. While we all relish those times when we're pleasantly absorbed in a complex activity, the more tedious experiences can also bring satisfaction, sort of like a good workout.

Critical thinking can also be emotionally challenging, researchers have found. Facing a new realm of

uncertainty and contradiction without relying on familiar assumptions is inherently anxiety provoking because when you're doing it, you are, by definition, incompetent. The kind of critical thinking your professors are looking for—that is, pursuing a comprehensive, multifaceted exploration in order to arrive at a debatable, nuanced argument—is inevitably a struggle, and it may be an emotional one. Your best bet is to find ways to make those processes as efficient, pleasant, and effective as you can.

Kaethe Leonard

writing student

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

The demands students face are not at all unique to their academic pursuits. Professional working roles demand critical thinking, and it's pretty easy to imagine how critical thinking helps one make much better decisions in all aspects of life. Embrace it. And just as athletes, artists, and writers sustain their energy and inspiration for hard work by interacting with others who share these passions, look to others in the scholarly community—your professors and fellow students—to keep yourself engaged in these ongoing intellectual challenges. While writing time is often solitary, it's meant to plug you into a vibrant academic community. What your instructors want, overall, is for you to join them in asking and pursuing important questions.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about all of the things you have written this week—both in school and outside of it. Who was the audience for each? How did that impact your writing?
2. What does "analyze" mean? It's a common verb on assignment sheets—but what are you being asked to do when you analyze something?
3. "Critical thinking" is a crucial outcome in many classes—and arguably, one of the main goals of a college education. How does this skill transfer to other parts of your life? Where else is it important to think critically? What does it look like in those contexts?

Activities

1. Freewrite on an assignment prompt. If you have one, do that one. If not, here's one to practice with: "Please write a five-page paper analyzing the controversy surrounding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the food supply." What clarification questions would you like to ask your professor? What additional background knowledge do you need to deeply understand the topic? What are some starter ideas that could lead to a good thesis and intriguing argument?
2. Find a couple of sample student papers from online paper mills (Google "free college papers") and use the AAC&U rubric on critical thinking to evaluate them. Which descriptor in each row most closely fits the paper?
3. In small groups or as a whole class, work together to develop a rubric for an upcoming assignment. Create three to four categories for evaluation, develop criteria, and assign points for each. For example, if you have a category titled

"Argument," what does that mean? What would excellent work look like in that category?

Additional Resources

1. The Online Writing Laboratory (OWL) at Purdue University is a wonderful set of resources for every aspect of college writing. Especially germane to this chapter is this summary of the most common types of writing assignments.
2. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a helpful page with tips for understanding assignments.

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1.3: Overcoming Writing Anxiety and Writer's Block

Overcoming Writing Anxiety and Writer's Block

Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

You may be thinking, "You could give me all the writing advice in the world, but sometimes I just get stuck! What I normally do just isn't working!" That's a familiar feeling for all writers. Sometimes the writing just seems to flow as if by magic, but then the flow stops cold. Your brain seems to have run out of things to say. If you just wait for the magic to come back, you might wait a long time. What professional writers know is that writing takes consistent effort. Writing comes out of a regular practice—a habit.

Professional writers also know that not everything they write ends up in the final draft. Sometimes we have to write what Anne Lamott calls a "shitty first draft." One of my favorite writing professors, Duncan Carter, used to say that he was a terrible writer but a great reviser, and that's what helped him write when inspiration wasn't available. So how do writers get going when they feel stuck or uninspired? They develop a set of habits and have more than one way to write to get the words flowing again.

You might associate the idea of writing anxiety or writer's block with procrastination, and procrastination certainly can be either a cause or an effect of writing anxiety. But writing anxiety or writer's block is more of a condition or state of being. We'll start by defining the term—so that you can figure out if you have it—and then cover some ways to work through it.

What Is Writing Anxiety and How Do You Know If You Have It?

Do you worry excessively about writing assignments? Do they make you feel uneasy or agitated? Do you have negative feelings about certain types of writing? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you

might be dealing with writing anxiety. Writing anxiety simply means that a writer is experiencing negative feelings about a given writing task.

Writing anxiety is often more about the audience and/or purpose for a given writing task than it is about the mere act of writing itself. Say you just bought a new pair of headphones. You brought them home, removed all the packaging, and connected them to your phone, and they're amazing! So you decide to visit the company website, and you write a stellar review of the product, giving it a five-star rating and including descriptive details about the headphones' comfortable fit, excellent sound quality, ability to cancel outside noise, and reasonable price.

Now let's say that the next day in biology class, your instructor covers the topic of biomes, and you learn about animal habitats and biodiversity and the interrelation and interdependence of species within biomes. You find it fascinating and can't wait to learn more. But then something terrible happens. Your instructor assigns a term project on the subject. As your instructor begins to describe the length and other specifications for the report, complete with formatting guidelines, citation requirements, and a bibliography at the end, your palms start to sweat, your stomach feels uneasy, and you begin to have trouble focusing on anything else your instructor has to say. You're experiencing writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety is the condition of feeling uneasy about writing, and writer's block is what you experience when you can't manage to put words on the page. But these conditions aren't about the act of writing. Just yesterday, you wrote a great review for those cool new headphones. So why do you suddenly feel paralyzed by the thought of writing the biology essay? Let's consider some possible causes.

What Causes Writing Anxiety?

The causes of writing anxiety are many. Here are just a few:

- Inexperience with the type of writing task
- Previous negative experiences with writing (e.g., someone, maybe a teacher, has given you negative feedback or said negative things about your writing)
- Negative feelings about writing (e.g., "I'm not a good writer," "I hate writing")
- Immediate deadline
- Distant deadline
- Lack of interest in the topic
- Personal problems or life events

Your level of experience may explain why you felt comfortable writing the headphone review yet broke out in a sweat at the thought of the biology paper. If you've never written anything similar to a specific assignment, maybe you're unsure about whether you can meet the assignment requirements or the teacher's expectations. Or maybe the last time you turned in a written report for school you received negative feedback or a bad grade from the teacher. Maybe you procrastinated most of the term, and now the paper is due next week, and you feel overwhelmed. Or maybe it's the second week of the term and the deadline seems so far away that you're not motivated to write.

Knowing the cause of your writing anxiety can help you move beyond it and get writing, even if you can't completely eliminate the problem. If the topic doesn't interest you or if you're having problems at home, those probably aren't issues that will just disappear, but if you try some of the following strategies, I think you'll find that you can at least move forward with even the most anxiety-inducing of writing assignments.

Strategies for Overcoming or Managing Writing Anxiety

There are a number of strategies that you can draw on to help you move past the feeling of being lost or stuck. Consider the following strategies to help you start writing again.

Just Start Writing

It might sound like it's oversimplifying the matter, but it's true. Half the battle is to just start writing. Try some strategies like freewriting or note-taking to get your writing muscles moving. Give yourself permission to write badly at this stage! Bruce Ballenger, a writer and professor of English at Boise State, explains why writing badly is an important part of the writing process: "Giving myself permission to write badly makes it much more likely that I will write what I don't expect to write, and from those surprises will come some of my best writing. Writing badly is also a convenient alternative to staring off into space and waiting for inspiration."

Sometimes the biggest problem writers have with getting started is that they feel like the writing needs to be good or well organized, or they feel like they need to start at the beginning. None of that is true. All you need to do is start.

Have you ever seen a potter make a clay pot? Before a potter can start shaping or throwing a pot, they have to bring the big wet blob of clay and slap it down on the table. It's heavy and wet and messy, but it's the essential raw material. No clay? No pot.

"Bad writing" is a lot like that. You have to dump all the words and ideas onto the table. Just get them out. Only then do you have the raw material you need to start shaping the words into something beautiful and lasting. You can wait until the revision stages to worry about shaping your writing to be its best. For now, just get the ideas on the table.

Create Smaller Tasks and Short-Term Goals

One of the biggest barriers to writing can be that the task just seems too large, and perhaps the due date is weeks away. Each of these conditions can contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed or to the tendency to procrastinate. But the remedy is simple and will help you keep writing something each week toward your

deadline and toward the finished product: divide larger writing tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks, and set intermediate deadlines.

The process that the authors used for writing this text provides a good example. As authors, we had to divide the text into sections, but we also had to plan the process for a first draft, peer reviews, and revisions, along with adding images, links, and other resources, not to mention the final publication of the text online. Had we not divided up the larger tasks into smaller ones and set short-term goals and deadlines, the process of writing the text would have been overwhelming. We didn't meet every single intermediate deadline right on time, but they helped move us along and helped us meet the most important deadline—the final one—with a complete text that was ready to publish on schedule.

Imagine that you have a term paper that's assigned during Week 1 of an eleven-week term, and it's due during finals week. Make a list of all the tasks you can think of that need to be completed, from beginning to end, to accomplish all that the assignment requires. List the tasks, and assign yourself due dates for each task. Consider taking it a step further, and create a task table that allows you to include a column for additional notes. Here's an example:

Task

Complete by

Notes

Brainstorm topics and select a topic.

Wed., Week 2

Notes:

Do some preliminary research on the web to learn about the topic.

Wed., Week 3

Notes:

Develop list of search terms for some more focused research.

Fri., Week 3

Notes: Ask instructor to look over my search terms.

Spend some time at the library searching library holdings, databases, more focused research on the web.

Mon., Week 4

Notes: Plan ahead to make sure I have time and transportation.

Read sources and take notes.

Mon., Week 5

Notes: Consult note-taking examples in my textbook.

Create an outline for the term paper.

Fri., Week 5

Notes:

Begin drafting.

Mon., Week 6

Notes: Remember to try some freewriting.

Complete first rough draft.

Wed., Week 7

Notes:

Ask a couple of classmates to read draft and comment; meet with instructor and ask questions.

Fri., Week 7

Notes: Ask classmates week before if they want to meet and exchange papers.

Do some additional research if needed.

Mon., Week 8

Notes:

Revise first draft and complete second draft with conclusion.

Mon., Week 9

Notes: Try revision strategies we learned about in class.

Meet with tutor in the Writing Center to go over my essay.

Fri., Week 9

Notes: Call the writing center the week before for appt.

Check for perfection: citations, formatting, and works cited are in place and correct; final revisions completed.

Fri., Week 10

Notes: Have someone new give it a final read-through.

Print, staple, and turn in (or save and upload) essay.

Mon., Finals Week

Notes: Celebrate!

Figure 1.3.1. Tasks

COLLABORATE

Talk to your friends or family or to a tutor in your college writing center about your ideas for your essay. Sometimes talking about your ideas is the best way to flesh them out and get more ideas flowing. Write down notes during or just after your conversation.

Classmates are a great resource because they're studying the same subjects as you and working on the same assignments. Talk to them often, and form study groups. Ask people to look at your ideas or writing and to give you feedback. Set goals and hold each other accountable for meeting deadlines (a little friendly competition can be motivating!).

Talk to other potential readers. Ask them what they would expect from this type of writing. Meet with a tutor in your campus writing center. Be sure to come to the appointment prepared with a printed copy of the assignment and a short list of what you want to work on, along with a printed copy of your essay.

EMBRACE REALITY

Don't imagine the situation of your writing assignment to be any better or worse than it really is. There are some important truths for you to recognize:

- Focus on what you do best rather than fretting about your perceived weaknesses.
- Acknowledge that writing can be difficult and that all you need to do is do your best.
- Recognize what might be new or unfamiliar about the type of writing that you're doing.
- Remember that you're a student and that you're supposed to be experiencing things that are new and unfamiliar (new formats, new audiences, new subject matter, new processes, new approaches, etc.).
- Repeat the mantra "It doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to be *done*.

Seek Out Experts

If you can, find more experienced writers (especially related to the type of writing that you're doing) and ask them questions. Sometimes, this might just mean a friend or family member who's already taken a couple of years of college courses. Maybe it's a fellow student who has already taken the class you're in now. Also, the tutors in your college writing center can be a big help at any stage in the writing process. Give them a call and make an appointment. And don't forget the expert you see all the time throughout any class that you take: your instructor. Ask your instructor for suggestions. That's what they're there for.

Another way to learn from the experience of others is to look at examples of other pieces of writing of the type that you're working on. How is this piece organized? Does it make use of source material? What sort of tone does it use? If you don't know where to find examples, ask your instructor. If they don't have them at the ready, they'll likely be able to give you some suggestions about where to find some.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt anxious about writing? How did you get through it?
2. How might the audience or context for writing impact how it feels to write it?
3. What are some low-stakes kinds of writing that you could do to build up to a high-stakes assignment?
4. What is the value of "bad writing" or "shitty first drafts"? What is the risk of trying to write a perfect first draft?

Activities

1. Freewrite about your paper topic for ten minutes. Set a timer and don't stop writing. Don't worry about spelling or clarity—you won't be turning it in. After the timer rings, sit back and see how much you have written. How did it feel? How did this approach impact your feelings around writing? Was it easier or harder than starting a paper? How might you use this approach in the future.
2. Create a detailed timeline for your next essay assignment. Break it down into smaller tasks and assign a deadline for each. Notice: is this helpful for you? In what way?
3. Write three hundred words every day for a week. This can be on any topic! Then reflect on the experience. How did you feel about writing at the beginning of the week and at the end? What changed in your speed or fluency of writing? What did you learn about yourself as a writer or your process?

ATTRIBUTION

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1.4: The AI Dilemma

The AI Dilemma

A Guide for College Writing Students

J.T. Bushnell

I was still a pretty young teacher when I first ran into the idea of “BS jobs” and broke out in a cold sweat.

The idea came from an anthropologist named David Graeber, first in the viral article "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs" and then in a book, both of which use the full expletive in their titles. He argued that most modern jobs were completely worthless, and that we could distinguish them from necessary jobs by imagining the impact on society if they disappeared.

No garbage collectors, dock workers, doctors? “The results would be immediate and catastrophic,” Graeber wrote in *STRIKE!* magazine. But no private equity CEOs, PR researchers, legal consultants? “It’s not entirely clear how humanity would suffer. Many suspect it might markedly improve.”

At the time, I wasn’t sure which category “writing instructor” belonged to. From a certain viewpoint, you could say that I invented unnecessary work for my students, who then invented unnecessary work for me, like interlocking cogs in a big useless machine. If we stopped, would any immediate catastrophe really ensue?

I had answers, but they were abstractions that slipped through my fingers. I couldn’t hold them like a farmer held an ear of corn, ripping open the husk for anyone who doubted.

Then generative artificial intelligence like ChatGPT came along, and suddenly, the question was real. People were actually entertaining the idea that writing classes were worthless, a waste of time, a BS occupation on par with telemarketing. Many of them were students, including my own. You might be one such student.

And so I think it’s time to confront this question, to talk openly and honestly about it together, and to test out the alternative – relegating our writing to AI. Graeber’s question might help. If you and I let AI do all our writing, would nothing change? Would it have no impact on society? Or is there something important happening when you write, and when you learn to write? Would we lose something if we stopped?

What Does Writing Give You?

A Harvard researcher named Emily Weinstein told a story on NPR that might help clarify these questions.

She was talking to a group of teenagers about their opinions on AI, and one teenager said that his friend's dad had used AI to write a birthday card for his wife. The wife called it the best card he'd ever given her and was even moved to tears.

But here's the crazy part, at least to me. The teenager who told the story thought it was a great example of AI's *value*. It showed why AI was a useful tool for writers. The other teenagers mostly agreed. Weinstein, the researcher, said that her reaction, like mine, was a little different, and she wanted to understand their viewpoint better. A different teenager in the article "AI & Authenticity" explained, "Isn't the intention what matters? Like, if he brings you flowers from a flower store, he didn't grow the flowers or pick them. And you still think it's really nice. So, isn't that kind of like what's happening here?"

Let me pause here to admit that I use AI, mostly for two things. One is cooking. When you have to put dinner on the table for your family, night after night, sometimes it helps to get new ideas or instructions. I don't feel guilty about it. I care about putting dinner on the table. It's the product that matters to me, not the process.

The other place I use AI is writing that I don't find particularly rewarding or valuable – bureaucratic forms, simple contracts, multiple-choice questions for reading quizzes. I do a lot of reviewing and adjusting in all of these, but it's the same as cooking – I care only about the outcome because there's nothing enriching about the process. Even for someone who enjoys writing, like me, it's just drudgery.

For some people, that's what all writing feels like: drudgery. They only want to arrive at the outcome, the meal, the document, as quickly and easily as possible. For these people, I'd imagine it seems perfectly acceptable to use AI to write a wife's birthday card, especially if the card is so effective.

But I wonder how the wife would feel if she knew that the message came from AI. Would she see it as a bouquet from the florist? Or like an exam her husband had cheated on? How would *you* feel?

Almost universally, my students have had the same reaction that Weinstein and I did – they were disturbed. They thought it was a great example of AI's *hollowness*, not its value. To them, it showed why AI writing is upsetting, even when it's effective, and how two identical messages can have totally different meanings based on whether they came from a human or a bot.

They also discovered that this distinction exists on the production side. Writing with AI, they said, felt boring and meaningless. It was hard to care about, or even remember – an obvious enough fact for anyone who has used AI this way but one that's now backed by research from scholars at MIT and Wellesley. Compared to participants who used only their brains, those who wrote essays with AI showed less satisfaction, ownership, memory, and even neural connectivity when they wrote essays with AI.

For some of us, writing can be meaningful, interesting, even enjoyable. It allows us to give expression to something inside ourselves, to discover what we want to say and then say it. It allows us to think things through, pursue a solution to problems we aren't sure how to handle, and exercise our cognitive skills. It's a way to connect with other people, to be understood, to understand ourselves and the world around us. In these situations, we're interested in more than just the destination. We're interested in the journey, because that journey fulfills something deeply human in us. For those reasons, we think it's worth it to do the meaningful work ourselves, even if AI can spit out a document as good as ours, or better.

The question we're all struggling with is where to draw the line.

Teachers usually see their coursework as important, enriching, even interesting. Students, on the other hand, sometimes see it as drudgery. When each side draws the line at a different location, they're bound to disagree about the value of using AI to complete coursework.

But this considers writing only from the perspective of the writer. What about the reader? Do they only want the bouquet? Or do they care whether you grew the flowers yourself? Which one matters more to you when you're reading, or deciding who to work with, or figuring out who to love and trust?

AI Writing Techniques

When we talk about using AI in writing, most people think of one technique: you tell AI what you want and let it write the whole thing. The risk is that people might know the writing came from AI, and have a negative reaction. That includes teachers, but also the bosses or colleagues or clients who don't appreciate bots in their inboxes. In fact, using AI can damage your professional reputation by lowering people's opinion of your competence and motivation, according to the "Evidence of a Social Evaluation Penalty for Using AI" from Duke researchers.

In the article "I'm a Student. You Have No Idea How Much We're Using ChatGPT," the author explains that a second technique has become common: students ask AI for ideas and then put them in their own words: you ask AI for the ideas, then put them in your own words. Because it's your writing, you're less likely to get caught, but the AI is still doing all the "thinking." The appeal of this method, like the first, is that you reach the finish line with less time and effort. You don't have to exercise that organ in your head very hard. Some people call that efficiency, and they're not wrong.

But that's also the downside of both these methods. Exercise makes you stronger. For some of us, that's the whole reason we go to college – to learn, to improve, to develop skills that will help us in our careers and personal lives. AI seems to have the opposite effect, according to a growing body of research, according to "The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking," reducing critical thinking, originality, and confidence. In other words, using AI makes it harder to think for yourself. That's scary. And so some of us are asking if we really want to sacrifice exercise for efficiency, especially in college.

So here's a third technique from "'AI' Modeling." In almost every kind of exercise, it helps to have someone pushing and guiding you – but not helping with the work. If they start lifting your weights, or offer to run the last lap on your behalf, you'd probably tell them to back off. Can we use AI that way?

To answer that question, it might help to consider the phases of the writing process where you'd ask a human for help. When you're looking for a topic or deciding what to say about it, you might talk to your teacher, or even run some initial ideas by them. You're not asking them to choose your topic or provide your ideas, just to help guide your thinking in a productive direction. You might ask a librarian for good places to track down information, but it would probably never occur to you to ask the librarian to *bring* the information, let alone to read and digest it for you.

Maybe you give your rough draft to a classmate for peer review or take it to a tutor at the writing center, pointing out the parts you're not sure about or find a little shaky. Their fresh eyes can help you see things more clearly, find improvements, even catch typos. But you'd never say, "Rewrite this whole thing for me, better." Most of us would be embarrassed to ask another human to do our writing. That embarrassment comes from

the implicit understanding that we're crossing a line, and that's probably a helpful guidepost about making the same request to AI.

In other words, the one phase where we can't really use AI this way is the drafting. But I will tell you, personally, that sometimes I get stuck in this phase just because the blank page feels so silent and important that I freeze up. To me, the AI interface feels less silent, less important, and I've typed whole paragraphs there that I afterward paste into my document. The point isn't to have the AI take it over, just to listen without judgment, which can help loosen the flow of ideas. I'm still the one trying to explain myself, and the writing is completely my own.

That's the guiding principle in this third technique: you always start by doing your best to explain yourself, using the AI as a dialogue partner afterward to help push your thinking. If at any point it starts doing too much, you tell it to back off. You have to decide, I'm the writer, I'm the boss, I'm calling the shots here, and the AI is only an assistant, a collaborator, a subordinate.

Preliminary research suggests that this technique can counteract AI's worst effects on learning. In "A New Muse," I led, it restored the creativity of top fiction writing students, which had been diminished by more passive uses of AI, and it significantly improved the creativity of lower level students. Likewise, research from Wharton has shown that when students use AI in a similarly proactive way to study, their test scores are as high as those who study without AI, whereas unregulated AI use produces a 17 percent drop in test scores.

That's not to say this method is without risk. Once you free the genie from the bottle, will you really be able to resist the temptation of its magic? Will the risk be worth it if your brainpower alone can produce equivalent results? Will there be any side effects, like the loneliness cited in "How AI and Human Behaviors Shape Psychosocial Effects of Chatbot Use" and dependence suggested by "Investigating Affective Use and Emotional Well-being on ChatGPT."

other research? Would it be better just to ask the teacher, or the librarian, or the classmate for help?

The AI Future

In college my roommate and I were both communication majors, and after college we both found ourselves unemployed, then underemployed – he delivered newspapers and I waited tables. But not for the same reason. For him, the point of college had been to earn a degree, which he thought of as a passport to a good job. Then he carried it to job openings where there were a hundred other applicants with the same degree, and he had nothing to set himself apart.

I was unemployed because I'd turned down a job offer to pursue my real passion *The Step Back*. It was an excruciating decision, and I never would've had the judgment or courage for it if I hadn't just spent four years exercising those exact qualities, or building confidence in my ability to learn. The main way I did that was by writing.

In fact, writing has proven to impart many of the skills that employers now value, according to "Reports of English Literature's Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated," most – critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, adaptability. Those skills are probably the reason my roommate eventually found a career in the wine industry, moving through positions that had nothing to do with his degree.

But even if you have a career in the field you studied, the technical training you get in college is eventually going to become outdated. What will you do to keep up with professional, technological, and cultural shifts we can't predict, like the ones we're experiencing right now from AI? You'll need to be able to think, to solve problems, to communicate, and to adapt. Writing helps impart those skills. That's probably why liberal arts majors eventually end up with higher salaries than engineering majors, according to surveys from the Census Bureau as reported "In the Salary Race, Engineers Sprint but English Majors Endure."

Maybe the job market won't be as bleak for today's students as it was for my roommate, but I wouldn't count on it. According to "For Some Recent Graduates, the A.I. Job Apocalypse May Already Be Here," multiple media outlets have been reporting a sharp decline in entry-level jobs recently. The reason? Employers are enlisting AI to accomplish the tasks that they once hired recent graduates for, and so it's possible you might find yourself in the same situation my roommate did. Casually offloading your work to AI won't give you a leg up on other applicants. They can do that just as easily as you can.

Besides, any job that can be accomplished that way is likely to disappear soon. Maybe Graeber would be pleased. If that's how people approach writing, I suppose it *is* a BS job – and so is the rest of college. Imagine for a moment that the whole institution becomes a big AI factory, where students do nothing except paste assignment prompts into AI and then paste AI output into their assignments. And they take on crippling debt to spend four years of their lives on this work: *pasting text*. Does this have any shred of value to humanity? Or is it a fever dream of the worthless work Graeber describes?

For some students, it's no dream at all – it's their everyday waking reality. We teachers can't force you to do your own thinking and writing anymore. AI has given you a choice.

What will you choose? What will you base your choice on? How much thought will you put into it? All we can do is ask you the questions. You have to answer for yourself.

Discussion Questions

1. Because of the rapid advancement of AI technology, this reading might become outdated quickly. What portions seem outdated already, and what portions still seem relevant?
2. Have you ever received or encountered AI-generated writing? What effect did it have on you and your opinion of the message?
3. What effect do you think it would have on our society to let AI do all our writing for us? Do you think AI makes it irrelevant to learn writing, or more relevant?
4. Do you think there's a place for AI in the writing process? What technique(s) have you used in the past? How did it feel compared to the writing you've done on your own?
5. Where do you think AI should be prohibited, allowed, or required for you and for your classmates? What advice would you give me for how to handle AI as I reshape future versions of this course?

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ATTRIBUTION

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CHAPTER 2: RHETORIC READING AND ARGUMENT

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2.1: How to Read Like a Writer

How to Read Like a Writer

Mike Bunn

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

My job (in addition to wearing a red tuxedo jacket) was to sit inside the dark theater with the patrons and make sure nothing went wrong. It didn't seem to matter to my supervisor that I had no training in security and no idea where we kept the fire extinguishers. I was pretty sure that if there was any trouble, I'd be running down the back stairs, leaving the patrons to fend for themselves. I had no intention of dying in a bright red tuxedo.

There was a Red Coat stationed on each of the theater's four floors, and we all passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights. It's not easy trying to read in the dim light of a theatre—flashlight or no flashlight—and it's even tougher with shrieks and shouts and gunshots coming from the stage. I had to focus intently on each and every word, often rereading a single sentence several times. Sometimes I got distracted and had to re-read entire paragraphs.

As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process. The intense concentration required to read in the theater helped me recognize some of the interesting ways that authors string words into phrases into paragraphs into entire books.

I came to realize that all writing consists of a series of choices. I was an English major in college, but I don't think I ever thought much about reading. I read all the time. I read for my classes and on the computer and sometimes for fun, but I never really thought about the important connections between reading and writing, and how reading in a particular way could also make me a better writer.

What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer?

When you Read Like a Writer (RLW) you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you

can better understand how such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.

Instead of reading for content or to better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can learn about writing by reading a particular text. As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and respond the way you do?

The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most important writerly choices represented in the text—choices as large as the overall structure or as small as a single word used only once—to consider the effect of those choices on potential readers (including yourself). Then you can go one step further and imagine what different choices the author might have made instead, and what effect those different choices would have on readers.

Say you're reading an essay in class that begins with a short quote from President Barack Obama about the war in Iraq. As a writer, what do you think of this technique? Do you think it is effective to begin the essay with a quote? What if the essay began with a quote from someone else? What if it was a much longer quote from President Obama, or a quote from the President about something other than the war?

And here is where we get to the most important part: Would you want to try this technique in your own writing?

Would you want to start your own essay with a quote? Do you think it would be effective to begin your essay with a quote from President Obama? What about a quote from someone else?

You could make yourself a list. What are the advantages and dis- advantages of starting with a quote? What about the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from the President? How would other readers respond to this technique? Would certain readers (say Democrats or liberals) appreciate an essay that started with a quote from President Obama better than other readers (say Republicans or conservatives)? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from a less divisive person? What about starting with a quote from someone more divisive?

The goal is to carefully consider the choices the author made and the techniques that he or she used, and then decide whether you want to make those same choices or use those same techniques in your own writing. Author and professor Wendy Bishop explains how her reading process changed when she began to read like a writer:

> *It wasn't until I claimed the sentence as my area of desire, interest, and expertise—until I wanted to be a writer writing better—that I had to look underneath my initial readings….I started asking, how—how did the writer get me to feel, how did the writer say something so that it remains in my memory when many other things too easily fall out, how did the writer communicate his/her intentions about genre, about irony? (119–20)*

Bishop moved from simply reporting her personal reactions to the things she read to attempting to uncover how the author led her (and other readers) to have those reactions. This effort to uncover how authors build

texts is what makes Reading Like a Writer so useful for student writers.

How Is RLW Different from "Normal" Reading?

Most of the time we read for information. We read a recipe to learn how to bake lasagna. We read the sports page to see if our school won the game, Facebook to see who has commented on our status update, a history book to learn about the Vietnam War, and the syllabus to see when the next writing assignment is due. Reading Like a Writer asks for something very different.

In 1940, a famous poet and critic named Allen Tate discussed two different ways of reading:

> There are many ways to read, but generally speaking there are two ways. They correspond to the two ways in which we may be interested in a piece of architecture. If the building has Corinthian columns, we can trace the origin and development of Corinthian columns; we are interested as historians. But if we are interested as architects, we may or may not know about the history of the Corinthian style; we must, however, know all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams. We have got to know this if we are going to put up buildings ourselves. (506)
>
> While I don't know anything about Corinthian columns (and doubt that I will ever want to know anything about Corinthian columns), Allen Tate's metaphor of reading as if you were an architect is a great way to think about RLW. When you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to "build" one for yourself. Author David Jauss makes a similar comparison when he writes that "reading won't help you much unless you learn to read like a writer. You must look at a book the way a carpenter looks at a house someone else built, examining the details in order to see how it was made" (64).

Perhaps I should change the name and call this Reading Like an Architect, or Reading Like a Carpenter. In a way those names make perfect sense. You are reading to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself.

Why Learn to Read Like a Writer?

For most college students RLW is a new way to read, and it can be difficult to learn at first. Making things even more difficult is that your college writing instructor may expect you to read this way for class but never actually teach you how to do it. He or she may not even tell you that you're supposed to read this way. This is because most writing instructors are so focused on teaching writing that they forget to show students how they want them to read.

That's what this essay is for.

In addition to the fact that your college writing instructor may expect you to read like a writer, this kind of reading is also one of the very best ways to learn how to write well. Reading like a writer can help you understand how the process of writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

Charles Moran, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, urges us to read like writers because:

> *When we read like writers we understand and participate in the writing. We see the choices the writer has made, and we see how the writer has coped with the consequences of those choices . . . We "see" what the writer is doing because we read as writers; we see because we have written ourselves and know the territory, know the feel of it, know some of the moves ourselves. (61)*

You are already an author, and that means you have a built-in advantage when reading like a writer. All of your previous writing experiences—inside the classroom and out—can contribute to your success with RLW. Because you "have written" things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to "see" the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read. This in turn helps you to think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do.

What Are Some Questions to Ask Before You Start Reading?

As I sat down to work on this essay, I contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom and also to get their thoughts on RLW. Throughout the rest of the essay I'd like to share some of their insights and suggestions; after all, who is better qualified to help you learn what you need to know about reading in college writing courses than students who recently took those courses themselves?

One of the things that several students mentioned to do first, before you even start reading, is to consider the context surrounding both the assignment and the text you're reading. As one former student, Alison, states: "The reading I did in college asked me to go above and beyond, not only in breadth of subject matter, but in depth, with regards to informed analysis and background information on context." Alison was asked to think about some of the factors that went into the creation of the text, as well as some of the factors influencing her own experience of reading—taken together these constitute the context of reading. Another former student, Jamie, suggests that students "learn about the historical context of the writings" they will read for class. Writing professor Richard Straub puts it this way: "You're not going to just read a text. You're going to read a text within a certain context, a set of circumstances . . . It's one kind of writing or another, designed for one audience and purpose or another" (138).

Among the contextual factors you'll want to consider before you even start reading are:

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

It may be that you need to start reading before you can answer these first two questions, but it's worth trying to answer them before you start. For example, if you know at the outset that the author is trying to reach a very specific group of readers, then his or her writerly techniques may seem more or less effective than if he/she was trying to reach a more general audience. Similarly—returning to our earlier example of beginning an essay with a quote from President Obama about the war in Iraq—if you know that the author's purpose is to address some of the dangers and drawbacks of warfare, this may be a very effective opening. If the purpose is to encourage Americans to wear sunscreen while at the beach this opening makes no sense at all. One former student, Lola, explained that most of her reading assignments in college writing classes were designed "to provoke analysis and criticisms into the style, structure, and purpose of the writing itself."

In What Genre Is This Written?

Another important thing to consider before reading is the genre of the text. Genre means a few different things in college English classes, but it's most often used to indicate the type of writing: a poem, a newspaper article, an essay, a short story, a novel, a legal brief, an instruction manual, etc. Because the conventions for each genre can be very different (who ever heard of a 900-page newspaper article?), techniques that are effective for one genre may not work well in another. Many readers expect poems and pop songs to rhyme, for example, but might react negatively to a legal brief or instruction manual that did so.

Another former student, Mike, comments on how important the genre of the text can be for reading:

> *I think a lot of the way I read, of course, depends on the type of text I'm reading. If I'm reading philosophy, I always look for signaling words (however, therefore, furthermore, despite) indicating the direction of the argument . . . when I read fiction or creative nonfiction, I look for how the author inserts dialogue or character sketches within narration or environ- mental observation. After reading To the Lighthouse [sic] last semester, I have noticed how much more attentive I've become to the types of narration (omniscient, impersonal, psychological, realistic, etc.), and how these different approaches are utilized to achieve an author's overall effect.*

Although Mike specifically mentions what he looked for while reading a published novel, one of the great things about RLW is that it can be used equally well with either published or student-produced writing.

Is This a Published or a Student-Produced Piece of Writing?

As you read both kinds of texts you can locate the choices the author made and imagine the different decisions that he/she might have made.

While it might seem a little weird at first to imagine how published texts could be written differently—after all, they were good enough to be published—remember that all writing can be improved. Scholar Nancy Walker believes that it's important for students to read published work using RLW because "the work ceases to be a mere artifact, a stone tablet, and becomes instead a living utterance with immediacy and texture. It could have been better or worse than it is had the author made different choices" (36). As Walker suggests, it's worth thinking about how the published text would be different—maybe even better—if the author had made different choices in the writing because you may be faced with similar choices in your own work.

Is This the Kind of Writing You Will Be Assigned to Write Yourself?

Knowing ahead of time what kind of writing assignments you will be asked to complete can really help you to read like a writer. It's probably impossible (and definitely too time consuming) to identify all of the choices the author made and all techniques an author used, so it's important to prioritize while reading. Knowing what you'll be writing yourself can help you prioritize. It may be the case that your instructor has assigned the text you're reading to serve as a model for the kind of writing you'll be doing later. Jessie, a former student, writes, "In college writing classes, we knew we were reading for a purpose—to influence or inspire our own work. The reading that I have done in college writing courses has always been really specific to a certain type of writing, and it allows me to focus and experiment on that specific style in depth and without distraction."

If the text you're reading is a model of a particular style of writ- ing—for example, highly-emotional or humorous—RLW is particularly helpful because you can look at a piece you're reading and think about whether you want to adopt a similar style in your own writing. You might realize that the author is trying to arouse sympathy in readers and examine what techniques he/she uses to do this; then you can decide whether these techniques might work well in your own writing. You might notice that the author keeps including jokes or funny stories, and you might think about whether you want to include them in your writing—what would the impact be on your potential readers?

What Are Questions to Ask As You Ar Reading?

It is helpful to continue to ask yourself questions as you read like a writer. As you're first learning to read in this new way, you may want to have a set of questions written or typed out in front of you that you can refer to while reading. Eventually—after plenty of practice—you will start to ask certain questions and locate certain things in the text almost automatically. Remember, for most students this is a new way of reading, and you'll have to train yourself to do it well. Also keep in mind that you're reading to understand how the text was written—how the house was built—more than you're trying to determine the meaning of the things you read or assess whether the texts are good or bad.

First, return to two of the same questions I suggested that you consider before reading:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?

Think about these two questions again as you read. It may be that you couldn't really answer them before, or that your ideas will change while reading. Knowing why the piece was written and who it's for can help explain why the author might have made certain choices or used particular techniques in the writing, and you can assess those choices and techniques based in part on how effective they are in fulfilling that purpose and/ or reaching the intended audience.

Beyond these initial two questions, there is an almost endless list of questions you might ask regarding writing choices and techniques. Here are some of the questions that one former student, Clare, asks herself:

> *When reading I tend to be asking myself a million questions. If I were writing this, where would I go with the story? If the author goes in a different direction (as they so often do) from what I am thinking, I will ask myself, why did they do this? What are they telling me?*

Clare tries to figure out why the author might have made a move in the writing that she hadn't anticipated, but even more importantly, she asks herself what *she* would do if she were the author. Reading the text becomes an opportunity for Clare to think about her own role as an author.

Here are some additional examples of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself as you read:

- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Depending on the subject matter and the intended audience, it may make sense to be more or less formal in terms of language. As you begin reading, you can ask yourself whether the word choice and tone/ language of the writing seem appropriate.

- What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?
- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?

To some extent the kinds of questions you ask should be determined by the genre of writing you are reading. For example, it's probably worth examining the evidence that the author uses to support his/ her claims if you're reading an opinion column, but less important if you're reading a short story. An opinion column is often intended to convince readers of something, so the kinds of evidence used are often very important. A short story may be intended to convince readers of something, sometimes, but probably not in the same way. A short story rarely includes claims or evidence in the way that we usually think about them.

- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?

It's pretty normal to get confused in places while reading, especially while reading for class, so it can be helpful to look closely at the writ- ing to try and get a sense of exactly what tripped you up. This way you can learn to avoid those same problems in your own writing.

- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?

Notice that in these questions I am encouraging you to question whether aspects of the writing are appropriate and effective in addition to deciding whether you liked or disliked them. You want to imagine how other readers might respond to the writing and the techniques you've identified. Deciding whether you liked or disliked something is only about you; considering whether a technique is appropriate or effective lets you contemplate what the author might have been trying to do and to decide whether a majority of readers would find the move successful. This is important because it's the same thing you should be thinking about while you are writing: how will readers respond to this technique I am using, to this sentence, to this word? As you read, ask yourself what the author is doing at each step of the way, and then consider whether the same choice or technique might work in your own writing.

What Should You Be Writing as You Are Reading?

The most common suggestion made by former students—mentioned by every single one of them—was to mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself notes and summaries both during and after reading. Often the notes students took while reading became ideas or material for the students to use in their own papers. It's important to read with a pen or highlighter in your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then try to answer the following three questions on my notepad:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing?

By utilizing this same process of highlighting and note taking, you'll end up with a useful list of specific techniques to have at your disposal when it comes time to begin your own writing.

What Does RLW Look Like in Action?

Let's go back to the opening paragraph of this essay and spend some time reading like writers as a way to get more comfortable with the process:

> *In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.>*

Let's begin with those questions I encouraged you to try to answer *before* you start reading. (I realize we're cheating a little bit in this case since you've already read most of this essay, but this is just practice. When doing this on your own, you should attempt to answer these questions before reading, and then return to them as you read to further develop your answers.)

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing? I hope the purpose is clear by now; if it isn't, I'm doing a pretty lousy job of explaining how and why you might read like a writer.
- Do you know who the intended audience is? Again, I hope that you know this one by now.
- What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would *you* call it?
- You know that it's published and not student writing. How does this influence your expectations for what you will read?
- Are you going to be asked to write something like this yourself? Probably not in your college writing class, but you can still use RLW to learn about writerly techniques that you might want to use in whatever you end up writing.

Now ask yourself questions as you read.

> *In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.*

Since this paragraph is the very first one, it makes sense to think about how it introduces readers to the essay. What technique(s) does the author use to begin the text? This is a personal story about his time work- ing in London. What else do you notice as you read over this passage? Is the passage vague or specific about where he worked? You know that the author worked in a famous part of London in a beautiful theater owned by a well-known composer. Are these details important? How different would this opening be if instead I had written:

In 1997, I was living in London and working at a theatre that showed Les Miserables.

This is certainly shorter, and some of you may prefer this version. It's quick. To the point. But what (if anything) is lost by eliminating so much of the detail? I *chose* to include each of the details that the revised sentence omits, so it's worth considering why. Why did I mention where the theater was located? Why did I explain that I was living in London right after finishing college? Does it matter that it was after college? What effect might I have hoped the inclusion of these details would have on readers? Is this reference to college an attempt to connect with my audience of college students? Am I trying to establish my credibility as an author by announcing that I went to college? Why might I want the readers to know that this was a theater owned by Andrew Lloyd Weber? Do you think I am just trying to mention a famous name that readers will recognize? Will Andrew Lloyd Weber figure prominently in the rest of the essay?

These are all reasonable questions to ask. They are not necessarily the right questions to ask because there are no *right* questions. They certainly aren't the only questions you could ask, either. The goal is to train yourself to formulate questions as you read based on whatever you notice in the text. Your own reactions to what you're reading will help determine the kinds of questions to ask.

Now take a broader perspective. I begin this essay—an essay about *reading*—by talking about my job in a theater in London. Why? Doesn't this seem like an odd way to begin an essay about reading? If you read on a little further (feel free to scan back up at the top of this essay) you learn in the third full paragraph what the connection is between working in the theater and reading like a writer, but why include this information at all? What does this story add to the essay? Is it worth the space it takes up?

Think about what effect presenting this personal information might have on readers. Does it make it feel like a real person, some "ordinary guy," is talking to you? Does it draw you into the essay and make you want to keep reading?

What about the language I use? Is it formal or more informal? This is a time when you can really narrow your focus and look at particular words:

> *Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.*

What is the effect of using the word "antiquated" to describe the fire-safety laws? It certainly projects a negative impression; if the laws are described as antiquated it means I view them as old-fashioned or obsolete. This is a fairly uncommon word, so it stands out, drawing attention to my choice in using it. The word also sounds quite formal. Am I formal in the rest of this sentence?

I use the word "performance" when I could just as easily have written "show." For that matter, I could have written "old" instead of "antiquated." You can proceed like this throughout the sentence, thinking about alternative choices I could have made and what the effect would be. Instead of "staff members" I could have written "employees" or just "workers." Notice the difference if the sentence had been written:

> *Because of old fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of workers inside watching the show in case of an emergency.*

Which version is more likely to appeal to readers? You can try to answer this question by thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of using formal language. When would you want to use formal language in your writing and when would it make more sense to be more conversational?

As you can see from discussing just this one paragraph, you could ask questions about the text forever. Luckily, you don't have to. As you continue reading like a writer, you'll learn to notice techniques that seem new and pay less attention to the ones you've thought about before. The more you practice the quicker the process becomes until you're reading like a writer almost automatically.

I want to end this essay by sharing one more set of comments by my former student, Lola, this time about what it means to her to read like a writer:

> *Reading as a writer would compel me to question what might have brought the author to make these decisions, and then decide what worked and what didn't. What could have made that chapter better or easier to understand? How can I make sure I include some of the good attributes of this writing style*

> *into my own? How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?*

Questioning why the author made certain decisions. Considering what techniques could have made the text better. Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about.

Are you ready to start reading?

Discussion Questions

1. How is "Reading Like a Writer" similar to and/or different from the way(s) you read for other classes?
2. What kinds of choices do you make as a writer that readers might identify in your written work?
3. Is there anything you notice in this essay that you might like to try in your own writing? What is that technique or strategy? When do you plan to try using it?
4. What are some of the different ways that you can learn about the context of a text before you begin reading it?s of your life? Where else is it important to think critically? What does it look like in those contexts?

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2.2: Working with Texts

Working with Texts

As a college student, much of your time will be spent interacting with texts of all types, shapes, sizes, and delivery methods. Sound interesting? Oh, it is. In the following sections, we'll explore the nature of texts, what they will mean to you, and how to explore and use them effectively.

In academic terms, a text is anything that conveys a set of meanings to the person who examines it. You might have thought that texts were limited to written materials, such as books, magazines, newspapers, and 'zines (an informal term for magazine that refers especially to fanzines and webzines). Those items are indeed texts—but so are movies, paintings, television shows, songs, political cartoons, online materials, advertisements, maps, works of art, and even rooms full of people. If we can look at something, explore it, find layers of meaning in it, and draw information and conclusions from it, we're looking at a text.

Building Strong Reading Skills

Read Effectively

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.

How do you become a reader, or a better reader?

> **First**, read every day. And vary the materials you read: a book, a magazine article, an online blog, etc. Try readings things that are a little challenging. In other words, don't just vary the subject matter–vary the difficulty, too. Stretch!
>
> **Second**, learn and practice the skills of effective reading (which are explained below in this section).
>
> **Third**, keep reading. Every day. And use good effective reading skills.
>
> **Fourth**, learn and practice the skill of reading critically. To learn more, see Reading Critically in the "Writing about Texts" section.
>
> **Fifth**, keep reading. Yes, every day, putting your skills to work. (Practice makes perfect!)
>
> **Sixth**, well, you know.

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'll be, the less time it will take, and the more you'll enjoy the experience.

People who read effectively use a variety of skills and techniques:

- They start by creating an optimal setting for reading. They pick the best time, place, and conditions.
- They engage in pre-reading strategies before starting to read (see pre-reading strategies later in this section)
- They read material efficiently: they pick up a piece of material, engage actively with it, and finish.
- They create a reading environment that helps decrease distraction.
- They annotate written texts (in other words, they write directly on the texts) or take notes as they read. By doing this, they enter into a discussion with the text, interacting with it.
- They research or investigate content they don't fully understand.
- They work to discover the central meaning of the piece. They ask themselves
- 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?

They reflect on what the text means to them, 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?

Create an Optimal Setting for Reading

Stop for a moment and think about yourself and the act of reading. Whether you read headlines or social media posts on a smartphone or tablet, love to settle in with the Sunday paper, devour stacks of hand-held magazines and hard copy books, or read only when forced to, what does reading look like for you?

- Consider your ideal spot for reading. Is it a favorite chair in your living room? Your bed? A coffee shop? The cool green grass in a local park?
- What's your favorite time of day for reading?
- Do you read best in silence? Or do you like to have music playing, be around other people, or have some other sort of active distraction?

- Do you prefer hard copy (printed) books, e-books, or audiobooks?

In each case, think about why you're making each of these choices.

For instance, many college students read and study late into the night, perhaps because that's the time they have available after work and family responsibilities or maybe because they've heard from others that all college students tend to study in the wee hours. Simple truth: not everyone reads most effectively at 2:00 am—or at 2:00 pm, for that matter. That's not to say some people don't do their best work late at night; the point is simply to really try and find when you study best—and then to make use of that.

Also, you may already know that the human body works via a series of diurnal cycles—cycles that move through peaks and valleys over each twenty-four hour period. During these cycles, levels of circulating hormones and chemicals rise and fall. Typically, this starts with a big chemical "push awake" in the morning, a peak of energy in the afternoon, and then a gradual lowering through the evening. Understanding these cycles can be helpful in finding effective times to read and study. This is important because as a college student, you'll be doing lots of reading and studying, and if you can find the time at which these activities are most effective, you can cut your reading/study time in half while also finding it's more enjoyable. And who wouldn't like to spend less time studying? (I know, right?)

Location is important, too. Some folks work best in an absolutely silent setting, while others prefer the background noise of people, music, etc. You may find you read most effectively on your couch, in a library, or in a lawn chair in your backyard. My point here is that you shouldn't just assume that a certain time and place are best for you. Experiment, trying out different settings for reading until you find the combination you know is best.

Once you've found that perfect setting, use it. Develop a routine of reading and studying at about the same time and in the same place as much as you can. Doing this will help the activity become a habit, and once that happens, it will be even easier—and more effective.

Here is a suggestion for those students with children, family obligations, pets, and other responsibilities: you may find you'll need to remove yourself from your usual daily setting in order to get your reading done. We've heard many stories of people who can't work at home because their dog, child, or partner are constantly interrupting them. This can be well-meaning, but even so, being interrupted when trying to read or study more or less destroys the process. Don't hesitate to escape to a local coffee shop, a campus library (fact: most college libraries are open to the public), or another safe spot to get your work done. If you're in an optimal setting, you'll finish faster—and then you can get back to whatever else is on your list.

Use Pre-Reading Strategies

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

Start by Reading and Considering the Title

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sit down (in your ideal setting and at your ideal time, if possible) and prepare to read. Do whatever you need to do to minimize distractions during your reading session. (This may include putting your smartphone and other technology in another room.) Have paper and pencil available to take notes.

Read carefully, stopping and rereading sections you don’t quite understand. Be sure to look up words you’re not familiar with. This is important! Most of us are good contextual readers; that is, we can usually figure out what an unfamiliar word means based on the content around it. But in your academic, college-level writing, every word is important, and some words carry enough power to change the meaning of a sentence or to launch it into a whole new level of detail. Also, some words have different meanings in the academic setting than in our more casual everyday lives. When you hit a word you don’t know, stop, make a note in the margin (or on a piece of paper), and look it up. If you find that stopping to look up individual words is too distracting, you can make a list of all the unknown words you run into and then look them all up when you’ve finished reading.

Keep reading until you’re done. Don’t be distracted. If you begin to feel fidgety, stop, get up, and take a five minute break. Then

get back to your reading. The more you read, the stronger your habit will grow, and the easier reading will be.

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2.2.1: Annotate and Take Notes

Annotate and Take Notes

As children, most of us were told never to write in books, but now that you're a college student, your teachers will tell you just the opposite. Writing in your texts as you read—annotating them—is encouraged! It's a powerful strategy for engaging with a text and entering a discussion with it. You can jot down questions and ideas as they come to you. You might underline important sections, circle words you don't understand, and use your own set of symbols to highlight portions that you feel are important. Capturing these ideas as they occur to you is important, for they may play a role in not just understanding the text better but also in your college assignments. If you don't make notes as you go, today's great observation will likely become tomorrow's forgotten detail.

If you can't write on the text itself, you can accomplish almost the same thing by taking notes—either by hand (on paper) or e-notes. You might also choose to use sticky notes to capture your ideas—these can be stuck to specific pages for later recall. For a strategy that helps you take note of what you see as interesting or important points of a text while also responding to those points with your own ideas, see "Dialectic Note-taking" in the "Writing about Texts" section of this text.

Many students use brightly-colored highlighting pens to markup texts. These are better than nothing, but in truth, they're not much help. Using them creates big swaths of eye-popping color in your text, but when you later go back to them, you may not remember why they were highlighted. Writing in the text with a simple pen or pencil is always preferable.

Annotating in a Textbook

When annotating, choose pencil or ball-point ink rather than gel or permanent marker. Ball point ink is less likely to soak through the page. If using erasable pens, test in an inconspicuous area to make sure they actually erase on that paper.

What about e-books? Most of them have on-board tools for note-taking as well as providing dictionaries and even encyclopedia access.

Where to Make Notes

First, determine how you will annotate the text you are about to read.

If it is a printed article, you may be able to just write in the margins. A colored pen might make it easier to see than black or even blue.

If it is an article posted on the web, you could also you Diigo, which is a highlighting and annotating tool that you can use on

the website and even share your notes with your instructor. Other note-taking plug-ins for web browsers might serve a similar function.

If it is a textbook that you do not own (or wish to sell back), use post it notes to annotate in the margins.

You can also use a notebook to keep written commentary as you read in any platform, digital or print. If you do this, be sure to leave enough information about the specific text you're responding to that you can find it later if you need to. (Make notes about page number, which paragraph it is, or even short quotes to help you locate the passage again.)

Annotating an Essay or Nonfiction Book

Reading (and writing!) essays is an essential part of your college experience. Essays and books are usually organized around a central idea or argument, known as a thesis statement. And even though a book is longer with more room to develop ideas, both books and essays share a similar structure that has an introduction, body, and conclusion.

When annotating an essay or nonfiction book, first look for these things:

1. Find the **stated or implied thesis statement**, also referred to as the author's central argument. A thesis consists of a specific topic and a position statement on the topic. All of the other ideas in the text support and develop the thesis, so it's really important to identify the thesis as you read. You'll get lots of practice identifying and writing thesis statements and topic sentences throughout this course.
2. **Identify topic sentences.** Topic sentences are the main ideas of a paragraph.
3. **Identify key supporting details.** Supporting details help develop and explain the topic sentences.
4. **Identify transitional words and phrases.** These can work as signposts to better help you understand the author's argument. They often highlight examples and comparisons with the main argument. Look for words like:

    - Example (e.g. for example, for instance)
    - Time or Sequence (e.g. first, second)
    - Comparison (e.g. however, on the other hand)
    - Concession (e.g. admittedly, granted)
    - Addition (e.g. furthermore, in addition)
    - Cause and Effect (e.g. as a result, consequently)

- Conclusion (e.g. therefore, in conclusion)
- Summary (e.g. in summary, in other words)

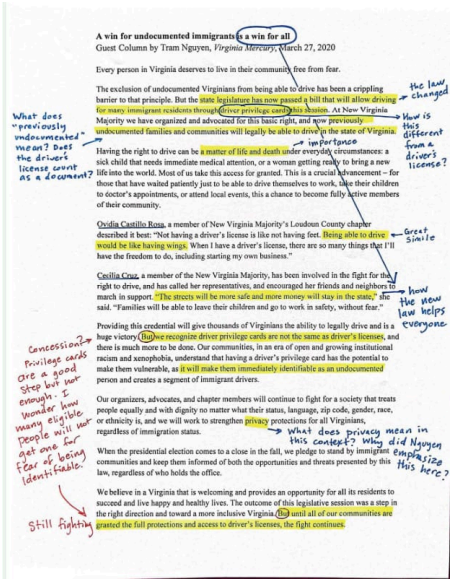
What Notes to Make

1. **Scan the document you are annotating.** Some obvious clues will be apparent before you read it, such as titles or headers for sections. Read the first paragraph. Somewhere in the first (or possibly the second) paragraph should be a BIG IDEA about what the article is going to be about. In the margins, near the top, write down the big idea of the article in your own words. This shouldn't be more than a phrase or a sentence. This big idea is likely the article's thesis.
2. **Underline topic sentences or phrases that express the main idea for that paragraph or section.** You should never underline more than 5 words, though for large paragraphs or blocks of text, you can use brackets. (Underlining long stretches gets messy, and makes it hard to review the text later.) Write in the margin next to what you've underlined a summary of the paragraph or the idea being expressed.
3. **Connect related ideas by drawing arrows from one idea to another.** Annotate those arrows with a phrase about how they are connected.
4. If you encounter an idea, word, or phrase you don't understand, **circle it and put a question mark** in the margin that indicates an area of confusion. Write your question in the margin.
    - "Depending on the outcome of the assessment, the commission recommends to WHO which formerly endemic countries should be declared free of transmission, i.e., certified as free of the disease." ?? What does this mean? Who is WHO?
5. Anytime the author makes a statement that you can connect with on a personal level, a**nnotate in the margins a summary of how this connects to you.** Write any comments or observations you feel appropriate to the text. You can also add your personal opinion.
    - "Guinea worm disease incapacitates victims for extended periods of time making them unable to work or grow enough food to feed their families or attend school." → My dad was sick for a while and couldn't work. This was hard on our family.
6. Place a box around any terms or phrase that emphasizes scientific language. These could be words yo are not familiar with or will need to review later. Define those words in the margins.
    - "Guinea worm disease is set to become the second human disease in history, after smallpox, to be eradicated." → Eradicated = to put an end to, destroy

To summarize how you will annotate text:

1. Identify the BIG IDEA
2. Underline topic sentences or main ideas
3. Connect ideas with arrows
4. Ask questions
5. Add personal notes
6. Define technical words

Now look at Figure 2.2.1.1. What do you notice about this annotation? What else would you add? Discuss with a partner.



A win for undocumented immigrants is a win for all

Guest Column by Tram Nguyen, *Virginia Mercury*, March 27, 2020

Every person in Virginia deserves to live in their community free from fear.

The exclusion of undocumented Virginians from being able to drive has been a crippling barrier to that principle. But the state legislature has now passed a bill that will allow driving for many immigrant residents through driver privilege cards this session. At New Virginia Majority we have organized and advocated for this basic right, and now previously undocumented families and communities will legally be able to drive in the state of Virginia.

Having the right to drive can be a matter of life and death under everyday circumstances: a sick child that needs immediate medical attention, or a woman getting ready to bring a new life into the world. Most of us take this access for granted. This is a crucial advancement – for those that have waited patiently just to be able to drive themselves to work, take their children to doctor's appointments, or attend local events, this a chance to become fully active members of their community.

Ovidia Castillo Rosa, a member of New Virginia Majority's Loudoun County chapter described it best: "Not having a driver's license is like not having feet. Being able to drive would be like having wings. When I have a driver's license, there are so many things that I'll have the freedom to do, including starting my own business."

Cecilia Cruz, a member of the New Virginia Majority, has been involved in the fight for the right to drive, and has called her representatives, and encouraged her friends and neighbors to march in support. "The streets will be more safe and more money will stay in the state," she said. "Families will be able to leave their children and go to work in safety, without fear."

Providing this credential will give thousands of Virginians the ability to legally drive and is a huge victory, but we recognize driver privilege cards are not the same as driver's licenses, and there is much more to be done. Our communities, in an era of open and growing institutional racism and xenophobia, understand that having a driver's privilege card has the potential to make them vulnerable, as it will make them immediately identifiable as an undocumented person and creates a segment of immigrant drivers.

Our organizers, advocates, and chapter members will continue to fight for a society that treats people equally and with dignity no matter what their status, language, zip code, gender, race, or ethnicity is, and we will work to strengthen privacy protections for all Virginians, regardless of immigration status.

When the presidential election comes to a close in the fall, we pledge to stand by immigrant communities and keep them informed of both the opportunities and threats presented by this law, regardless of who holds the office.

We believe in a Virginia that is welcoming and provides an opportunity for all its residents to succeed and live happy and healthy lives. The outcome of this legislative session was a step in the right direction and toward a more inclusive Virginia, but until all of our communities are granted the full protections and access to driver's licenses, the fight continues.

the law changed

What does "previously undocumented" mean? Does the driver's license count as a document?

How is this different from a driver's license?

importance

Great simile

how the new law helps everyone

Concession: Privilege cards are a good step but not enough. I wonder how many eligible people will not get one for fear of being identifiable.

What does privacy mean in this context? Why did Nguyen emphasize this here?

Still fighting

Figure 2.2.1.1. Sample paper annotated

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2.2.2: How to Annotate

How to Annotate

Knowing that annotation is useful is one thing; knowing what to do on the page is another. Annotation does not mean highlighting everything or filling the margins with random comments. Effective annotation gives you a way to track ideas, ask questions, and build a conversation with the text.

You do not need a complicated system. Begin with a clear reading purpose and use a few consistent marks.

Step 1: Preview and Set a Reading Purpose

Before reading, quickly survey the text.

Ask:

- What type of text am I reading (article, essay, chapter, story, report)?
- What am I trying to learn or answer?
- What should I pay attention to?

Look at titles, headings, visuals, keywords, and introductory material.

Step 2: Break the Text into Manageable Sec (Chunking)

Long readings can feel overwhelming. Divide the text into smaller sections or chunks.

You might:

- number paragraphs;
- separate sections with horizontal lines;

- identify introductions, examples, evidence, counterarguments, or conclusions.

Breaking the text into parts helps you slow down and notice how ideas develop.

Try It:

If you would like examples of how readers divide a text into sections and identify larger organizational patterns, see Charting the Text, which demonstrates ways to analyze both the overall structure of a reading and the function of individual sections.

The following video provides steps for chunking and summarizing the text: Video: "Reading Strategies: Chunk and Summarize"

STEP 3: MARK IMPORTANT INFORMATION INTENTIONALLY

Annotate with a purpose instead of marking everything.

Try a simple system:

○ Circle:

- key terms or repeated concepts;
- unfamiliar vocabulary;
- names, dates, or important references.

Underline:

- central ideas or claims;
- evidence and examples;
- passages connected to your reading goal.

[Bracket]:

- supporting details;
- explanations or extended examples.

Choose only a few marks and use them consistently.

See It in Practice

If you are new to annotation, it may help to watch a demonstration before trying the strategy on your own. See "Annotating the Text" (7:07) with Katie Henderson and notice how annotation involves making deliberate choices about what to mark and what to record in the margins.

Step 4: Write Brief Notes in the Margins

Annotations become useful when you explain your thinking.

In the margins, write short notes such as:

- Summaries ("The author explains…")
- Questions ("Why does this matter?")
- Reactions ("This connects to…")
- Predictions ("This may lead to…")
- Vocabulary notes
- Connections to other readings or experiences

Aim for brief notes rather than complete sentences.

Step 5: Move Beyond What the Text Says

Strong readers notice both content and structure.

Ask two questions:

What is the author saying?
What information, ideas, or arguments are presented?

What is the author doing?
Describing? Comparing? Defining? Providing evidence? Challenging another idea?

Thinking about both helps you understand not only the message but also how the text creates meaning.

Try It:

For additional examples of close reading and margin annotation, see "Five Close Reading Strategies to Support the Common Core," which demonstrates how readers summarize sections, ask questions, and track the development of ideas while reading.

Step 6: Review Your Annotations

After reading, look back over your markings.

Ask:

- What patterns do I notice?
- Which ideas appear most important?
- What questions remain?
- How could I use these notes in discussion or writing?

Your annotations should help you return to the text quickly and support your own analysis.

Activities

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

1. Find the Scientific American article "U.S. Cracking Down on Brain-Training Games."
2. Before reading the article, work through the pre-reading skills.
3. Based on what you found in your pre-reading, what do you think the text is about? What position will the article take on the idea of brain-training games? How much do you know about the topic already? What did you already know (before you even looked at the article)?
4. Now, switch to in-depth reading and read the article carefully, taking notes of any questions you have or words you don't understand.
5. If needed, do a bit of quick research on any questions or unknown words you identified.
6. How did the pre-reading affect your ideas of what to expect from the text? How did your understanding of the piece

compare between what you learned from pre-reading versus a complete reading? What does this tell you about the relationship between pre-reading and in-depth reading?

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2.2.3: Annotating a Work of Fiction

Annotating a Work of Fiction

When annotating a work of fiction, such as a novel or short story, look for key elements, such as:

- **Characters:** The protagonist is the main character and the focus of the story. They may be the hero, or anti-hero, someone who is flawed but still fulfills the role of the hero. There may also be an antagonist, someone who is opposed to the main character.
- **Setting:** The setting is a place and time where the story unfolds. The setting may be current, historical, or invented.
- **The Plot:** Many stories follow a predictable plot formula, which involves first setting the stage, introducing a conflict that causes action leading up to a climax, then falling action and resolution.



Figure 1. Identifying the five stages of a plot will help you as you annotate works of fiction.

- **The Point of View:** The point of view is the teller of the story.



Figure 2. Recognizing which point of view is being used is another helpful tool for annotating.

- **Themes:** Themes are the major ideas expressed in a story. Every story has one or more themes that it develops, such as “human endeavor is ultimately futile” or “working class unity leads to successful resistance to oppression.”

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2.3: Writing about Texts

Writing about Texts

As you take on a broader range of writing assignments in your college classes, it can be helpful to read as a writer, often called reading to write. “Reading to write” means approaching reading material with a variety of tools that help prepare you to write about that reading material. These tools can include things like previewing related assignments or lectures prior to reading, specific note-taking methods while reading, and ways of thinking about and organizing the information after completing the reading.

As we have learned in the “Building Strong Reading Skills” section of this text, critical reading is effective reading taken to the next step, but now we’re going to talk about how to use those reading skills to help us write about the texts we read. Instead of simply reading for your own purposes, you now will also read through the writer’s eyes, seeking to understand the deeper, interwoven meanings layered within a text. Critical reading involves the reader in grappling with the text—interacting with it.

The critical reader digs in and explores a text. They do some or all of the following:

- **They analyze the structure of the piece.** What kind of organization does it follow? Where is the thesis? What types of sentences and language are used? How are the paragraphs structured?
- **They analyze the text itself,** either exploring its content or its use of rhetoric, i.e., the ways the text uses language to make its message effective.
- **They capture the text’s main points** by summarizing its meaning.
- **They critique the text,** passing judgment on its effectiveness.
- **They reach conclusions** (make inferences) about the text.
- **They combine their own ideas with the textual analysis** to synthesize new ideas and insights.

You’ll begin, of course, by reading the text. Work your way through the suggestions in the “Read Effectively” section, found in the larger “Building Strong Reading Skills” section of this text.

Exploring the Structure of a Text

Exploring a text’s structure may sound a little complicated, but it really isn’t. We’re simply looking for how it’s been constructed or built, and then we’re thinking about how the structure supports the work the text is trying to do. The fancy literary terms for this are “form” and “function.” Form refers to the way the text is structured, while function refers to what it communicates to the reader.

Consider these questions when thinking about structure:

- How is the text organized? (Does it seem logical? Is it in time-related, chronological order? Does it skip around in time with flashbacks or flash-forwards?)
- Is it divided into obvious sections? Do the sections have headings, or are they just visually separated?
- Does the author use comparison/contrast, explore cause and effect, or examine a process to present their ideas?
- Is there a lot of detail and description in the text? Does the author use dialog?
- Does the author do anything unusual* or unexpected with the text?

*Speaking of unusual texts, sometimes the author will do something unexpected with the text's form in order to support its function. As an example, check out these examples from Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, a novel that includes some extraordinary structures.

In the example shown below, you can see some of the unusual ways Danielewski has arranged text on two of the pages. His book contains all sorts of different textual anomalies (something that deviates from the usual or standard approach); if you want to see more of them, go to Google and search for "House of Leaves" and then "images." Throughout the text, his creativity with the textual layout echoes and supports what is happening within the story. It's ridiculously cool, and if you're curious about it, I recommend reading it. It's a weird but worthwhile reading experience, and it brings home the idea of textual structure like nothing else can.

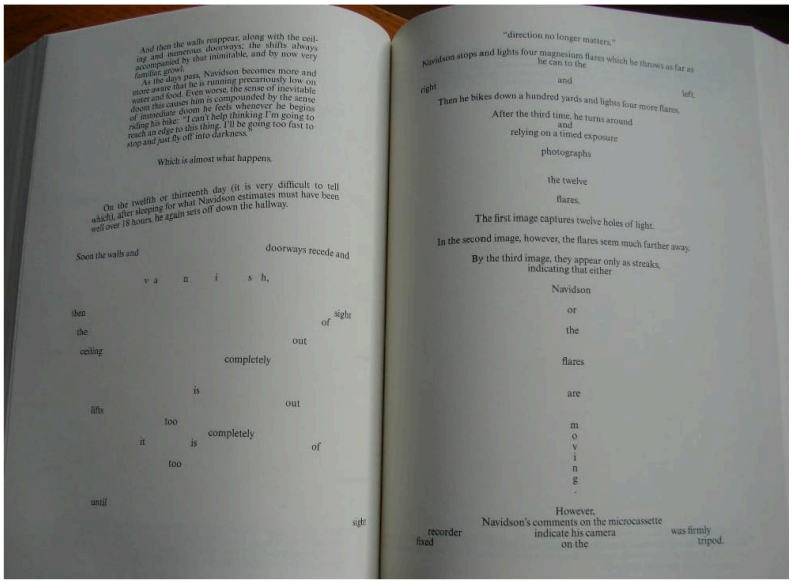


Figure 2.3.1

DIALECTIC NOTETAKING

A dialectical approach to taking notes sounds much more complicated than it is. A dialectic is just a dialogue, a discussion between two (or more) voices trying to figure something out. Whenever we read new material, particularly material that is challenging in some way, it can be helpful to take dialectic notes to create clear spaces for organizing **these different sets of thoughts.**

Creating Dialectic Notes

Start by drawing a vertical line down the middle of a fresh sheet of paper to make two long columns.

The Left Column

This column will be a straightforward representation of the main ideas in the text you are reading (or viewing). In it, you will note things like

- What are the author's main points in this section?
- What kind of support is the author using in this section?
- Other points of significant interest?
- Note the source and page number, if any, so that you can find and document this source later

You can directly quote these points, but do write them down as you encounter them, not after the fact. If you quote directly, use quotation marks; if you paraphrase, do not use quotation marks. Be consistent so that you don't make more work for yourself when you start writing your draft. For more guidance with writing summaries, paraphrasing, and quoting, see the "Drafting" section of this text.

The Right Column

The right column will be the questions and connections you make as you encounter this author's ideas. This might include

- Questions you want to ask in class
- Bigger-picture questions you might explore further in writing
- Connections to other texts you've read or viewed for this class
- Connections to your own personal experiences
- Connections to the world around you (issues in your community, stories on the news, or texts you've read or viewed outside of this class)

Bottom of the Page

It is often a good idea to leave space at the bottom of the page (or on the back) for additional notes about this piece you may want to write down based on what your instructor has to say about it or for comments and questions your peers make about it during class discussion.

Example

Once you've finished the text and have taken your dialectic notes while reading it, you might have something that looks a bit like this (for the sake of the example, I read a story I'd never read before from an author I'm familiar with, so you could see genuine reactions to a first read):

Dialectical Notes for Bradbury's "The Last Night of the World"

What it says	Questions/Connections
"What would you do if you knew this was the last night of the world?"	It feels so strange to start a story with a character asking a direct question in dialogue . . . can't decide if it draws me in or not.
"You don't mean it?" said his wife.	The slow reveal of who these characters are, their relationship to each other, even how many are talking is interesting. I wonder why Bradbury chose to reveal them this way.
Long paragraph about his dream and Stan.	Weird! And a little creepy . . . I wonder why the shared dreams, & how many others are hearing the same one.

Figure 2.3.2

Dialectical Notes for Bradbury's "The Last Night of the World" - Page 2

What it says	Questions/Connections
This is logical.	What? Not a single thing about this is logical! Not even the further explanation makes logical sense
February 30, 1951	Okay, so . . . alternate timeline? The world ending on a day that never has, never will exist?
The discussion about whether the children know.	Why wouldn't the children have had the same dream?

Notes during class:
. . .

Figure 2.3.3

Once you have this set of dialectic notes, there are a number of ways you can use them. Here are a few:

- They can help you contribute to class discussion about this piece and the topics it addresses.
- Significant questions you encountered while reading are already written down and collected in one place so you don't have to sift back through the reading to re-discover those questions.
- These notes provide a place where many of your observations and thoughts about the piece are already organized, which can help you see patterns and connections within those observations. Finding these connections can be a

strong starting point for written assignments.

- If you are asked to respond to this piece in writing, these notes can serve as a reference point as you develop a draft. They can give you new ideas if you get stuck and help keep the original connections you saw when reading fresh in your mind as you respond more formally to that reading.

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2.4: Writing a Formal Summary

Writing a Formal Summary

At some point in your classes, you will likely be given an assignment to summarize a specific text, an assignment in which summary is the sole intent. You will also use summaries in more holistic ways, though, incorporating them along with paraphrase, quotation, and your own opinions into more complex pieces of writing. You might summarize for several reasons, both in your time as a student and in your life outside of education.

Here are some common ones:

- A summary can show your understanding of the main points of an assigned reading or viewing, so your instructor might ask you to summarize in order to know that you've understood the material.
- You might summarize a section from a source, or even the whole source, when the ideas in that source are critical to an assignment you are working on and you feel they need to be included, but they would take up too much space in their original form.
- You might also summarize when the general ideas from a source are important to include in your work, but the details included in the same section as those main ideas aren't needed for you to make your point. For example, technical documents or in-depth studies might go into much, much more detail than you are likely to need to support a point you are making for a general audience. These are situations in which a summary might be a good option.
- Summarizing is also an excellent way to double-check that you understand a text–if you can summarize the ideas in it, you likely have a good grasp on the information it is presenting. This can be helpful for school-related work, such as studying for an exam or researching a topic for a paper, but is also useful in daily life when you encounter texts on topics that are personally or professionally interesting to you.

What Makes Something a Summary?

When you ask yourself, after reading an article (and maybe even reading it two or three times), "What was that article about?" and you end up jotting down–from memory, without returning to the original article to use its language or phrases–three things that stood out as the author's main points, you are summarizing. Summaries have several key characteristics.

You're summarizing well when you

- Use your own words.
- Significantly condense the original text.
- Provide accurate representations of the main points of the text they summarize.
- Avoid personal opinion.

Summaries are much shorter than the original material—a general rule is that they should be no more than 10% to 15% the length of the original, and they are often even shorter than this.

It can be easy and feel natural, when summarizing an article, to include our own opinions. We may agree or disagree strongly with what this author is saying, or we may want to compare their information with the information presented in another source, or we may want to share our own opinion on the topic. Often, our opinions slip into summaries even when we work diligently to keep them separate. These opinions are not the job of a summary, though. A summary should only highlight the main points of the article.

SUMMARIZING

Focusing on just the ideas that best support a point we want to make or ignoring ideas that don't support that point can be tempting. This approach has two significant problems, though:

First, it no longer correctly represents the original text, so it misleads your reader about the ideas presented in that text. A summary should give your reader an accurate idea of what they can expect if we pick up the original article to read.

Second, it undermines your own credibility as an author to not represent this information accurately. If readers cannot trust an author to accurately represent source information, they may not be as likely to trust that author to thoroughly and accurately present a reasonable point.

How Should I Organize a Summary?

Like traditional essays, summaries have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. What these components look like will vary some based on the purpose of the summary you're writing. The introduction, body, and conclusion of work focused specifically around summarizing something is going to be a little different than in work where summary is not the primary goal.

Introducing a Summary

One of the trickier parts of creating a summary is making it clear that this is a summary of someone else's work; these ideas are not your original ideas. You will almost always begin a summary with an introduction to the author, article, and publication so the reader knows what we are about to read. This information will appear again in your bibliography, but is also useful here so the reader can follow the conversation happening in your paper. You will want to provide it in both places.

In summary-focused work, this introduction should accomplish a few things:

- Introduce the name of the author whose work you are summarizing.
- Introduce the title of the text being summarized.

- Introduce where this text was presented (if it's an art installation, where is it being shown? If it's an article, where was that article published? Not all texts will have this component–for example, when summarizing a book written by one author, the title of the book and name of that author are sufficient information for your readers to easily locate the work you are summarizing).
- State the main ideas of the text you are summarizing—just the big-picture components.
- Give context when necessary. Is this text responding to a current event? That might be important to know. Does this author have specific qualifications that make them an expert on this topic? This might also be relevant information.

So, for example, if you were to get an assignment asking you to summarize Matthew Hutson's *Atlantic* article "Beyond the Five Senses" (found at www.theatlantic.com), an introduction for that summary might look something like this:

In his July 2017 article in The Atlantic, "Beyond the Five Senses," Matthew Hutson explores ways in which potential technologies might expand our sensory perception of the world. He notes that some technologies, such as cochlear implants, are already accomplishing a version of this for people who do not have full access to one of the five senses. In much of the article, though, he seems more interested in how technology might expand the ways in which we sense things. Some of these technologies are based in senses that can be seen in nature, such as echolocation, and others seem more deeply rooted in science fiction. However, all of the examples he gives consider how adding new senses to the ones we already experience might change how we perceive the world around us.

However, you will probably find yourself more frequently using summary as just one component of work with a wide range of goals (not just a goal to "summarize X").

Summary introductions in these situations still generally need to

- Name the author.
- Name the text being summarized.
- State just the relevant context, if there is any (maybe the author has a specific credential that makes their work on this topic carry more weight than it would otherwise, or maybe the study they generated is now being used as a benchmark for additional research).
- Introduce the author's full name (first and last names) the first time you summarize part of their text. If you summarize pieces of the same text more than once in a work you are writing, each time you use their text after that initial introduction of the source, you will only use the author's last name as you introduce that next summary component.

Presenting the "Meat" (or Body) of a Summary

Again, this will look a little different depending on the purpose of the summary work you are doing. Regardless of how you are using summary, you will introduce the main ideas throughout your text with transitional phrasing, such as "One of [Author's] biggest points is…," or "[Author's] primary concern about this solution is…."

If you are responding to a "write a summary of X" assignment, the body of that summary will expand on the main ideas you stated in the introduction of the summary, although this will all still be very condensed compared to the original. What are the key points the author makes about each of those big-picture main ideas? Depending on the kind of text you are summarizing, you may want to note how the main ideas are

supported (although, again, be careful to avoid making your own opinion about those supporting sources known).

When you are summarizing with an end goal that is broader than just summary, the body of your summary will still present the idea from the original text that is relevant to the point you are making (condensed and in your own words).

Since it is much more common to summarize just a single idea or point from a text in this type of summarizing (rather than all of its main points), it is important to make sure you understand the larger points of the original text. For example, you might find that an article provides an example that opposes its main point in order to demonstrate the range of conversations happening on the topic it covers. This opposing point, though, isn't the main point of the article, so just summarizing this one opposing example would not be an accurate representation of the ideas and points in that text.

Concluding a Summary

For writing in which summary is the sole purpose, here are some ideas for your conclusion.

Now that we've gotten a little more information about the main ideas of this piece, are there any connections or loose ends to tie up that will help your reader fully understand the points being made in this text? This is the place to put those.

This is also a good place to state (or restate) the things that are most important for your readers to remember after reading your summary.

When your writing has a primary goal other than summary, your conclusion should

- Include an in-text citation, if appropriate. (To learn how to do this correctly, see the discussion of in-text citation in Chapter 8.)
- Discuss the summary you've just presented. How does it support, illustrate, or give new information about the point you are making in your writing? Connect it to your own main point for that paragraph so readers understand clearly why it deserves the space it takes up in your work. (Note that this is still not giving your opinion on the material you've summarized, just making connections between it and your own main points.)

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2.5: Analyzing a Text

Analyzing a Text

Analysis goes further than a summary, considering how and why (and for whom) a text functions the way that it does rather than just focusing on what it says.

Written Texts

When you analyze an essay or article, consider these questions:

- What is the thesis or central idea of the text?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What questions does the author address?
- How does the author structure the text?
- What are the key parts of the text?
- How do the key parts of the text interrelate?
- How do the key parts of the text relate to the thesis?
- What does the author do to generate interest in the argument?
- How does the author convince the readers of their argument's merit?
- What evidence is provided in support of the thesis?
- Is the evidence in the text convincing?
- Has the author anticipated opposing views and countered them?
- Is the author's reasoning sound?

Visual Texts

When you analyze a piece of visual work, consider these questions:

- What confuses, surprises, or interests you about the image?
- In what medium is the visual?
- Where is the visual from?
- Who created the visual?
- For what purpose was the visual created?
- Identify any clues that suggest the visual's intended audience.

- How does this image appeal to that audience?
- In the case of advertisements, what product is the visual selling?
- In the case of advertisements, is the visual selling an additional message or idea?
- If words are included in the visual, how do they contribute to the meaning?
- Identify design elements – colors, shapes, perspective, and background – and speculate how they help to convey the visual's meaning or purpose.

Critiquing a Text

Let's review:

- When we summarize a text, we capture its main points.
- When we analyze a text, we consider how it has been put together—we dissect it, more or less, to see how it works

Here's a new term: when we critique (crih-TEEK) a text, we evaluate it, asking it questions. Critique shares a root with the word "criticize." Most of us tend to think of criticism as being negative or mean, but in the academic sense, doing a critique is not the least bit negative. Rather, it's a constructive way to better explore and understand the material we're working with. The word's origin means "to evaluate," and through our critique, we do a deep evaluation of a text.

When we critique a text, we interrogate it. Imagine the text, sitting on a stool under a bright, dangling light bulb while you ask, in a demanding voice, "What did you mean by having Professor Mustard wear a golden yellow fedora?"

Okay, seriously. When we critique, our own opinions and ideas become part of our textual analysis. We question the text, we argue with it, and we delve into it for deeper meanings.

Here are some ideas to consider when critiquing a text:

- How did you respond to the piece? Did you like it? Did it appeal to you? Could you identify with it?
- Do you agree with the main ideas in the text?
- Did you find any errors in reasoning? Any gaps in the discussion?
- Did the organization make sense?
- Was evidence used correctly, without manipulation? Has the writer used appropriate sources for support?
- Is the author objective? Biased? Reasonable? (Note that the author might just as easily be subjective, unbiased, and unreasonable! Every type of writing and tone can be used for a specific purpose. By identifying these techniques and considering why the author is using them, you begin to understand more about the text.)
- Has the author left anything out? If yes, was this accidental? Intentional?
- Are the text's tone and language text appropriate?
- Are all of the author's statements clear? Is anything confusing?
- What worked well in the text? What was lacking or failed completely?
- What is the **cultural context*** of the text?

***Cultural context** is a fancy way of asking who is affected by the ideas and who stands to lose or gain if the ideas take place. When you think about this, think of all kinds of social and cultural variables, including age, gender, occupation, education, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, and so forth.*

These are only a few ideas relating to critique, but they'll get you started. When you critique, try working with these statements, offering explanations to support your ideas. Bring in content from the text (textual evidence) to support your ideas.

SYNTHESIZING

To synthesize is to combine ideas and create a completely new idea. That new idea becomes the conclusion you have drawn from your reading. This is the true beauty of reading: it causes us to weigh ideas, to compare, judge, think, and explore—and then to arrive at a moment that we hadn't known before. We begin with a simple summary, work through analysis, evaluate using critique, and then move on to synthesis.

For example, many people read J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* at some point during their lives, often during high school. The book focuses on an angsty, rebellious teen who relates aspects of his teenage experiences, and he does this from his room in a mental institution. In the end, the teen understands more about himself and the world, and he begins to consider his possible future.

Many teens read this story and see themselves in it; grappling with the ideas in the text helps them better understand themselves and often encourages them to reach for their own futures. This is an example of how they draw their own conclusions from the text and synthesize their own directions and ideas.

Most of us can point to one or two books that have been life-changing—books that have held us captive for a moment in time and shaped our outlook. These are moments of synthesis. If this hasn't happened to you yet, grab a good book (ask a teacher or librarian if you need suggestions), pour a cup of tea, and start reading.

ATTRIBUTION

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2.6: Backpacks vs. Briefcases

Backpacks vs. Briefcases

Steps toward Rhetorical Analysis

Laura Bolin Carroll

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

First Impressions

Imagine the first day of class in first-year composition at your university. The moment your instructor walked into the room, you likely began analyzing them and making assumptions about what kind of teacher they will be. You might have noticed what kind of bag they are carrying—a tattered leather satchel? A hot-pink polka-dotted backpack? A burgundy briefcase? You probably also noticed what they are wearing—trendy slacks and an untucked striped shirt? A suit? Jeans and a T-shirt?

It is likely that the above observations were only a few you made. You might have also noticed your instructor's shoes, their jewelry or tattoos, whether they wear a wedding ring, how their hair is styled, whether they stand tall or slump, how quickly they walk, or maybe even if their nails are done. If you don't tend to notice any of these things about your instructors, you certainly do about the people around you—your roommate, others in your residence hall, students you are assigned to work with in groups, or a prospective date. For most of us, many of the people we encounter on a given day are subject to this kind of quick analysis.

Now as you performed this kind of analysis, you likely didn't walk through each of these questions one by one, write out the answer, and add up the responses to see what kind of person you are interacting with. Instead, you quickly took in the information and made an informed—and likely somewhat accurate—decision about that person. Over the years, as you have interacted with others, you have built a mental database that you can draw on to make conclusions about what a person's looks tell you about their personality. You have become able to analyze quickly what people are saying about themselves through the way they choose to dress, accessorize, or wear their hair.

We have, of course, heard that you "can't judge a book by its cover," but, in fact, we do it all the time. Daily, we find ourselves in situations where we are forced to make snap judgments. Each day, we meet different people, encounter unfamiliar situations, and see different kinds of media that ask us to do, think, buy, and

act in all sorts of ways. In fact, our saturation in media and the images it presents is one of the reasons why learning to do rhetorical analysis is so important. The more we know about how to analyze situations and draw informed conclusions, the better we can become about making savvy judgments about the people, situations, and media we encounter.

Implications of Rhetorical Analysis

Media is one of the most important places where this kind of analysis needs to happen. Rhetoric—the way we use language and images to persuade—is what makes media work. Think of all the media you see and hear every day: Twitter, television shows, web pages, billboards, text messages, podcasts. Even as you read this chapter, more ways to get those messages to you quickly and in a persuasive manner are being developed. Media is constantly asking you to buy something, act in some way, believe something to be true, or interact with others in a specific manner. Understanding rhetorical messages is essential to help us become informed consumers, but it also helps us evaluate the ethics of messages, how they affect us personally, and how they affect society.

Take, for example, a commercial for men's deodorant that tells you that you'll be irresistible to women if you use this product. This campaign doesn't just ask you to buy the product though. It also asks you to trust the company's credibility, or ethos, and to believe the messages they send about how men and women interact, about sexuality, and about what constitutes a healthy body. You have to decide whether you will choose to buy the product and how you will choose to respond to the messages that the commercial sends.

Or, in another situation, a Facebook group asks you to support health care reform. The rhetoric in this group uses people's stories of their struggles to obtain affordable health care. These stories, which are often heart wrenching, use emotion to persuade you—also called pathos. You are asked to believe that health care reform is necessary and urgent, and you are asked to act on these beliefs by calling your congresspersons and asking them to support the reforms as well.

Because media rhetoric surrounds us, it is important to understand how rhetoric works. If we refuse to stop and think about how and why it persuades us, we can become mindless consumers who buy into arguments about what makes us value ourselves and what makes us happy. For example, research has shown that only 2% of women consider themselves beautiful ("Campaign"), which has been linked to the way that the fashion industry defines beauty. We are also told by the media that buying more stuff can make us happy, but historical surveys show that US happiness peaked in the 1950s, when people saw as many advertisements in their lifetime as the average American sees in one year (Leonard).

Our worlds are full of these kinds of social influences. As we interact with other people and with media, we are continually creating and interpreting rhetoric. In the same way that you decide how to process, analyze, or ignore these messages, you create them. You probably think about what your clothing will communicate as you go to a job interview or get ready for a date. You are also using rhetoric when you try to persuade your parents to send you money or your friends to see the movie that interests you. When you post to your blog or tweet something, you are using rhetoric.

In fact, according to rhetorician Kenneth Burke, rhetoric is everywhere: "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning,' there is 'persuasion.' Food eaten and digested is not rhetoric.

But in the meaning of food, there is much rhetoric, the meaning being persuasive enough for the idea of food to be used, like the ideas of religion, as a rhetorical device of statesmen" (71–72). In other words, most of our actions are persuasive in nature. What we choose to wear (tennis shoes vs. flip-flops), where we shop (Whole Foods Market vs. Wal-Mart), what we eat (organic vs. fast food), or even the way we send information (snail mail vs. text message) can work to persuade others.

Chances are you have grown up learning to interpret and analyze these types of rhetoric. They become so commonplace that we don't realize how often and how quickly we are able to perform this kind of rhetorical analysis. When your teacher walked in on the first day of class, you probably didn't think to yourself, "I think I'll do some rhetorical analysis on her clothing and draw some conclusions about what kind of personality she might have and whether I think I'll like her." And yet you probably were able to come up with some conclusions based on the evidence you had.

However, when this same teacher hands you an advertisement, photograph, or article and asks you to write a rhetorical analysis of it, you might have been baffled or felt a little overwhelmed. The good news is that many of the analytical processes that you already use to interpret the rhetoric around you are the same ones that you'll use for these assignments.

The Rhetorical Situation; or, Discerning Context

One of the first places to start is context. Rhetorical messages always occur in a specific situation or context. The president's speech might respond to a specific global event, like an economic summit; that's part of the context. You choose your clothing depending on where you are going or what you are doing; that's context. A television commercial comes on during specific programs and at specific points of the day; that's context. A billboard is placed in a specific part of the community; that's context too.

In an article called "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Bitzer argues that there are three parts to understanding the context of a rhetorical moment: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence is the circumstance or condition that invites a response; "imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (304). In other words, rhetorical discourse is usually responding to some kind of problem. You can begin to understand a piece's exigence by asking, "What is this rhetoric responding to? What might have happened to make the rhetor (the person who creates the rhetoric) respond in this way?"

The exigence can be extremely complex, like the need for a new Supreme Court justice, or it can be much simpler, like receiving an email that asks you where you and your friends should go for your road trip this weekend. Understanding the exigence is important because it helps you begin to discover the purpose of the rhetoric. It helps you understand what the discourse is trying to accomplish.

Another part of the rhetorical context is the audience, those who are the (intended or unintended) recipients of the rhetorical message. The audience should be able to respond to the exigence. In other words, the audience should be able to help address the problem. You might be very frustrated with your campus's requirement that all first-year students purchase a meal plan for on-campus dining. You might even send an email to a

good friend back home voicing that frustration. However, if you want to address the exigence of the meal plans, the most appropriate audience would be the person/office on campus that oversees meal plans. Your friend back home cannot solve the problem (though she may be able to offer sympathy or give you some good suggestions); the person who can change the meal plan requirements is probably on campus. Rhetors make all sorts of choices based on their audience. The audience can determine the type of language used, the formality of the discourse, the medium or delivery of the rhetoric, and even the types of reasons used to make the rhetor's argument. Understanding the audience helps you begin to see and understand the rhetorical moves that the rhetor makes.

The last piece of the rhetorical situation is the constraints. The constraints of the rhetorical situation are those things that have the power to "constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer 306). Constraints have a lot to do with how the rhetoric is presented. Constraints can be "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives" (306). Constraints limit the way the discourse is delivered or communicated. Constraints may be something as simple as your instructor limiting your proposal to one thousand words or something far more complex like the kinds of language you need to use to persuade a certain community.

So how do you apply this to a piece of rhetoric? Let's say you are flipping through a magazine, and you come across an advertisement that has a large headline that reads, "Why Some People Say 'D'OH' When You Say 'Homer.'" This ad is an Ad Council public service announcement (PSA) to promote arts education and is sponsored by Americans for the Arts and the National Association of Music Merchants, the trade association of the international music products industry.

Since you want to understand more about what this ad means and what it wants you to believe or do, you begin to think about the rhetorical situation. You first might ask, "What is the ad responding to? What problem does it hope to address?" That's the exigence. In this case, the exigence is the cutting of arts funding and children's lack of exposure to the arts. According to the Ad Council's website, "The average kid is provided insufficient time to learn and experience the arts. This PSA campaign was created to increase involvement in championing arts education both in and out of school." The PSA is responding directly to the fact that kids are not getting enough arts education.

Then you might begin to think about to whom the Ad Council targeted the ad. Unless you're a parent, you are probably not the primary audience. If you continued reading the text of the ad, you'd notice that there is information to persuade parents that the arts are helpful to their children and to let them know how to help their children become more involved with the arts. The ad tells parents that "the experience will for sure do more than entertain them. It'll build their capacity to learn more. In fact, the more art kids get, the smarter they become in subjects like math and science. And that's reason enough to make a parent say, 'D'oh!,' For Ten Simple Ways to instill art in your kids' lives visit AmericansForTheArts.org" ("Why"). Throughout the text of the ad, parents are told both what to believe about arts education and how to act in response to the belief.

There also might be a secondary audience for this ad—people who are not the main audience of the ad but might also be able to respond to the exigence. For example, philanthropists who could raise money for arts education or legislators who might pass laws for arts funding or to require arts education in public schools could also be intended audiences for this ad.

Finally, you might want to think about the constraints or the limitations on the ad. Sometimes these are harder

to get at, but we can guess a few things. One constraint might be the cost of the ad. Different magazines charge differently for ad space as well as placement within the magazine, so the Ad Council could have been constrained by how much money they wanted to spend to circulate the ad. The ad is also only one page long, so there might have been a limitation on the amount of space for the ad. Finally, on the Ad Council's web page, they list the requirements for organizations seeking the funding and support of the Ad Council. There are twelve criteria, but here are a few:

1. The sponsor organization must be a private nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, private foundation, government agency or coalition of such groups.
2. The issue must address the Ad Council's focus on Health & Safety, Education, or Community. Applications which benefit children are viewed with favor—as part of the Ad Council's Commitment to Children.
3. The issue must offer a solution through an individual action.
4. The effort must be national in scope, so that the message has relevance to media audiences in communities throughout the nation. ("Become")

Each of these criteria helps us understand the limitations on both who can participate as rhetor and what can be said.

The exigence, audience, and constraints are only one way to understand the context of a piece of rhetoric, and, of course, there are other ways to get at context. Some rhetoricians look at subject, purpose, audience, and occasion. Others might look at the "rhetorical triangle" of writer, reader, and purpose.

An analysis using the rhetorical triangle would ask similar questions about the audience as one using the rhetorical situation, but it would also ask questions about the writer and the purpose of the document. Asking questions about the writer helps the reader determine whether she or he is credible and knowledgeable. For example, the Ad Council has been creating public service announcements since 1942 ("Loose lips sink ships," anyone?) and is a nonprofit agency. They also document their credibility by showing the impact of their campaigns in several ways: "Destruction of our forests by wildfires has been reduced from 22 million acres to less than 8.4 million acres per year, since our Forest Fire Prevention campaign began" and "6,000 children were paired with a mentor in just the first 18 months of our mentoring campaign" ("About").

Based on this information, we can assume that the Ad Council is a credible rhetor, and whether or not we agree with the rhetoric they produce, we can probably assume it contains reliable information. Asking questions about the next part of the rhetorical triangle, the purpose of a piece of rhetoric, helps you understand what the rhetor is trying to achieve through the discourse. We can discern the purpose by asking questions like "What does the rhetor want me to believe after seeing this message?" or "What does the rhetor want me to do?" In some ways, the purpose takes the exigence to the next step. If the exigence frames the problem, the purpose frames the response to that problem.

The rhetorical situation and rhetorical triangle are two ways to begin to understand how the rhetoric functions within the context you find it. The key idea is to understand that no rhetorical performance takes place in a vacuum. One of the first steps to understanding a piece of rhetoric is to look at the context in which it takes place. Whatever terminology you (or your instructor) choose, it is a good idea to start by locating your analysis within a rhetorical situation.

The Heart of the Matter—the Argument

The rhetorical situation is just the beginning of your analysis though. What you really want to understand is the argument—what the rhetor wants you to believe or do and how he or she goes about that persuasion. Effective argumentation has been talked about for centuries. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle was teaching the men of Athens how to persuade different kinds of audiences in different kinds of rhetorical situations. Aristotle articulated three "artistic appeals" that a rhetor could draw on to make a case—logos, pathos, and ethos.

Logos

Logos is commonly defined as argument from reason, and it usually appeals to an audience's intellectual side. As audiences we want to know the "facts of the matter," and logos helps present these—statistics, data, and logical statements. For example, in our Homer ad for the arts, the text tells parents that the arts will "build their capacity to learn more. In fact, the more art kids get, the smarter they become in subjects like math and science" ("Why"). You might notice that there aren't numbers or charts here, but giving this information appeals to the audience's intellectual side.

The audience can see a continuation of the argument on the Ad Council's web page, and again much of the argument appeals to logos and draws on extensive research that shows that the arts do these things:

- Allow kids to express themselves creatively and bolster their self-confidence
- Teach kids to be more tolerant and open
- Improve kids' overall academic performance
- Show that kids actively engaged in arts education are likely to have higher SAT scores than those with little to no arts involvement
- Develop skills needed by the twenty-first-century workforce: critical thinking, creative problem solving, effective communication, teamwork, and more
- Keep students engaged in school and less likely to drop out ("Arts")

Each bullet above is meant to intellectually persuade parents that they need to be more intentional in providing arts education for their children.

Few of us are persuaded only with our minds though. Even if we intellectually agree with something, it is difficult to get us to act unless we are also persuaded in our hearts. This kind of appeal to emotion is called pathos. Pathetic appeals (as rhetoric that draws on pathos is called) used alone without logos and ethos can come across as emotionally manipulative or overly sentimental but are very powerful when used in conjunction with the other two appeals.

PATHOS

Emotional appeals can come in many forms—an anecdote or narrative, an image such as a photograph, or even humor. For example, on their web campaign, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) uses an image of a baby chick and of Ronald McDonald wielding a knife to draw attention to their Chicken McCruelty UnHappy Meal campaign. These images are meant to evoke an emotional response in the viewer and, along with a logos appeal with the statistics about how cruelly chickens are treated, persuade the viewer to boycott McDonald's.

Pathos can also be a very effective appeal if the rhetor has to persuade the audience in a very short amount of time, which is why it is used heavily in print advertisements, billboards, or television commercials. An investment company will fill a thirty-second commercial with images of families and couples enjoying each other, seeming happy, and surrounded by wealth to persuade you to do business with them.

The thirty-second time spot does not allow them to give the fifteen-year growth of each of their funds, and pathetic appeals will often hold our interest much longer than intellectual appeals.

The ad promoting the importance of art uses humor to appeal to the audience's emotional side. By comparing the epic poet Homer to Homer Simpson and his classic catchphrase "D'oh!" the ad uses humor to draw people into their argument about the arts. The humor continues as they ask parents if their kids know the difference between the Homers: "The only Homer some kids know is the one who can't write his own last name" ("Why"). The ad also appeals to emotion through its language use (diction), describing Homer as "one very ancient dude," and describing the Odyssey as "the sequel" to the Iliad. In this case, the humor of the ad, which occurs in the first few lines, is meant to draw the reader in and help them become interested in the argument before the ad gets to the logos, which is in the last few lines of the ad.

ETHOS

The humor also makes the organization seem real and approachable, contributing to the ethos. The humor might lead you to think that Americans for the Arts is not a stuffy bunch of suits but an organization you can relate to or one that has a realistic understanding of the world. Ethos refers to the credibility of the rhetor—which can be a person or an organization. A rhetor can develop credibility in many ways. The tone of the writing and whether that tone is appropriate for the context helps build a writer's ethos, as does the accuracy of the information or the visual presentation of the rhetoric.

In the Homer ad, the ethos is built in several ways. The simple, humorous, and engaging language (e.g., "Greek Gods. Achilles Heel. Trojan Horse. All of these icons are brought to us by one very ancient dude—Homer. In *The Iliad* and its sequel, *The Odyssey*, he presented Greek mythology in everyday language" ["Why"]) draws the audience in and helps the tone of the ad seem very approachable. Also, the knowledge of Greek mythology and the information about how the arts help children—which also contribute to the logos appeal—make the ad seem credible and authoritative. However, the fact that the ad does not use too many statistics or overly technical language also contributes to the ethos of the ad because often sounding too intellectual can come across as pompous or stuffy.

Aristotle's artistic appeals are not the only way to understand the argument of rhetoric. You might choose to look at the claim or the unstated assumptions of a piece; someone else might consider the visual appeal of the rhetoric, like the font, page layout, types of paper, or images; another person might focus on the language use and the specific word choice and sentence structure of a piece. Logos, pathos, and ethos can provide a nice framework for analysis, but there are numerous ways to understand how a piece of rhetoric persuades (or fails to persuade).

Looking at the context and components of a piece of rhetoric often isn't enough though because it is important to draw conclusions about the rhetoric: Does it successfully respond to the exigence? Is it an ethical approach? Is it persuasive? These kinds of questions let you begin to create your own claims, your own rhetoric, as you take a stand on what other people say, do, or write.

Beginning to Analyze

Once you have established the context for the rhetoric you are analyzing, you can begin to think about how well it fits into that context. You've probably been in a situation where you arrived way underdressed for an occasion. You thought that the dinner was just a casual get-together with friends; it turned out to be a far more formal affair, and you felt very out of place. There are also times when discourse fails to respond to the situation well—it doesn't fit. On the other hand, successful discourses often respond very well to the context. They address the problem, consider the audience's needs, provide accurate information, and have a compelling claim. One of the reasons you work to determine the rhetorical situation for a piece of discourse is to consider whether it works within that context. You can begin this process by asking questions like the following:

- Does the rhetoric address the problem it claims to address?
- Is the rhetoric targeted at an audience who has the power to make change?
- Are the appeals appropriate to the audience?
- Does the rhetor give enough information to make an informed decision?
- Does the rhetoric attempt to manipulate in any way (by giving incomplete/inaccurate information or abusing the audience's emotions)?
- What other subclaims do you have to accept to understand the rhetor's main claim? (For example, in order to accept the Ad Council's claim that the arts boost math and science scores, you first have to value the boosting of those scores.)
- What possible negative effects might come from this rhetoric?

Rhetorical analysis asks how discourse functions in the setting in which it is found. In the same way that a commercial for denture cream seems very out of place when aired during a reality television show aimed at teenagers, rhetoric that does not respond well to its context often fails to persuade. In order to perform analysis, you must understand the context and then carefully study the ways that the discourse does and does not respond appropriately to that context.

The bottom line is that the same basic principles apply when you look at any piece of rhetoric (your instructor's clothing, an advertisement, the president's speech): you need to consider the context and the argument. As you begin to analyze rhetoric, there are lots of different types of rhetoric you might encounter

in a college classroom, such as the following:

- Political cartoon
- Wikipedia entry
- Scholarly article
- Bar graph
- Op-ed piece in the newspaper
- Speech
- YouTube video
- Book chapter
- Photograph
- PowerPoint presentation

All of the above types of discourse try to persuade you. They may ask you to accept a certain kind of knowledge as valid, they may ask you to believe a certain way, or they may ask you to act. It is important to understand what a piece of rhetoric is asking of you, how it tries to persuade you, and whether that persuasion fits within the context you encounter it. Rhetorical analysis helps you answer those questions.

Implications of Rhetorical Analysis; or Why Do This Stuff Anyway?

So you might be wondering, if you know how to do this analysis already—you can tell what kind of person someone is by their clothing or what a commercial wants you to buy without carefully listening to it—why do you need to know how to do more formal analysis? How does this matter outside a college classroom?

Well, first of all, much of the reading and learning in college requires some level of rhetorical analysis: as you read a textbook chapter to prepare for a quiz, it is helpful to be able to distill the main points quickly; when you read a journal article for a research paper, it is necessary to understand the scholar's thesis; when you watch a video in class, it is useful to be able to understand how the creator is trying to persuade you. But college is not the only place where an understanding of how rhetoric works is important. You will find yourself in many situations—from boardrooms to your children's classrooms or churches to city council meetings where you need to understand the heart of the arguments being presented.

One final example: in November 2000, Campbell's Soup Company launched a campaign to show that many of their soups were low in calories and showed prepubescent girls refusing to eat because they were "watching their weight." A very small organization called Dads and Daughters, a group that fights advertising that targets girls with negative body images, contacted Campbell's explaining the problems they saw in an ad that encouraged young girls to be self-conscious about their weight and asked Campbell's to pull the ad. A few days later, Campbell's vice president for marketing and corporate communications called. One of the dads said that "the Vice President acknowledged he had received their letter, reviewed the ad again, saw their point, and was pulling the ad," responding to a "couple of guys writing a letter" ("Media"). Individuals who understand rhetorical analysis and act to make change can have a tremendous influence on their world.

Discussion Questions

1. What are examples of rhetoric that you see or hear on a daily basis?
2. What are some ways that you create rhetoric? What kinds of messages are you trying to communicate?
3. Think about all of the media that you have consumed in the last twenty-four hours, and choose one to analyze. Who was the intended audience? What were the explicit or implied arguments? What rhetorical strategies were used?
4. Which Aristotelian appeal do you find most persuasive or important: logos, ethos, or pathos? How would your answer change for different types of media: a political speech, a commercial, an article about climate change, a sitcom?

Activities

1. Freewrite about your own personal style choices today. Imagine that you are an outside observer: What do you notice? How would you interpret what you are wearing?
2. Write a message to your parent asking to borrow $20. Now write a message to your friend asking for the same favor. How did the audience change your style, tone, evidence, reasons, or constraints?
3. Find an advertisement (either a print ad or a commercial) and analyze it using the rhetorical analysis questions laid out in this chapter.

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2.7: The Rhetorical Appeals and Sociohistorical Context

The Rhetorical Appeals and Sociohistorical Context

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Regardless of the style of argument you use, you will need to consider the ways you engage your audience. Aristotle identified three kinds of *rhetorical appeals*: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

The best argumentation engages all three of these appeals, falling in the center where all three overlap. Unbalanced application of rhetorical appeals is likely to leave your audience suspicious, doubtful, or even bored.

Logos

Logos refers to an appeal to an audience's logical reasoning. Logos will often employ statistics, data, or other quantitative facts to demonstrate the validity of an argument. For example, an argument about the wage gap might indicate that women, on average, earn only 80% of the salary that men in comparable positions earn; this would imply a logical conclusion that our economy favors men.

However, stating a fact or statistic does not alone constitute logos. For instance, when I show you a graph, I am not yet making a logical appeal. Yes, a graph might be "fact-based," drawing on data to illustrate a phenomenon. That characteristic alone, though, doesn't make a logical appeal. For my appeal to be logical, I also need to *interpret* the graph. Your logic is only complete when you've drawn a logical conclusion from your facts, statistics, or other information.

There are many other ways we draw logical conclusions. There are entire branches of academia dedicated to understanding the many kinds of logical reasoning, but we might get a better idea by looking at a specific kind of logic. Let's take as an example the logical syllogism, which might look something like this:



Figure 2.7.1. Logical Syllogism

Pretty straightforward, right? We can see how a general rule (major premise) is applied to a specific situation (minor premise) to develop a logical conclusion. I like to introduce this kind of logic because students sometimes jump straight from the major premise to the conclusion; if you skip the middle step, your logic will be less convincing.

Logical Fallacies

When logic is faulty or misused to manipulate, that's a logical fallacy. Logical fallacies are part of our daily lives; we have all encountered fallacies like stereotypes, generalizations, and misguided assumptions. You may have heard some terms about fallacies already (red herring, slippery slope, non sequitur).

Fallacies follow patterns of reasoning that would otherwise be perfectly acceptable to us, but within their basic structure, they make a mistake. Aristotle identified that fallacies happen on the "material" level (the content is fallacious—something about the ideas or premises is flawed) and the "verbal" level (the writing or speech is fallacious—something about the delivery or medium is flawed).

It's important to be able to recognize these so that you can critically interrogate others' arguments and improve your own. Here are some of the most common logical fallacies:

Fallacy	Description	Example
Post hoc, ergo propter hoc	"After this, therefore because of this"—a confusion of cause and effect with coincidence, attributing a consequence to an unrelated event. This error assumes that correlation equals causation, which is sometimes not the case.	Statistics show that rates of ice cream consumption and deaths by drowning both increased in June. This must mean that ice cream causes drowning.
Non sequitur	"Does not follow"—a random digression that distracts from the train of logic (like a "red herring") or draws an unrelated logical conclusion. John Oliver calls one manifestation of this fallacy "whataboutism," which he describes as a way to deflect attention from the subject at hand.	*Sherlock is great at solving crimes; therefore, he'll also make a great father.* "Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe, which is unhealthy. But what about Bill Clinton? He eats McDonald's every day, which is also unhealthy."
Straw man	An oversimplification or cherry-picking of the opposition's argument to make them easier to attack.	"People who oppose the destruction of Confederate monuments are all white supremacists."
Ad hominem	"To the person"—a personal attack on the arguer rather than a critique of their ideas.	"I don't trust Moriarty's opinion on urban planning because he wears bowties." Truly, though, bowties are the most suspicious; just look at Eleven. The most sus Doctor.

Slippery slope	An unreasonable prediction that one event will lead to a related but unlikely series of events that follows.	"If we let people of the same sex get married, then people will start marrying their dogs too!"
False dichotomy	A simplification of a complex issue into only two sides.	"Given the choice between pizza and Chinese food for dinner, we simply must choose Chinese."

Chart 2.7.1. Fallacies

PATHOS

The second rhetorical appeal we'll consider here is perhaps the most common: pathos refers to the process of engaging the reader's emotions. (You might recognize the Greek root pathos in "sympathy," "empathy," and "pathetic.") A writer can evoke a great variety of emotions to support their argument, from fear, passion, and joy to pity, kinship, and rage. By playing on the audience's feelings, writers can increase the impact of their arguments.

There are two especially effective techniques for cultivating pathos:

1. *Make the audience aware of the issue's relevance to them specifically*—"How would you feel if this happened to you? What are we to do about this issue?"
2. *Tell stories.* A story about one person or one community can have a deeper impact than broad, impersonal data or abstract, hypothetical statements.

Consider the difference between "About 1.5 million pets are euthanized each year" and "Scooter, an energetic and loving former service dog with curly brown hair like a Brillo pad, was put down yesterday." Both are impactful, but the latter is more memorable and more specific.

Pathos is ubiquitous in our current journalistic practices because people are more likely to act (or at least consume media) when they feel emotionally moved. Consider, as an example, the outpouring of support for detained immigrants in June 2018, reacting to the Trump administration's controversial family separation policy. As stories and images surfaced, millions of dollars were raised in a matter of days on the premise of pathos, resulting in the temporary suspension of that policy.

ETHOS

Your argument wouldn't be complete without an appeal to ethos. Cultivating ethos refers to the means by which you demonstrate your authority or expertise on a topic. You'll have to show your audience that you're

trustworthy if they are going to buy your argument.

There are a handful of ways to demonstrate ethos:

By personal experience

Although your lived experience might not set hard-and-fast rules about the world, it is worth noting that you may be an expert on certain facets of your life. For instance, a student who has played rugby for fifteen years of their life is in many ways an authority on the sport.

By education or other certifications

Professional achievements demonstrate ethos by revealing status in a certain field or discipline.

By citing other experts

The common expression is "Stand on the shoulders of giants." You can develop ethos by pointing to other people with authority and saying, "Look, this smart/experienced/qualified/important person agrees with me."

A common misconception is that ethos corresponds with "ethics." However, you can remember that ethos is about credibility because it shares a root with "authority."

Kairos and the Sociohistorical Context of Argumentation

"Good" argumentation depends largely on your place in time, space, and culture. Different cultures throughout the world value the elements of argumentation differently, and argument has different purposes in different contexts. The content of your argument and your strategies for delivering it will change in every unique rhetorical situation.

Continuing from logos, pathos, and ethos, the notion of *kairos* speaks to this concern. To put it in plain language, kairos is the force that determines what will be the best argumentative approach in the moment in which you're arguing; it is closely aligned with rhetorical occasion. According to rhetoricians, the characteristics of the kairos determine the balance and application of logos, pathos, and ethos.

Moreover, your sociohistorical context will bear on what you can assume of your audience. What can you take for granted that your audience knows and believes? The "common sense" that your audience relies on is always changing: common sense in the US in 1950 was much different from common sense in the US in 1920 or common sense in the US in 2022. You can make assumptions about your audience's interests, values, and background knowledge, but only with careful consideration of the time and place in which you are arguing.

As an example, let's consider the principle of logical noncontradiction. Put simply, this means that for an argument to be valid, its logical premises must not contradict each other: if A = B, then B = A. If I said that a dog is a mammal and a mammal is an animal, but a dog is not an animal, I would be contradicting myself. Or "No one drives on I-84; there's too much traffic." This statement contradicts itself, which makes it humorous to us.

However, this principle of noncontradiction is not universal. Our understanding of cause and effect and logical consistency is defined by the millennia of knowledge that has been produced before us, and some cultures value the contradiction rather than perceive it as invalid. This is not to say that either way of seeing the world is more or less accurate but rather to emphasize that your methods of argumentation depend tremendously on sociohistorical context.

Discussion Questions

1. Identify a rhetorical situation (audience, genre) where pathos is the primary appeal. How about logos? Ethos?
2. What is the value of learning about logical fallacies?

Activities

1. Choose an op-ed or a TED talk and analyze its use of rhetorical appeals. How does it use logos, ethos, and pathos to appeal to its audience? Are these effective rhetorical choices or not?
2. Watch a Super Bowl ad and analyze its use of appeals. Pay particular attention to pathos, ethos, and kairos. Logos is often in short supply in advertising. Why is that?
3. Imagine that you want to argue that your town should build a new park over a downtown parking lot. Consider how you would develop the logos, ethos, and pathos of this claim for each of these potential audiences: (a) downtown business owners, (b) city council, and (c) citizens.
4. Scroll through an opinion section on a new site and identify the kairos of three different op-eds. Why are they making this argument now? How does it tie to current events or current cultural attitudes?

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2.8: Rhetorical Concepts and Vocabulary

Rhetorical Concepts and Vocabulary

During your time as a student of writing, you may hear instructors talk about "rhetorical situations." This is a term used to talk about any set of circumstances in which one person is trying to change another person's mind about something, most often via text (like a book, or blog post, or journal article).

These rhetorical situations can be better understood by examining the rhetorical concepts that they are built from. The philosopher Aristotle called these concepts ethos, logos, pathos, kairos, and telos—also known as author, text, audience, setting, and purpose.

Author (Ethos)

Here the "author" of a text is the creator, the person utilizing communication to try to effect a change in their audience. An author doesn't have to be a single person, or a person at all – an author could be an organization. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine the identity of the author and their background. Not only do you want to know what kind of experience they have in the subject, but you'll also want to explore basic biographical information about them. Where and when did they grow up? How could that affect their perspective on the topic?

Appealing to **ethos** is all about using credibility, either your own as a writer or of your sources, in order to be persuasive. Essentially, ethos is about believability. Will your audience find you believable? What can you do to ensure that they do?

You can establish ethos—or credibility—in two basic ways: you can use or build your own credibility on a topic, or you can use credible sources, which, in turn, builds your credibility as a writer.

Credibility is extremely important in building an argument, so, even if you don't have a lot of built-in credibility or experience with a topic, it's important for you to work on your credibility by integrating the credibility of others into your argument.

Aristotle argued that ethos was the most powerful of the modes of persuasion, and while you may disagree, you can't discount its power. After all, think about the way advertisers use ethos to get us to purchase products. Taylor Swift sells us perfume, and Peyton Manning sells us pizza. But, it's really their fame and name they are selling.

With the power of ethos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to help build your ethos in your arguments.

- If you have specific experience or education related to your issues, **mention it** in some way.
- If you don't have specific experience or education related to your issue, make sure you **find sources from authors who do**. When you integrate that source information, it's best if you can address the credibility of your sources. When you have credible sources, you want to let your audience know about them.
- Use a **tone of** voice that is appropriate to your writing situation and will make you sound reasonable and credible as a writer. Controversial issues can often bring out some extreme emotions in us when we write, but we have to be careful to avoid sounding extreme in our writing, especially in academic arguments. You may not convince everyone to agree with you, but you at least need your audience to listen to what you have to say.
- Provide good balance when it comes to pathos and logos, which will be explored in the following pages.
- Avoid flaws in logic—or logical fallacies.

Text (Logos)

Texts can come in all shapes and sizes, such as those listed earlier. But in this context, text is not limited to something written down. The text in a rhetorical situation could be a film, or a photograph, or a recording of a song or history. The important thing to ask yourself when faced with a text, no matter what it is, is what is gained by having the text composed in this format/ genre. What are the relevant characteristics of a book versus a song? What might an oral history version of a text communicate that a book version would not?

Logos is about appealing to your audience's logical side. You have to think about what makes sense to your audience and use that as you build your argument. As writers, we appeal to logos by presenting a line of reasoning in our arguments that is logical and clear. We use evidence, such as statistics and factual information, when we appeal to logos.

In order to develop strong appeals to logos, we have to avoid faulty logic. Faulty logic can be anything from assuming one event caused another to making blanket statements based on little evidence. Logical fallacies should always be avoided.

Appeals to logos are an important part of academic writing, but you will see them in commercials as well. Although they more commonly use pathos and ethos, advertisers will sometimes use logos to sell products. For example, commercials based on saving consumers money, such as car commercials that focus on miles-per-gallon, are appealing to the consumers' sense of logos.

As you work to build logos in your arguments, here are some strategies to keep in mind.

- **Both experience and source material can provide you with evidence to appeal to logos.** While outside sources will provide you with excellent evidence in an argumentative essay, in some situations, you can share personal experiences and

observations. Just make sure they are appropriate to the situation and you present them in a clear and logical manner.

- Remember to think about your audience as you appeal to logos. Just because something makes sense in your mind, doesn't mean it will make the same kind of sense to your audience. You need to try to see things from your audience's perspective. Having others read your writing, especially those who might disagree with your position, is helpful.
- **Be sure to maintain clear lines of reasoning throughout your argument.** One error in logic can negatively impact your entire position. When you present faulty logic, you lose credibility.
- When presenting an argument based on logos, **it is important to avoid emotional overtones and maintain an even tone of voice.** Remember, it's not just a matter of the type of evidence you are presenting; how you present this evidence is important as well.

AUDIENCE (PATHOS)

The audience is any person or group who is the intended recipient of the text, and also the person/people the text is trying to influence. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine who the intended audience is and what their background may be. An audiences' assumptions about the author, the context in which they are receiving the text, their own demographic information (age, gender, etc.) can all affect how the text is seeking to engage with them.

Appealing to **pathos** is about appealing to your audience's emotions. Because people can be easily moved by their emotions, pathos is a powerful mode of persuasion. When you think about appealing to pathos, you should consider all of the potential emotions people experience. While we often see or hear arguments that appeal to sympathy or anger, appealing to pathos is not limited to these specific emotions. You can also use emotions such as humor, joy or even frustration, to note a few, in order to convince your audience.

It's important, however, to be careful when appealing to pathos, as arguments with an overly-strong focus on emotion are not considered as credible in an academic setting. This means you could, and should, use pathos, but you have to do so carefully. An overly-emotional argument can cause you to lose your credibility as a writer.

You have probably seen many arguments based on an appeal to pathos. In fact, a large number of the commercials you see on television or the internet actually focus primarily on pathos. For example, many car commercials tap into our desire to feel special or important. They suggest that, if you drive a nice car, you will automatically be respected.

With the power of pathos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to carefully build pathos in your arguments.

- **Think about the emotions most related to your topic** in order to use those

emotions effectively. For example, if you're calling for change in animal abuse laws, you would want to appeal to your audience's sense of sympathy, possibly by providing examples of animal cruelty. If your argument is focused on environmental issues related to water conservation, you might provide examples of how water shortages affect metropolitan areas in order to appeal to your audience's fear of a similar occurrence.

- In an effort to appeal to pathos, **use examples** to illustrate your position. Just be sure the examples you share are credible and can be verified.
- In academic arguments, be sure to **balance appeals to pathos with appeals to** logos (which will be explored on the next page) in order to maintain your ethos or credibility as a writer.
- When presenting evidence based on emotion, **maintain an even tone of voice.** If you sound too emotional, you might lose your audience's respect.

Setting (Kairos)

Nothing happens in a vacuum, and that includes the text you are trying to understand. It was written in a specific time, context, and/or place, all of which can affect the way the text communicates its message. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine the setting of both audience and author and ask yourself if there was a particular occasion or event that prompted the particular text at the particular time it was written.

You can also use kairos as a strategy for building ethos. *Kairos* refers to a favorable moment for action. Most issues have energy or agency within certain time frames. Think about the famous "I Have a Dream" speech delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the right speech for the right time. Choosing to write about an issue that has current energy and interest contributes to your ethos by presenting you as an engaged, aware writer who is willing to tackle important issues in critical times.

Kairos means the right moment or, more simply, timeliness. Appeals to emotion are more likely to be effective work if they are also timely. For example, people were more likely to give to charities related to 9/11 soon after the tragedy than they are now. However, donations still rise nearer the actual date of September 11 each year. This is an intersection of kairos and pathos. In other words, people's emotions are heightened because of the time. Timeliness and emotion might be tied to an annual event such as sadness or depression on the anniversary of a loved one's death or pride in America on the 4th of July. Other examples could have much larger time frames, such as suspicion and fear of one's neighbors during the Communist witch hunts of the 1940s and '50s. Or they could be on a much smaller scale, like someone being more generous and cheerful than normal on Friday evenings. When writing and considering an appeal to pathos, also consider the timeliness. If you were writing a piece on why present-day Americans should fear a widespread viral infectious disease outbreak, it might seem untimely to use the example of smallpox, which was eradicated decades ago, especially since there have been more recent diseases that present greater threats to the limits of modern medicine.

Kairos is the fourth rhetorical appeal, but it is almost always best explained in context with the other rhetorical appeals.

In his article “Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric,” Aaron Hess provides a definition of kairos for the present day that bridges the two classical applications. Hess addresses Poulakos’s view that, “In short, kairos dictates that what is said must be said at the right time.” He suggests that kairos also considers appropriateness. According to Hess, kairos can either be understood as “the decorum or propriety of any given moment and speech act, implying a reliance on the given or known” or as “the opportune, spontaneous, or timely.”

Kairos is an important part of appeals to logos because all logical information is contextual. In other words, you cannot use data from a 1960s study about cancer treatment without contextualizing it: it is no longer timely in 2017.

The appropriateness of information is also related to kairos. Even if information is logical and factually correct, it may not always be timely to present it. You must evaluate the rhetorical situation in order to balance the appeals appropriately, and an important part of the rhetorical situation is the time.

ATTRIBUTION

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2.9: Situating Arguments

Situating Arguments

Kristy Kelly

Arguments are all about context, and they're designed for and by *people*. People have conflicting motivations, complicated views, wide varieties of values, and ideological commitments, and they carry assumptions, both examined and unexamined, that shape their receptivity toward a particular argument. If you are going to persuade anyone, you need to understand as much as you can about those values, motivations, and assumptions before you can get them to listen to you, let alone act based on your argument.

Let's look at an example. Let's say you've just moved into an apartment with three new roommates who've already lived together for a year before you moved in. Since you're new to the living situation, you'd want to take some time to understand their preferences, routines, and opinions before you start making changes around the apartment. You certainly wouldn't get a cat before realizing that one of your new roommates has a cat allergy—or if you did, it would be pretty rude.

But more subtly than that, you'd need to understand the internal dynamics of the roommate situation before you influence it yourself. Take a smaller example. Maybe your roommates have a friend that comes over frequently but acts really obnoxious in your opinion. They're loud, they leave a mess, and they rely on your roommates to pay for food and drinks without making a contribution themselves. You want to convince your roommates to stop inviting this person over so frequently, and you start the conversation by saying, "Hey, that one friend of yours is really disruptive and rude every time they come over. Can you stop bringing them here, or at least run it past me before they come over?" You think you're being reasonable with this request, but one of your roommates gives you a look of shock and says, "What are you talking about? That person is the best"; the other roommate goes silent; and the third roommate storms out of the room.

You're baffled. Your roommates become awkward around you until you finally pull the first roommate aside and ask, "What's the deal? Why did everyone react like that?" You then learn that this friend helped your roommate who stormed out of the room through an incredibly tough time back in high school, to the point that they may never have even made it to college without this friend. The friend then went through some really big struggles themselves and had to start some medications that make their behavior really uneven—causing them to act a little strange when they visit the apartment. You feel a little bit sheepish about your attitude from before, realizing that this all makes a lot of sense now that you know the full context.

Like we said before: rhetoric is all about **context.** You can't have a decent conversation, let alone persuade someone, if you don't understand the various motivations, connections, and implicit values driving the situation you're stepping into. So that's what a good rhetorician does—they try to understand the internal dynamics of the audience she hopes to influence. You probably understand this on an instinctual level. We

use this kind of sensitivity to navigate complicated situations with our friends, families, and coworkers all the time. But you may not have applied this sort of thinking to the writing you've done in academic settings. This book is here to help you situate your arguments in academic conversations, just as you would situate your arguments in social settings where you know all the stakeholders involved.

"So wait—you're saying I have to understand a person's deepest values and moral commitments before I can persuade them? How can I do that if I don't even know the people I'm talking to?" That may sound like mind reading at best and manipulation at worst. But it's really about respect and ethical argumentation. The best rhetorician listens before she argues. According to Krista Ratcliffe, listening is one of the most important elements of successful communication, particularly when it takes place across cultures or in contexts when the participants might be at odds with one another (196).

Actually *listening* to someone else is hard work. So often we're just looking for ways to shut the other person down or bolster our own viewpoints or we're merely waiting for our turn to speak. But good rhetoric doesn't work that way because it's all about taking the time to understand the audience's values and shape the argument around them rather than merely learning enough about a group of people in order to influence their views.

Rhetoricians use the term *presuppositions* to describe those tacit values that lay the foundations for arguments. Understanding the audience's presuppositions is a prerequisite to effective argumentation. Mark Longaker and Jeffrey Walker call presuppositions "the system of ideas—the ways of thinking—that the speaker and audience share, making them a community (more or less)" (14). Presuppositions involve what both the speaker and audience "love, hate, fear, admire, yearn for; their sense of what is true…what they know as 'fact,' their sense of the structure of reality"—in other words, the network of beliefs that determines how they see the world (14). Note that the speaker and audience *share* these values in this definition. It's not enough to pander to your audience, pretending that you believe in something you don't in order to get them to see your way of thinking. This is about arguing from the same playing field so that everyone shares the same rules and sense of what they're aiming for.

Here's a classic example: in *A Modest Proposal*, Jonathan Swift expresses his outrage about the inhumane treatment of impoverished Irish by making a satirical argument for his fellow citizens to enact a program to eat the poor's newborn babies (and worse) to solve the country's economic problems. Swift makes an exaggerated, ironic claim to highlight the folly of his audience's biases and beliefs, and by making his outrageous proposal seem calmly logical, well cited, and persuasive, he beguiles his audience into confronting their own hypocrisy. Not eating babies is one of the audience's latent beliefs about what is right, and Swift uses that shared value to force his audience to see how their *other* latent beliefs (in this case, tacit acceptance of inhumane treatment of their country's less well-off) are not only wrong but immoral.

That's a rather extreme example, but we can see how it applies to the roommate example as well. The roommates share a respect for the history that shapes the visiting friend's behavior, operating on the implicit assumption that it's worth tolerating some of the friend's less-than-ideal qualities in recognition of that history. This reveals some of the group's deeper beliefs about the reciprocal nature of friendship and the importance of mutual support. You likely believe in those ideals, too, but your initial argument wasn't effective because it didn't recognize that those beliefs were in play. For Longaker and Walker, "Presuppositions determine not only what the speaker means and what the audience understands; they also determine both the speaker's and the audience's understanding of the occasion" (14). Now that you

understand what's really at issue regarding the visiting friend's behavior, you're in a much better position to make arguments that resonate with the presuppositions you all share about friendship.

Discourse Communities

In the quote above, Longaker and Walker say that the speaker and audience become a "community" when they're engaging with arguments based on shared beliefs. It turns out that we're all members of beliefs-based communities and that we're shifting between these groups all the time in our day-to-day lives. Think about the way you might change your language, tone, or references as you switch between friend groups or social situations. You wouldn't use the same inside jokes that you formed with your college friends with your friends from high school because they wouldn't make sense. It also takes a little time to gain a keen sense of the underlying values in a friend group, as we saw with the roommate example.

Some of those same principles apply to our interactions with social, political, professional, or cultural communities we belong to. Rhetoricians use the term *discourse community* to refer to a group that uses a shared language to work toward mutual goals and operate on shared values. Discourse communities are usually organized around a specific purpose or philosophy, and they establish patterns and conventions for communication to work toward their goals. Academic disciplines, activist groups, athletic teams, and religious groups all count as discourse communities, since they all have their own patterns of communication that help them achieve concrete outcomes as a group.

The idea of *shared language* is crucial to understanding what makes a discourse community tick. Imagine stumbling into an advanced biochemistry class when you'd never even taken an introductory chemistry course or walking into a busy restaurant kitchen and hearing the chef shout orders to the kitchen staff. You'd have no idea what anyone was talking about! That's because, as composition scholar Dan Melzer points out, discourse communities use "specialized terms," which linguist John Swales has also called "lexis," to communicate as specifically as possible about the concepts that matter to their community (102). Those specialized terms allow discourse communities to advance their knowledge and communicate in concrete ways as they work to solve problems, from ensuring consistency in a restaurant kitchen to producing reliable results in a biochemistry lab.

At this point, you might be tempted to say, "Oh, cool, so that means pretty much everything is a discourse community if it uses language to solve problems. My friends and I make up a discourse community when we're discussing the problem of whether to get Taco Bell or Jack in the Box." Well, not quite. A discourse community needs to have consistent, traceable goals that are at least somewhat publicly oriented so that potential members can see what the group is all about and how communication contributes to those goals. A private group chat between housemates probably wouldn't count as a discourse community, but a subreddit devoted to discussion of the game *Animal Crossing* would. In order to count as a discourse community, a group needs to arrive at patterns that render its communication legible to people outside the community as well. A housemates' group chat might have shared goals of setting chores or making plans, but it's not designed to communicate those goals to anyone beyond your housemates. An *Animal Crossing* subreddit, while focused on the relatively loose goal of enjoying a video game, must establish rules and patterns that make it possible for newcomers to see how and why the community functions.

Any discourse community, regardless of its purpose, needs to use language consistently enough for anyone

to be able to join, even if there is a learning curve in understanding all the patterns, terms, and expectations. In a discourse community, language functions as a system, a durable set of tools that anyone should be able to pick up and use. Dan Melzer emphasizes the centrality of *genre* in discourse communities, showing how the shared characteristics of genres help create predictable and accessible patterns of communication that make a group's goals easier to achieve. You might think about a lab report as a genre in the discourse community of biochemistry: lab reports contain concrete conventions that allow experimenters to secure reliable results. Similarly, posts to the *Animal Crossing* subreddit need to follow the community rules to ensure that communication remains on topic, appropriate, and aligned with the broader goals of the discourse community. As Melzer points out, "Genres arise out of social purposes, and they're a form of social action within discourse communities" (103–104). From *Animal Crossing* to biochem, members of a discourse community need consistent language to meet their goals. This is ultimately why rhetoricians care about discourse communities: because they show us how people use language as a system to share ideas and get things done.

Stasis Questions

So we understand that it's important to get a well-rounded sense of an issue and determine what values are at play before we try to intervene with an argument. We also understand that we need consistent discursive tools to help us understand and pursue shared goals. One set of tools at our disposal is the **stasis questions**, a simple series of four questions that can help you identify where disagreement rests on a particular issue. The idea of "stasis" refers to that area of disagreement, where a given group can't yet move forward in consensus on how they'd answer the question at hand. The following are the different types of stasis questions:

- ***Questions of fact:*** Does X exist?
- ***Questions of definition:*** What is X? How does X differ from Y?
- ***Questions of evaluation:*** Is X good? What are its causes/effects?
- ***Questions of policy:*** What should we do about X?

These look pretty simple, right? They are! Yet they can yield some really complex insights about a particular discourse community's beliefs—and the answers to the same set of stasis questions can have completely different answers, depending on what discourse community you're asking. Take climate change, for example. In some political contexts, there are still disagreements about whether climate change even exists or what causes it. For the scientists who believe in the data about the existence of climate change, discussions have moved into the policy realm to consider how we can combat the impacts of climate change. So while some politicians are still at the level of stasis on whether climate change is a fact, climate scientists are deliberating at the level of policy.

You can also use the stasis questions to brainstorm the inquiries that are important to be able to answer in a given topic. They can help you take stock and figure out what aspect of an issue demands further analysis. Let's say you're considering writing an essay about homelessness in your area but you're not sure where to start. You might brainstorm a set of questions such as this:

- ***Questions of fact:*** Does homelessness exist in my community? How many homeless people are there in this city? How many of them are children?
- ***Questions of definition:*** Does one simply have to lack an address to be homeless? What about couch surfing or living in a car?
- ***Questions of evaluation:*** What impacts does homelessness have on people's ability to find stable employment? What conditions lead to homelessness?
- ***Questions of policy:*** How can we combat homelessness in this community? How can we help homeless people find jobs?

You might notice that the stasis questions increase in levels of complexity: you must know the answer to the first question to proceed to the next. If you don't understand the basic facts of an issue, you can't make an informed argument about it. You'd need to consider the impacts and effects of homelessness before you make an argument about how to fix it.

This brings us back to Krista Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening: while it's very tempting to jump into a new context or encounter a new problem by immediately proposing a solution, you must first take the time to immerse yourself in the existing conversations, contexts, and complexities before trying to make a judgment call. We saw how well it went in the roommate example when the new roommate tried to take a stance on an issue they didn't fully understand. So when in doubt, remember this tip: *Listen before you argue.*

Discussion Questions

1. What can you do to better understand the context of an argument or position in (a) a conversation with someone you know or (b) an article or something else you are reading?
2. Are there instances in which you might try to make an argument to someone who doesn't share your presuppositions? What could go wrong in that instance? How could you reduce that risk?
3. What are the presuppositions of the following arguments? How could those presuppositions be addressed to improve your paper? (a) College tuition should be free. (b) Elementary schools should not teach students about sexuality or gender identity. (c) Everyone should eat less meat to help the environment.
4. How could you use the stasis questions to analyze other people's arguments? How could you use them in your own writing process?

Activities

1. Choose an article from the "Opinion" section of a newspaper or website of your choice. Read it carefully, and analyze the context, presuppositions, and stasis questions that it builds upon. How do these elements add to (or undermine) the argument for the target audience? What changes would the author need to make in these areas if they were writing for a different audience?
2. Use the stasis questions to write questions of fact, definition, evaluation, and policy for a topic of your choice. How do these questions prod your thinking and raise new ideas for your argument? (If you need topic ideas for this activity, here are a few: fast fashion, vegetarianism, mask/vaccine/other public health requirements, paying college athletes.)

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2.10: Audience and Purpose

Audience and Purpose

Each time you communicate, in writing or otherwise, you consider whom you're communicating with and why, whether you're conscious of this or not. Think about it: if you're asking your best friend for a favor, aren't you going to ask differently than if you were asking your boss for a raise? You already have a great instinct for knowing how to shape language around the people you are addressing and what your goal is. So how can you use this instinct when writing for your college classes?

Audience

A roaring political rally, a studio audience, dancing concert goers—these are all examples of different types of audiences, but an audience for your writing is a bit different. All audiences have a job to do: they are consumers of information or experiences. So when you set out to write, deciding who your audience is, is an important first step.

What is the Difference between an Audience and a Reader?

Great question! It's as simple as this: your audience is the person or group whom you intend to reach with your writing. A reader is just someone who gets their hands on your beautiful words. The reader might be the person you have in mind as you write, the audience you're trying to reach, but they might be some random person you've never thought of a day in your life. You can't always know much about random readers, but you should have some understanding of who your audience is. It's the audience that you want to focus on as you shape your message.

Isn't My Instructor Always My Audience?

Sometimes your instructor will be your intended audience, and your purpose will be to demonstrate your learning about a particular topic to earn credit on an assignment. Other times, even in your college classes, your intended audience will be a person or group outside of the instructor or your peers. This could be someone who has a personal interest in or a need to read about your topic but who may never actually read your work unless it finds a place to be published like a blog or website. Understanding who your intended

audience is will help you shape your writing.

Here are some questions you might think about as you're deciding what to write about and how to shape your message:

- What do I know about my audience? (age, gender, interests, biases, or concerns; Do they have an opinion already? Do they have a stake in the topic?)
- What do they know about my topic? (What does this audience not know about the topic? What do they need to know?)
- What details might affect the way this audience thinks about my topic? (How will facts, statistics, personal stories, examples, definitions, or other types of evidence affect this audience? What kind of effect are you going for?)

Purpose

Often, you'll know your purpose at the exact moment you know your audience because they're generally a package deal:

- I need to write a letter to my landlord explaining why my rent is late so she won't be upset. (Audience = landlord; Purpose = explaining/keeping her happy)
- I want to write a proposal for my work team to persuade them to change our schedule. (Audience = work team; Purpose = persuading/ to get the schedule changed)
- I have to write a research paper for my environmental science instructor comparing solar to wind power. (Audience = instructor; Purpose = analyzing/ showing that you understand these two power sources)

How Do I Know What My Purpose Is?

Sometimes your instructor will give you a purpose like in the third example above, but other times, especially out in the world, your purpose will depend on what effect you want your writing to have on your audience. What is the goal of your writing? What do you hope for your audience to think, feel, or do after reading it? Here are a few possibilities:

- Persuade/inspire them to act or think about an issue from your point of view.
- Challenge them/make them question their thinking or behavior
- Argue for or against something they believe or do/change their minds or behavior.

- Inform/teach them about a topic they don't know much about.
- Connect with them emotionally/help them feel understood.

Appealing to Your Audience

Once you know who your intended audience is and what your purpose is for writing, you can make specific decisions about how to shape your message. No matter what, you want your audience to stick around long enough to read your whole piece. How do you manage this magic trick? Easy. You appeal to them. You get to know what sparks their interest, what makes them curious, and what makes them feel understood. The one and only Aristotle provided us with three ways to appeal to an audience, and they're called *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. You'll learn more about each appeal in the discussion below, but the relationship between these three appeals is also often called *the rhetorical triangle*, and in diagram form, it looks like this:

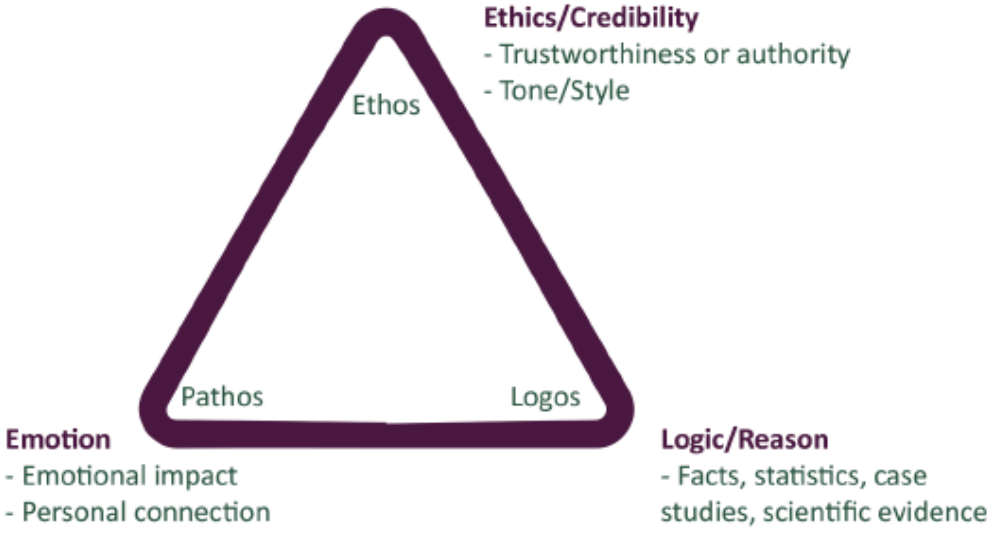


Figure 2.10.1. Rhetorical Triangle

Basic Questions for Rhetorical Analysis

What Is the Rhetorical Situation?

- What occasion gives rise to the need or opportunity for persuasion?
- What is the historical occasion that would give rise to the composition of this text?

Who Is the Author/Speaker?

- How does he or she establish ethos (personal credibility)?
- Does he/she come across as knowledgeable? fair?

- Does the speaker's reputation convey a certain authority?

What Is His/Her Intention in Speaking?

- To attack or defend?
- To exhort or dissuade from certain action?
- To praise or blame?
- To teach, to delight, or to persuade?

Who Makes Up the Audience?

- Who is the intended audience?
- What values does the audience hold that the author or speaker appeals to?
- Who have been or might be secondary audiences?
- If this is a work of fiction, what is the nature of the audience within the fiction?

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2.11: Rhetorical Analysis in the Real World

Rhetorical Analysis in the Real World

As a reader and a listener, it is fundamental that you be able to recognize how writers and speakers depend upon **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos** in their efforts to communicate. As a communicator yourself, you will benefit from being able to see how others rely upon ethos, logos, and pathos so that you can apply what you learn from your observations to your own speaking and writing.

Evaluating an Appeal to Ethos

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

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

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

- Has the writer or speaker cited her sources or in some way made it possible for the audience to access further information on the issue?
- Does she demonstrate familiarity with different opinions and perspectives?
- Does she provide complete and accurate information about the issue?
- Does she use the evidence fairly? Does she avoid selective use of evidence or other types of manipulation of data?
- Does she speak respectfully about people who may have opinions and perspectives different from her own?
- Does she use unbiased language?
- Does she avoid excessive reliance on emotional appeals?
- Does she accurately convey the positions of people with whom she disagrees?
- Does she acknowledge that an issue may be complex or multifaceted?
- Does her education or experience give her credibility as someone who should be listened to on this issue?

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

argument but also about the logic of an argument.

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Ethos

In a perfect world, everyone would tell the truth and we could depend upon the credibility of speakers and authors. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. You would expect that news reporters would be objective and tell new stories based upon the facts. Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Brian Williams all lost their jobs for plagiarizing or fabricating part of their news stories. Janet Cooke's Pulitzer Prize was revoked after it was discovered that she made up "Jimmy," an eight-year-old heroin addict (Prince, 2010). Brian Williams was fired as anchor of the NBC Nightly News for exaggerating his role in the Iraq War.

Others have become infamous for claiming academic degrees that they didn't earn, as in the case of Marilee Jones. At the time of discovery, she was Dean of Admissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After 28 years of employment, it was determined that she never graduated from college (Lewin, 2007). However, because she was a widely respected national figure who heavily campaigned to reduce student anxiety, private schools and organizations were willing to look past her resume fraud to utilize her 30 years of elite admissions expertise. As noted in a profile by The Boston Globe, she now uses her public downfall as a cautionary tale to teach high school students about the dangers of chasing perfection.

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

Fallacies That Misuse Appeals to Ethos

- **Ad hominem:** attacking the person making an argument rather than the argument itself.

  Example: "Of course that doctor advocates vaccination—he probably owns stock in a pharmaceutical company."

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

  Example: "Dr. X is an engineer, and he doesn't believe in global warming."

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

  Example: "My opponent is a card-carrying member of the ACLU."

- **Poisoning the well:** undermining an opponent's credibility before he or she gets a chance to speak.

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

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

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

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

  Example: "These rabble-rousers are nothing but feminazis."

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

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

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

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

Evaluating an Appeal to Logos

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

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

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Logos

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

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

Fallacies That Misuse Appeals to Logos

- **Hasty generalization:** jumping to conclusions based upon an unrepresentative sample or insufficient evidence.

  Example: "10 of the last 14 National Spelling Bee Champions have been Indian American. Indian Americans must all be great spellers!"

- **Appeal to ignorance**—true believer's form: arguing along the lines that if an opponent can't prove something isn't the case, then it is reasonable to believe that it is the case; transfers the burden of proof away from the person making the claim (the proponent).

  Example: "You can't prove that extraterrestrials haven't visited earth, so it is reasonable to believe that they have visited earth."

- **Appeal to ignorance**—skeptic's form: confusing absence of evidence with evidence of absence; assumes that if you cannot now prove something exists, then it is shown that it doesn't exist.

  Example: "There's no proof that starting classes later in the day will improve the performance of our high school students; therefore, this change in schedule will not work."

- **Begging the question:** circular argument because the premise is the same as the claim that you are trying to prove.

  Example: "This legislation is sinful because it is the wrong thing to do."

- **False dilemma:** misuse of the either/or argument; presenting only two options when other choices exist.

  Example: "Either we pass this ordinance or there will be rioting in the streets."

- **Post hoc ergo propter hoc:** Latin phrase meaning "after this, therefore because of this"; confuses correlation with causation by concluding that an event preceding a second event must be the cause of that second event.

  Example: "My child was diagnosed with autism after receiving vaccinations. That is proof that vaccines are to blame."

- **Non-sequitur:** Latin for "does not follow"; the conclusion cannot be inferred from the premises because there is a break in the logical connection between a claim and the premises that are meant to support it, either because a premise is untrue (or missing) or because the relationship between premises does not support the deduction stated in the claim.

  Example (untrue premise):"If she is a Radford student, she is a member of a sorority. She is a Radford student. Therefore she is a member of a sorority."

- **Smoke screen:** avoiding the real issue or a tough question by introducing an unrelated topic as a distraction; sometimes called a red herring.

  Example: "My opponent says I am weak on crime, but I have been one of the most reliable participants in city council meetings."

- **Straw man:** pretending to criticize an opponent's position but actually misrepresenting his or her view as simpler and/or more extreme than it is and therefore easier to refute than the original or actual position; unfairly undermines credibility of claim if not source of claim.

  Example: "Senator Smith says we should cut back the Defense budget. His position is that we should let down our defenses and just trust our enemies not to attack us!"

Fallacies that misuse appeals to logos or attempt to manipulate the logic of an argument are discussed below.

Evaluating an Appeal to Pathos

People may be uninterested in an issue unless they can find a personal connection to it, so a communicator may try to connect to her audience by evoking emotions or by suggesting that author and audience share attitudes, beliefs, and values—in other words, by making an appeal to **pathos**. Even in formal writing, such as academic books or journals, an author often will try to present an issue in such a way as to connect to the feelings or attitudes of his audience.

When you evaluate pathos, you are asking whether a speech or essay arouses the audience's interest and sympathy. You are looking for the elements of the essay or speech that might cause the audience to feel (or not feel) an emotional connection to the content.

An author may use an audience's attitudes, beliefs, or values as a kind of foundation for his argument—a layer that the writer knows is already in place at the outset of the argument. So one of the questions you can ask yourself as you evaluate an author's use of pathos is whether there are points at which the writer or speaker makes statements assuming that the audience shares his feelings or attitudes. For example, in an argument about the First Amendment, does the author write as if he takes it for granted that his audience is religious?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Pathos

Up to a certain point, an **appeal to pathos** can be a legitimate part of an argument. For example, a writer or speaker may begin with an anecdote showing the effect of a law on an individual. This anecdote will be a means of gaining an audience's attention for an argument in which she uses evidence and reason to present her full case as to why the law should/should not be repealed or amended. In such a context, engaging the emotions, values, or beliefs of the audience is a legitimate tool whose effective use should lead you to give the author high marks.

See below for the most common fallacies that misuse appeals to pathos.

Fallacies That Misuse Appeals to Pathos

- **Appeal to fear:** using scare tactics; emphasizing threats or exaggerating possible dangers.

  Example: "Without this additional insurance, you could find yourself broke and homeless."

- **Appeal to guilt and appeal to pity:** trying to evoke an emotional reaction that will cause the audience to behave sympathetically even if it means disregarding the issue at hand.

  Example: "I know I missed assignments, but if you fail me, I will lose my financial aid and have to drop out."

- **Appeal to popularity (bandwagon):** urging the audience to follow a course of action because "everyone does it."

Example: "Nine out of ten shoppers have switched to Blindingly-Bright-Smile Toothpaste."

- **Slippery Slope:** making an unsupported or inadequately supported claim that "One thing inevitably leads to another." This may be considered a fallacy of logos as well as pathos but is placed in this section because it often is used to evoke the emotion of fear.

  Example: "We can't legalize marijuana; if we do, then the next thing you know people will be strung out on heroin."

- **Appeal to the people:** also called stirring symbols fallacy; the communicator distracts the readers or listeners with symbols that are very meaningful to them, with strong associations or connotations.

  Example: This fallacy is referred to in the sentence "That politician always wraps himself in the flag."

- **Appeal to tradition:** people have done it a certain way for a long time; assumes that what has been customary in the past is correct and proper.

  Example: "A boy always serves as student-body president; a girl always serves as secretary."

- **Loaded-Language and other emotionally charged uses of language:** using slanted or biased language, including God terms, devil terms, euphemisms, and dysphemisms.

  Example: In the sentence "Cutting access to food stamps would encourage personal responsibility," the god term is "personal responsibility." It might seem as if it would be hard to argue against "personal responsibility" or related god terms such as "independence" and "self-reliance." However, it would require a definition of "personal responsibility," combined with evidence from studies of people's behavior in the face of food stamps or other benefit reductions, to argue that cutting access to food stamps would lead to the intended results.

An appropriate appeal to **pathos** is different than trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a **manipulative** use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out". An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) commercials featuring the song "*In the Arms on an Angel*" and footage of abused animals. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing (Brekke).

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based argument. In addition to making use of pathos, the author must establish her credibility (**ethos**) and must supply reasons and evidence (**logos**) in support of her position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone should be given low marks.

CONCLUSION

Fallacies can crop up whenever definitions, inferences, and facts are at issue. Once we become familiar with fallacies we may start to see them everywhere. That can be good and bad. Since persuasion is ever-present, it is good to be on guard against various hidden persuaders. But whether a persuasive strategy is considered fallacious may be dependent on context. Editorials and advertisements—both political and commercial—frequently use such strategies as transfer and appeals to popularity. We need to be critically aware of the techniques of persuasion being used on us, but since we *expect* advertisements, political speeches, and editorials on public policy or ethical issues to try to sway us emotionally, perhaps only extreme examples deserve to be judged harshly for being fallacious.

In addition, something that looks as if it is a fallacy may turn out not to be on closer examination. For example, not everything that smacks of slippery slope is fallacious. There are indeed some *genuine* slippery slopes, where an initial decision or action may have both great and inevitable repercussions. So whether that fallacy has been committed depends upon what the author has done (or failed to do) to support his claim. Similarly, while personal attacks (*ad hominem*) in most cases are unfair and considered fallacious, there are special situations in which a person's character may be directly relevant to his or her qualifications. For example, when somebody is running for political office or for a judgeship, casting doubt on his or her character may be appropriate—*if* one has facts to back it up—since it relates to job expectations. But wholesale character assassination remains a rhetorical ploy of the propagandist or demagogue.

ACTIVITIES

Instructions: Choose two of the eight audiences described and pictured below, and write two letters. Each letter should address one of your two chosen audiences.

Ready to practice writing for specific audiences? Below you'll find eight pictures of people with some information about each person included.

- Choose two people to write letters to. The purpose of your letter writing is to ask these people to give you $100.
- **Please follow these two rules:**
  - You cannot say you will pay the money back, because you won't. You're not asking for a loan.
  - Also, you cannot lie or exaggerate about why you need the $100. Think of a real reason. We could all use $100, after all! With these parameters in mind, how will you manage to persuade these people to give you the money?



Image 1

Jeremiah is the director of a non-profit organization that helps homeless youth get an education. He is thirty-three and is married with three small children. In his free time, Jeremiah enjoys practicing karate, hiking with his wife and kids, and reading historical fiction.



Image 2

Deborah is a forty-year-old professional violinist who plays full time in the Portland Symphony Orchestra. She considers the orchestra to be her family. She isn't married and doesn't have children. When she's not practicing her instrument, Deborah enjoys painting with acrylics and cross-country skiing.



Image 3

Ronaldo is a twenty-seven-year-old middle school biology teacher who also coaches track and field. He and his wife have just adopted two children from Haiti, so most of Ronaldo's free time is spent reading parenting books and being the best father he can be.



Image 4

Grace is a twenty-year-old Marine in a family of Marines. She met her partner Jane during basic training, and they are planning to get married after they've both finished college. Grace's hobbies include kickboxing, wakeboarding, and training her dog, Boss.



Image 5

Henry is a retired CEO for a fishing rod manufacturing company. At the age of eighty-four, he still enjoys fly fishing all over the Pacific Northwest. He is recently widowed and has seven grandchildren who go fishing with him regularly.



Image 6

Sophia is a dancer, dance teacher, and new mother. She just turned thirty and loves to travel with her husband. Her goal is to see every continent (except for Antarctica) before the age of forty. So far, she's been to North and South America, Africa, and Asia.



Image 7

Larry is a foreman for a construction company that builds skyscrapers and other types of office buildings. He's fifty-seven and has saved enough to be able to retire by the age of sixty, when he hopes to move to the mountains and build a log cabin with his partner David.



Image 8

Michelle is a pediatric doctor who specializes in childhood leukemia. She is thirty-five and newly married to an ER doctor. They support each other's research projects and other professional goals. They don't want children, feeling that their work is their primary life focus.

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2.12: Interpretation, Analysis, and Close Reading

Interpretation, Analysis, and Close Reading

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Interpretation

When *Mad Max: Fury Road* came out in 2015, it was lauded as a powerful feminist film. No longer was this franchise about men enacting postapocalyptic violence; now, there was an important place in that universe for women. A similar phenomenon surrounded *Wonder Woman* in 2017: after dozens of male-fronted superhero movies, one would finally focus on a female hero exclusively.

Some people, though, were resistant to this reading of feminism in film. I found myself in regular debates after each of these releases about what it meant to promote gender equality in film: Does substituting a violent woman for a violent man constitute feminism? Is the leading woman in a film a feminist just by virtue of being in a female-fronted film? Or do her political beliefs take priority? Does the presence of women on the screen preclude the fact that those women are still highly sexualized?

These questions, debates, and discussions gesture toward the interpretive process. Indeed, most arguments (verbal or written) rely on the fact that we each process texts and information from different positions with different purposes, lenses, and preoccupations. Why is it that some people leave the theater after *Mad Max* or *Wonder Woman* feeling empowered and others leave deeply troubled?

Interpretation is a complex process that is unique to every reader. It is a process of meaning making that relies on your particular position as a reader. Your interpretive position is informed by several factors:

1. **Your purpose**

   In the same way you have a rhetorical purpose in writing, you often have a purpose in reading, either consciously or subconsciously. What are you trying to accomplish in this encounter with a text?

2. **Your background**

   Your lived experiences have trained you to perceive texts with certain assumptions. This background is a blend of cultural, educational, geographical, familial, ideological, and personal influences, among many others.

3. **Your posture**

   The stance you assume relative to a text will contribute to what meaning you make as you read, think about, and write about that text. This relative position might be emotional (what mood you're in while reading) or contextual (what situation you're reading in) and may also be impacted by your background and purpose.

4. **Your lens**

   Related to your purpose, lens refers to the way you focus your attention on particular ideas, images, and language to construct meaning. To what elements are you directing your attention?

Related to your purpose, lens refers to the way you focus your attention on particular ideas, images, and language to construct meaning. To what elements are you directing your attention?

It would be simpler, perhaps, to acknowledge that we will never all agree on an interpretation of a text because of these differences. But the stakes are higher here than simply, "Is *Mad Max: Fury Road* feminist?" Interpretation gets down to the very way we encounter the world; it is about all our biases and flaws; it is about truth; it is about building new knowledge and dismantling institutional oppression. In other words, analytical interpretation is not so esoteric as slotting texts into labels like "feminist" or "not feminist." It is a practice of thinking critically, examining our sense of community and communication, and pursuing social justice.

ANALYSIS

Analysis, then, is a practice of radical noticing (like description): it invites you to attend to the details that add up to a complex reality. But analysis also involves the conscientious focus of your attention, or a lens. Just like reading glasses can bring these words into focus, an analytical lens brings specific ideas, words, or patterns into sharper focus, making them easier to process and interpret.

Sometimes, especially in English classrooms, analysis of a text is referred to as close reading. Importantly, close reading as a technique is not a magical key to meaning, not a supersecret decoder ring for a deeply encrypted code. Rather, it is a means to unpack a text and construct a unique, focused interpretation. Close reading is an iterative process: by repeatedly encountering, unpacking, and discussing a text, you can develop an analytical insight through guided and focused interpretation of its meaning.

In an analytical situation, your readerly purpose might determine your focus: for example, if you're trying

to convince a friend that Wonder Woman is a feminist film, you would keep your eyes peeled for images, words, and other markers that align with such an interpretation, like situations featuring independent powerful women or an equitable ratio of dialogue spoken by female characters versus male characters. It is important to note, though, that good analysis embraces curiosity and allows you to notice elements that might contradict, complicate, or nuance your original purpose: in addition to finding evidence in support of your interpretation, you should also be aware of characteristics that push back against your expectations.

TECHNIQUES

Radical Noticing: Seeing What's on the Page

When we were early readers, we were trained to encounter texts in a specific way: find the main idea, focus on large-scale comprehension, and ignore errors, digressions, or irrelevant information. As Jane Gallop discusses in her essay "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters," this is a useful but problematic skill. Because we engage a text from a specific interpretive position (and because we're not always aware of that position), we often project what we anticipate rather than actually reading. Instead of reading what is on the page, we read what we think should be (7–17).

Projection is efficient—one email from Mom is probably like all the others, and one episode of *The Simpsons* will probably follow the same trajectory as every episode from the last twenty-odd years. But projection is also problematic and inhibits analysis. As Gallop puts it,

> *When the reader concentrates on the familiar, she is reassured that what she already knows is sufficient in relation to this new book. Focusing on the surprising, on the other hand, would mean giving up the comfort of the familiar, of the already known for the sake of learning, of encountering something new, something she didn't already know.*
>
> *In fact, this all has to do with learning. Learning is very difficult; it takes a lot of effort. It is of course much easier if once we learn something we can apply what we have learned again and again. It is much more difficult if every time we confront something new, we have to learn something new.*
>
> *Reading what one expects to find means finding what one already knows. Learning, on the other hand, means coming to know something one did not know before. Projecting is the opposite of learning. As long as we project onto a text, we cannot learn from it, we can only find what we already know. Close reading is thus a technique to make us learn, to make us see what we don't already know, rather than transforming the new into the old. (7–17)*

Analysis as "learning," as Gallop explains, is a tool to help interrupt projection: by focusing on and trying to understand parts, we can redirect our attention to what the author is saying rather than what we think they should have said. In turn, we can develop a more complex, ethical, and informed understanding of the whole.

Perhaps the most important part of analysis is this attention to detail. If we assume that every word the author published is intentional (in order to avoid speculation about authorial intent), then we can question the meaning and impact of each word, each combination of words, and each formal feature of the text. In turn,

you should pay special attention to words or forms that surprise you or confuse you: the eye-catching and the ambiguous.

Symbols, Patterns, and References

There is no definitive "how-to" guide on text wrestling, but I often ask my students to direct their attention to three particular elements of a text during their interpretive processes. When you draw connections through the following categories, you are actively building meaning from the words on the page.

Symbol

A symbol, as you may already know, is an artifact (usually something concrete) that stands in for (represents) something else (often something abstract).

Here are a few examples in different media:

- In Barack Obama's 2008 campaign logo, the *O*, of course, stands in for the candidate's last name; the red lines seem to suggest a road (implying progress) or maybe a waving American flag; the blue curve represents a clear, blue sky (implying safety or well-being); the colors themselves are perhaps symbolic of bipartisan cooperation or, at the very least, the American color palette of red, white, and blue.
- In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat," the titular black cat symbolizes the narrator's descent into madness, alcoholism, and violence and later his guilt for that descent.
- The teaspoon used to hypnotize people in the film *Get Out* (2017) symbolizes wealth, power, and privilege (a "silver spoon"), suggesting that those structures are tools for control and domination.

Pattern

Patterns are created by a number of rhetorical moves, often in form. Repetition of phrases or images, the visual appearance of text on a page, and character archetypes might contribute to patterns. While patterns themselves are interesting and important, you might also notice that breaking a pattern is a significant and deliberate move.

- The episode of the TV series *Master of None* titled "Parents" (season 1, episode 2) tells the respective stories of two immigrant families. By tracing the previous generation of each immigrant family through a series of flashbacks, the episode establishes a pattern in

chronology: although the families have unique stories, the pattern highlights the similarities between these two families' experiences. In turn, this pattern demonstrates the parallel but distinct challenges and opportunities faced by the immigrants and first-generation American citizens the episode profiles.

- In Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est," each line of the first stanza contains ten syllables. However, the following stanzas contain occasional deviations—more or fewer syllables—creating a sense of disorder and also drawing emphasis to the pattern-breaking lines.

Reference

A reference is a connection a text makes to another text. By making a reference (whether obvious or hidden), the referencing text adopts some characteristics of the referenced text. References might include allusion, allegory, quotation, or parody.

- C. S. Lewis's classic young adult series, The Chronicles of Narnia, is a Christian allegory. The imagery used to describe the main hero, Aslan the lion, as well as a number of the other stories and details, parallel the New Testament. In turn, Aslan is imbued with the savior connotation of Jesus Christ.
- The TV show *Bob's Burgers* makes frequent references to pop culture. For instance, the fictional boy band featured in the show, Boyz 4 Now, closely resembles One Direction, *NSYNC, and Backstreet Boys—and their name is clearly a reference to Boyz II Men.
- "Woman Hollering Creek," a short story by Sandra Cisneros, deals with the dangers of interpersonal violence. The protagonist refers frequently to telenovelas, soap operas that set unrealistic and problematic assumptions for healthy relationships. These references suggest to us that interpersonal violence is pervasive in media and social norms.

Sociocultural Lenses

In addition to looking for symbols, patterns, and references, you might also focus your analytical reading by using a sociocultural critical lens. Because your attention is necessarily selective, a limited resource, these lenses give you a suggestion for where you might direct that attention. While it is beyond the scope of this book to give in-depth history and reading practices for different schools of literary criticism or cultural studies, the following are common lenses applied during textual analysis.

As you engage with a text, you should look for touchstones, tropes, or symbols that relate to one or more of the following critical perspectives:

1. Gender and sexuality

How does the text portray the creation and performance of gender? How many people of different genders are included in the story? Do the characters in the text express gender according to traditional standards? How do characters resist the confines of gender? How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed to women, men, and nonbinary or genderqueer characters?

What sorts of relationships—familial, friendly, romantic, sexual, and so on—are portrayed in the text? How do these relationships compare with the relationships of the dominant culture? How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed to LGBTQIA2S+ people?

2. Disability

How does the text represent people with disabilities? Does the text reveal damaging stereotypes or misconceptions about people with disabilities or their life experiences? Does the text illuminate the social/environmental construction of disabilities? How does the text construct or assume the normative body?

3. Race, ethnicity, and nationality

How does the text represent people of color, of minority status, and/or of different nationalities? What does it suggest about institutionalized racism and discrimination? How does the text examine or portray cultural and individual identities? How do the characters resist racism, xenophobia, and oppression? How do they reproduce, practice, or contribute to racism, xenophobia, or oppression?

4. Social class and economy

How does the text represent differences in wealth, access, and resources? Do people cross the divisions between socioeconomic statuses? Are characters of greater status afforded more power, agency, or freedom in the plot events or in the text more generally? How do exploited people resist or reproduce exploitation?

5. Ecologies and the environment

Does the setting of the text represent a “natural” world? How does the text represent nature, ecosystems, nonhuman animals, and other living organisms? Does the text, its narrative, or its characters advocate for environmental protection? Does the text speak to the human impact on global ecological health?

6. (Post)colonialism

What is the relationship between the characters and the setting, historically and culturally? Does the text take place in a currently or formerly colonized nation? Which of the characters are from that place? How have the effects of colonialism and imperialism influenced the place and its indigenous people? How have subjected, enslaved, or exploited people preserved culture or resisted colonialism? How does the text represent patterns of migration—forced or voluntary?

Some texts will lend themselves to a certain lens (or combination of lenses) based on content or the rhetorical situation of the author or reader. Bring to mind a recent movie you watched, a book you read, or other text you've encountered; by asking the questions above, determine whether that text seems to be asking for a certain sociocultural perspective.

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter opened with a discussion of *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Choose another movie and identify two or more popular interpretations. What does the movie have to say about gender, power, society, or something else? Can it be read multiple ways?
2. If a movie or other artifact can be interpreted in multiple ways, how does that impact its power in the culture? Does it make it more interesting or less persuasive?
3. Are symbols always crafted and created by people? Are there "naturally occurring" symbols?

Activities

1. ***Pathos practice.*** Find a photograph (digital or printed) that has some sort of emotional gravity for you: it could be a picture of a loved one, a treasured memory, a favorite place, anything that makes you feel something. On a clean sheet of paper, freewrite about the photo in response to the following prompts for three minutes each:

    - Describe the photograph as a whole. What's happening? Who is in it? Use vivid descriptions to capture the photo in writing as best you can.
    - Zoom in on one element of the photo—one color, shape, object, person, and so on. How does this part relate to the greater whole?
    - Zoom out and describe what's not shown in the photo. What's happening just out of frame? What's happening just before, just after? What are the emotions you associate with this moment?
    - Now, trade photos with a friend or classmate who's also working on this activity. Repeat the same freewrite prompts and compare your responses. What do the differences indicate about the interpretive process? About context? About the position of the reader and the limitations on the author (photographer)?

2. ***Advertising visual rhetoric.*** Advertisements are one of the most common forms of visual rhetoric we encounter on a daily basis; indeed, advertisements are more and more prominent with the growth of technology and increasingly tailored to the target audience. The ads we encounter often blend language, images, sound, and video to achieve their intended purpose—to convince you to buy something. To practice analysis, you can close read an advertisement or advertising campaign.

- Choose a brand, product, or corporation that you find interesting. One that I've found especially engaging is Levi's 2009 "Go Forth" advertising campaign.
- Try to identify the subject, occasion, audience, and purpose of the advertisement. Often, there is an obvious or declared answer for each of these (the subject of the Levi's campaign is "Levi's jeans," and the purpose is "to make you buy Levi's jeans"), but there are also more subtle answers (the subject is also "American millennial empowerment," and the purpose is also "create a youthful, labor-oriented brand").
- Identify what parts of the advertisement contribute to the whole: what colors, shapes, words, images, associations, and so on does the ad play on in order to achieve its purpose? Do you notice symbols, patterns, or references?
- Interpret the observations you collected. How do the parts contribute to the whole? What might you overlook if you weren't paying close enough attention?

3. ***Radical noticing promenade.*** This exercise encourages you to focus on details as a way to better understand the big picture. You will need a notebook and a camera.

- Take about twenty minutes to wander around an area that you often spend time in: your house, your neighborhood, the halls of your school, and so on. Walk slowly and aimlessly; this exercise works best when you don't have a destination in mind.
- As you wander, look around you and focus on small details—a piece of garbage on the sidewalk, the color of that guy's shoes, the sound of a leaf blower in the distance. Record (using your camera, notebook, or both) these small details. When you return to your desk, choose three of these details to meditate on. Using descriptive writing, spend a few minutes exploring these details in writing. Then consider what they might reflect about the place where you promenaded—the piece of garbage might indicate that the neighborhood is well maintained but not pristine; the leaf blower might reflect a suburban American commitment to both manicured lawns and convenience.

Additional Resources

For a fun and rewarding deep dive into analyzing literature and other texts, see Thomas Foster's *How to Read Literature like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading between the Lines*.

Works Cited

Gallop, Jane. "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters." *Journal of Curriculum and Theorizing*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2000, pp. 7–17.

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CHAPTER 3: WRITING PROCESS AND REVISION

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3.1: Getting Started

Getting Started

Once you have a good understanding of the assignment, the next step is to work through some strategies to generate ideas to write about. Here are a few different strategies that you can use to generate ideas.

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, students, and employees find that beginning to write can be intimidating. When faced with a blank page, however, experienced writers remind themselves that writing, like other everyday activities, is a process. Every process, from writing to cooking, bike riding, and learning to use a new cell phone, will get significantly easier with practice. Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and the proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create a well-written composition. In other words, writing is a process that requires following steps and using strategies to accomplish your goals. Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed well and arranged in the proper order. This chapter will give you the chance to work on all these important aspects of writing.

Prewriting

Loosely defined, prewriting includes all the writing strategies employed *before* writing your first draft. Although many more prewriting strategies exist, the following section covers: using experience and observations, reading, freewriting, asking questions, listing, and clustering/idea mapping. Using the strategies in the following section can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

Choosing a Topic

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

Brainstorming refers to writing techniques used to

- generate topic ideas;
- transfer your abstract thoughts on a topic into more concrete ideas on paper (or digitally on a computer screen); and
- organize the ideas you have generated to discover a focus and develop a working thesis.

Although brainstorming 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**, **Asking Questions**, **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 use brainstorming strategies to narrow the focus of the topic.

1. **Experience and Observations**

   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.

2. **Reading**

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

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

   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.

3. 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.

Freewriting Example:

> *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?*

4. Asking Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get more information. ***Who*** will be my partner for the project? ***When*** is the next meeting? ***Why*** is my car making that odd noise? When faced with a writing assignment, you might ask yourself, "How do I begin?"

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

When Mariah reread her freewriting notes, she found she had rambled and her thoughts were disjointed. She realized that the topic that interested her most was the one she started with, the media. She then decided

to explore that topic by asking herself questions about it. Her purpose was to refine media into a topic she felt comfortable writing about. To see how asking questions can help you choose a topic, take a look at the following chart that Mariah completed to record her questions and answers. She asked herself the questions that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are often called the **5WH** questions, after their initial letters.

Example of "Asking Questions"

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

5. Narrowing the Focus

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 techniques of brainstorming by **freewriting** and **asking questions** helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- 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.

6. Listing

Listing is a term often applied to describe any prewriting technique writers use to generate ideas on a topic, including freewriting and asking questions. 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
- Broadcasting

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Internet
- Cell Phones

- Radio
- Television
- Smart Phones
- Text Messages

- DVD
- Gaming/Video Games
- Tiny Cameras
- GPS

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

7. **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:

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.



Figure 3.1.1. Idea Map

Topic Checklist: Developing a Good Topic

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

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.

Activities

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

ATTRIBUTION

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3.2: Outlining

Outlining

Once your topic has been chosen, your ideas have been generated through brainstorming techniques, and you've developed a working thesis, the next step in the prewriting stage is to create an outline. Sometimes called a "blueprint" or "plan" for your paper, an outline helps writers organize their thoughts and categorize the main points they wish to make in an order that makes sense.

Creating an outline is an important step in the writing process!

The purpose of an outline is to help you organize your paper by checking to see if and how your ideas connect to each other, or whether you need to flesh out a point or two.

No matter the length of the paper, from a three-page weekly assignment to a 50-page senior thesis, outlines can help you see the overall picture.

Having an outline also helps prevent writers from "getting stuck" when writing the first draft of an essay.

A well-developed outline will show the essential elements of an essay:

- thesis of essay
- main idea of each body paragraph
- evidence/support offered in each paragraph to substantiate the main points

A well-developed outline breaks down the parts of your thesis in a clear, hierarchical manner. Writing an outline ***before*** beginning an essay helps the writer organize ideas generated through brainstorming and/or research. In short, a well-developed outline makes your paper easier to write.

The formatting of any outline is not arbitrary; the system of formatting and number/letter designations creates a visual hierarchy of the ideas, or points, being made in the essay.

Major points, in other words, should not be buried in subtopic levels.

Types of Outlines

Alphanumeric Outlines

This is the most common type of outline used and is usually instantly recognizable to most people. The

formatting follows these characters, in this order:

I. Roman Numerals
  A. Capital Letters
    1. Arabic Numerals
      a. Lowercase Letters

Alphanumeric Example

I. **Main point:** Lowering the speed limit to 55 mph on Interstate highways is a cost-effective way to reduce pollution and greenhouse gases.
  A. **Supporting detail:** Gas mileage significantly decreases at speeds over 55 mph.
    1. **Supporting detail for sub-point:** Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase MPG by as much as 15 percent.
      a. **Additional explanation:** Each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (assuming gas costs $3.00 per gallon).

If the outline needs to subdivide beyond these divisions, use Arabic numerals inside parentheses and then lowercase letters inside parentheses.

Decimal Outlines

The decimal outline follows the same levels of indentation when formatting to indicate the hierarchy of ideas/points as the alphanumeric outline. The added benefit of decimal notation, however, is that it clearly shows, through the decimal breakdown, how each progressive level relates to the larger whole.

Decimal Example

1. (Main Point) Lowering the speed limit on all Interstate highways to 55 mph would create a significant, cost-free reduction in air pollution.

1.1 (Supporting Detail) Gas consumption significantly increases at speeds over 55 mph.

1.2 (Supporting Detail) Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase MPG by as much as 15 percent, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

1.2.1 (Additional Explanation) According to the U.S. Department of Energy, “As a rule of thumb, each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (at $3.00 per gallon).”

Micro and Macro Outlines

The indentation/formatting of a micro (full sentence) or macro (topic) outline is essentially the same as alphanumeric/decimal outlines. The difference between micro and macro outlines lies in the specificity and depth of the content.

Micro outlines focus on the "micro," the drilled-down specific details of the essay's content. They are particularly useful when the topic you are discussing is complex in nature. When creating a micro outline, it can also be useful to insert the quotations you plan to include in the essay (with citations) and subsequent analyses of quotes. Taking this extra step helps ensure that you have enough support for your ideas, as well as reminding writers to actually analyze and discuss quotations, rather than simply inserting quotes and moving on. While time-consuming to create, micro outlines can be seen as basically creating the first rough draft of an essay.

Macro outlines, in contrast, focus on the "big picture" of an essay's main points and support by using short phrases or keywords to indicate the focus and content at each level of the essay's development. A macro outline is useful when writing about a variety of ideas and issues where the ordering of points is more flexible. Macro outlines are also especially helpful when writing timed essays, or essay exam questions--or any rhetorical situation where writers need to quickly get their ideas down in an organized essay format.

Micro/Full-Sentence Outline Example

I. (Main Point) Lowering the speed limit on all Interstate highways to 55 mph would create a significant, cost-free reduction in air pollution.
   A. (Supporting Detail) Gas consumption significantly increases at speeds over 55 mph.
      1. (Supporting Detail for Sub-point) Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase your car's MPG by as much as 15 percent, thereby reducing carbon emissions.
         a. (Additional Explanation) According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), "As a rule of thumb, each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (assuming gas costs $3.00 per gallon)."

Steps to Creating an Outline

Thesis: Making the perfect egg omelet requires proper preparation and skillful cooking technique.

I. Making the perfect egg omelet requires proper preparation.
   A. The cook must have adequate utensils.
      1. A heavy, Teflon-coated frying pan gives even heat and prevents burning.
      2. A plastic spatula prevents the cook from scratching the

frying pan.

B. The cook must select fresh ingredients.
    1. Fresh eggs make a fluffier omelet than eggs that have aged.
    2. Sweet milk blends into the egg batter more evenly than sour milk.
    3. Fresh vegetable oil avoids giving the omelet a greasy flavor and texture.
    4. Freshly cracked pepper and sea salt add extra zest to the egg batter.

II. Making the perfect egg omelet requires skillful cooking techniques.
    A. The cook must prepare the egg batter quickly.
        1. The eggs must be beaten with a whisk until they are fluffy.
        2. The milk and seasonings must be whisked into the egg batter before the eggs go flat.
    B. The cook must fry the egg batter with care.
        1. The egg batter must be poured into the frying pan as soon as the oil is hot.
        2. The omelet must be turned only once after the batter sets on top.

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3.3: Drafting

Drafting

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

Goals and Strategies for Drafting

Your objective at this stage of the writing process is to draft an essay with at least three body paragraphs, which means that the essay will contain a minimum of five paragraphs, including an introduction and a conclusion. More information about how to structure and develop effective paragraphs and essays is in Chapter 6. A draft is a complete version of a piece of writing, but it is not the final version. The step in the writing process after drafting, as you may remember, is revising. During revising, you will have the opportunity to make changes to your first draft before you put the finishing touches on it during the editing and proofreading stage. A first draft gives you a working version that you can later improve.

If you are more comfortable starting on paper than on the computer, you can start on paper and then type it before you revise. You can also use a voice recorder to get yourself started, dictating a paragraph or two to get you thinking. In this lesson, Mariah does all her work on the computer, but you may use pen and paper or the computer to write a rough draft.

Making the Writing Process Work for You

The following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in the writing process:

- Begin writing with the part you know the most about: You can start with the third paragraph in your outline if ideas come easily to mind. You can start with the second paragraph or the first paragraph, too. Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support.

Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.

- **Write one paragraph at a time and then stop:** As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.
- **Take short breaks to refresh your mind:** This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multi-page report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. But do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.
- **Be reasonable with your goals:** If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you tell yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.
- **Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write:** These aspects of writing are just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

Of all of these considerations, keeping your purpose and your audience at the front of your mind is the most important key to writing success. If your purpose is to persuade, for example, you will present your facts and details in the most logical and convincing way you can. Your purpose will guide your mind as you compose your sentences. Your audience will guide word choice. Are you writing for experts, for a general audience, for other college students, or for people who know very little about your topic? Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their background and experience, need to be told in order to understand your ideas. How can you best express your ideas so they are totally clear and your communication is effective?

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

Discovering the Basic Elements of a First Draft

If you have been using the information in the previous chapters step by step to help you develop an assignment, you already have both a formal topic outline and a formal sentence outline to direct your writing. Knowing what a first draft looks like will help you make the creative leap from the outline to the first draft.

A First Draft Should Include The Following Elements:

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

The Bowtie Method

There are many ways to think about the writing process as a whole. One way to imagine your essay is to see it like a bowtie. In the figure below, you will find a visual representation of this metaphor. The left side of the bow is the introduction, which begins with a hook and ends with the thesis statement. In the center, you will find the body paragraphs, which grow with strength as the paper progresses, and each paragraph contains a supported topic sentence. On the right side, you will find the conclusion. Your conclusion should reword your thesis and then wrap up the paper with a summation, clinch, or challenge. In the end, your paper should present itself as a neat package, like a bowtie.

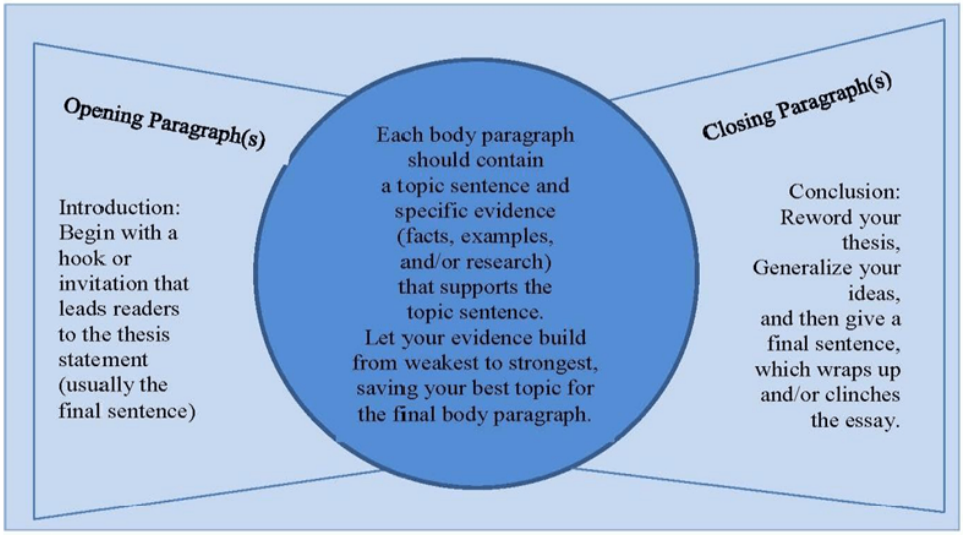


Figure 3.3.1. The Bowtie Method

Starting Your First Draft

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

The following is Mariah's thesis statement:

> E-book readers are changing the way people read.

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

> Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.
>
> **Purpose:** My purpose is to inform readers about the wide variety of consumer digital technology available in stores and to explain why the specifications for these products, expressed in numbers that the average consumer doesn't understand, often cause bad or misinformed buying decisions.
>
> **Audience:** My audience is my instructor and members of this class. Most of them are not heavy into technology except for the usual laptops, cell phones, and MP3 players, which are not topics I'm writing about. I'll have to be as exact and precise as I can be when I explain possibly unfamiliar product specifications. At the same time, they're more with it electronically than my grandparents' VCR-flummoxed generation, so I won't have to explain every last detail.

Mariah chose to begin by writing a quick introduction based on her thesis statement. She knew that she would want to improve her introduction significantly when she revised. Right now, she just wanted to give herself a starting point. Remember that she could have started directly with any of the body paragraphs. You will learn more about writing attention-getting introductions and effective conclusions later in this chapter.

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

I. Ebook readers are changing the way people read.
   A. Ebook readers make books easy to access and carry.
      1. Books can be downloaded electronically.
      2. Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.
   B. The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.
      1. Booksellers sell their own ebook readers.
      2. Electronics and computer companies also sell ebook readers.
   C. Current ebook readers have significant limitations.
      1. The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.

2. Few programs have been made to duplicate the way Americans borrow and read printed books.

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

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

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

Continuing the First Draft

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

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

Preceding each body paragraph that Mariah wrote is the appropriate section of her sentence outline. Notice

how she expanded Roman numeral II from her outline into a first draft of the second body paragraph. As you read, ask yourself how closely she stayed on purpose and how well she paid attention to the needs of her audience.

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

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

Mariah then began her third and final body paragraph using Roman numeral III from her outline.

I. …
II. …
III. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.
    A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?
    B. In the screen-size wars, what do plasma screens and LCD

screens offer?

C. Does every home really need a media center?

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

Writing a Title

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

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

Thesis Statement:

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

Working Title:

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

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3.4: Getting Feedback

Getting Feedback

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

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

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

Giving Peer Feedback

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

- **First, listen to the writer.** What kind of feedback are they asking for? Do they want to know if their thesis is clear? Do they have questions about citing sources? Make a note about what kind of feedback the writer has requested and keep that in mind as you respond.
- **Be kind.** When you are receiving criticism, isn't it easier to hear if the person giving the criticism is kind and respectful to you? Do the same for your peers.
- **Comment on the higher-order concerns first.** That means asking questions about anything that confuses you, checking to see if the writing did what the assignment called for, and considering if the order of the paper makes sense. Sometimes your instructor will give you specific things they want you to comment on; if so, be sure you do so.
- **Use "I" statements to help stay focused on your reaction to the writing.** For

example, instead of saying, “You aren’t clear in this paragraph,” try saying, “I’m confused in this paragraph. Did you mean X or Y?”

- **Be specific.** Never say “I liked it” or “It was good” unless you follow up with an explanation of exactly what you liked or thought was good. The same goes for criticism; say exactly what confused you or what was missing.
- **Ask questions.** Use questions to clarify what the writer means, what the resources given are saying, and what the writer is trying to do.
- **Offer advice based on your own experience.** For example, you could say, “If this were my paper, the two things I would do next are A and B.” Provide options such as, “If you wanted to expand this, you could do A, B, or C.”
- **Don’t try to make the writer sound like you.** If a word is the wrong word, note that, but if you just think of a word you like better, that’s just a matter of style and voice.
- **Don’t edit your peer’s writing for them.** Only comment on editing when the writing is a final draft or when your instructor has included checking for errors in the instructions for peer review. Correcting errors is important at some point, but it makes no sense to spend time editing a paragraph if that paragraph may need to be deleted or changed. It’s okay to remind the writer to run spell check and grammar check if you notice minor errors. Otherwise, only ask about editing errors if you have trouble understanding the sentence because of the mistakes. If your instructor does want you to comment on editing, be sure to follow the instructions. Remember that the responsibility for correcting the errors lies with the writer, not with you.

When providing peer feedback, it can be helpful to have an understanding of higher-order and lower-order concerns. See “Higher- vs. Lower-Order Concerns” in the “Revising” section to learn more.

Making the Most of Peer Feedback

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

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

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

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

free to set that feedback aside.

Why Meet with a Writing Tutor?

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

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

Preparing to Meet with a Tutor

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

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

What about Getting Help from a Frien or Family Member?

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

Preparing for a Student/Teacher Conference

Getting in-person help from your instructor is one of the best ways to receive feedback. You can prepare for a conference with your instructor so that you get the most out of it. Usually, a conference happens with just you and your instructor. Friends aren't invited, and parents can only attend with your permission due to the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA). See this handy link to "FERPA General Guidance for Students" from the US Department of Education (found at www2.ed.gov).

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

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3.5: Strong Writers Still Need Revision

Strong Writers Still Need Revision

Laura Giovenelli

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

The fantasy that good writers summon forth beautiful, lean, yet intricate sentences onto a page without sweating is an unhealthy fiction, and it is wrong. What writers need is revision. Novice writers, experienced writers, *all* writers. Anyone interested in writing clearer, stronger, more persuasive and passionate prose, even those of us who are procrastinators panicking because we need to get a project finished or a paper written and it's 2:00 a.m. the night before our deadline—writers need revision because revision is not a discrete step. Revision is not the thing writers do when they're done writing. Revision *is* the writing.

It's important to keep in mind I'm not talking about revision as proofreading or copyediting; no amount of grammatical, spelling, and style corrections transforms a piece of writing like focused attention to fundamental questions about purpose, evidence, and organization. That, to me, is revision: the heavy lifting of working through why I'm writing, who I'm writing for, and how I structure writing logically and effectively.

Revision Is Writing

My writing students are usually relieved to hear that published authors often find writing just as fraught as they do. Like college students, people paid to write—the journalists and the novelists and the technical writers—more often than not despair at the difference between what's in their heads and hearts and what ends up on the page the first time around. The professionals are just a little better at waiting things out, pushing through what Anne Lamott calls "shitty first drafts" and all the ones that follow, the revision of a tenth and a thirteenth and a twenty-third draft.

In class, I show a YouTube video by Tim Weninger, a computer scientist and engineer at the University of Notre Dame. In the video, Weninger stitches together his revisions of a research paper. In my class, we play a game, guessing how many revisions Weninger did. The answer—463!—almost always surprises them. It still sometimes surprises me. And sure, some of those revisions are small, fiddly changes. But most of the time, even watching this quickly on classroom monitors, my students notice Weninger aims for the jugular in his writing. He's after a wholesale overhaul of his argument and of his larger work.

However, talking about revision in terms of numbers of drafts implies that all writing, all writers, and all revision work one way: hit your target draft number, like your daily Fitbit goals, and you magically get good writing. But more revision isn't necessarily better. Effective revising isn't making changes for the sake of change but instead making smarter changes. And professional writers—practiced writers—have this awareness even if they aren't aware of it. In Stephen King's memoir *On Writing*, he calls this instinct the *ideal reader:* an imagined person a writer knows and trusts but rewrites in response to, a kind of collaborative dance between writer and reader. To writers, the act of *writing* is an act of *thinking.*

One writer in a landmark study comparing the habits of experienced writers to those of novices called their first drafts "the kernel." If you're someone like me who is constantly struggling to demystify this complex cognitive thing we humans do, that metaphor of writing as a seed is revelatory. Revision is not a sign of weakness or inexperience or poor writing. *It is the writing.* The more writers push through chaos to get to the good stuff, the more they revise. The more writers revise, whether that be the keystrokes they sweat in front of a blinking, demanding cursor or the unofficial revising they do in our heads when they're showering or driving or running, the more the ideal reader becomes a part of their craft and muscle memory, *of who they are* as writers, so at some point, they may not know where the writing stops and the revision begins.

Because writing and revision are impossible to untangle, revision is just as situational and interpretive as writing. In other words, writers interact with readers—writing and revision are social, responsive, and communal. Take Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. King gave a rough draft of the most famous American speech of the twentieth century to eighteen hundred people crammed into a gymnasium in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in November of 1962. Seven months later, King gave another revision of the speech to a gathering of political and spiritual leaders, musicians, and activists in Detroit. In August of 1963, in front of the Lincoln Memorial, King riffed and reworked and rebuilt what he preached in Rocky Mount and Detroit, ad-libbing, deleting, and flipping lines. "I Have a Dream" is what Americans remember today, engraved in our collective memories, archives, and textbooks as a symbol of an entire era, but King's famous refrain singing his vision for a less racially divided country was not even part of his speech's official text that day.

Was King writing a new speech? Was he done with the Rocky Mount or Detroit one? "I Have a Dream" was not one speech but many, written and rewritten. King was not content to let his words sit, but like any practiced writer working out his muscles, he revised and riffed, adapting it for new audiences and purposes.

Revision: Alive and Kicking

All this revision talk could lead to the counterargument that revision is a death spiral, a way of shoving off the potential critique of a finished draft forever. Tinkering is something we think of as quaint but not very efficient. Writers can always make the excuse that something is a work in progress, that they just don't have time for all this revision today. But this critique echoes the point that writing is social and responsive to its readers. Writing is almost always meant to be read and responded to, not hoarded away.

A recent large-scale study on writing's impact on learning supports the idea that specific interventions in the writing process matter more in learning to write rather than how much students are writing (Anderson et al.). Among these useful interventions are participation in a lively revision culture and an interactive and social writing process such as talking over drafts—soliciting feedback from instructors and classmates.

Extending the modern definition of writing more broadly to composing in any medium, revision is as bound to writing as breathing is to living. If anything, humans are doing more writing and revision today. Sure, there are people who call themselves writers and mean that it is part of their formal job title. But then there are the greater numbers of us who are writers but don't label ourselves as such, the millions of us just noodling around on Facebook or Snapchat or Instagram. Facebook and Instagram have an edit feature on posts. Google Docs includes a revision history tool. When we send a text and our buzzy little e-devices kick in with autocorrect, changing Linkin Park to Kinky Park, we compensate with frantic asterisks. We edit our comments or return to clarify them; we cannot resist. Revision as writing is an idea that we should not abandon or trash—and it may not even be possible to do so if we tried.

Discussion Questions

1. One of the headings in this essay is a common saying in the field of rhetoric and composition: "revision is writing" (or sometimes "writing is revision"). What does this mean? What does this perspective suggest about the writing process or how experienced writers write?
2. What revision strategies have you used in the past? What has been effective for you?
3. What gets in the way of revision? What makes this a difficult process to undertake?
4. How does the story about Dr. King change your understanding or perspective on MLK and his fame as one of history's greatest public speakers?
5. Consider the story about Dr. King's revision process as he wrote "I Have a Dream." How is the revision process different in public speaking than in writing a paper? What could transfer, and what could not?

Activities

1. Read Mike Birbiglia's article "6 Tips for Getting Your Solo Play to Broadway." Although his tone is humorous—Birbiglia is a comedian—he has some interesting things to say about the revision process in developing his stand-up special.
    - How does Birbiglia's process compare or contrast with what we know of Dr. King's?
    - Do a little research on other stand-up comedians' processes. What surprises you about what you learn? What can you take away?
2. Choose one revision strategy that's new to you (either from discussion in class or from your own research). Try it out with your own draft. Write a paragraph reflecting on the process. What surprised you? What did you learn through this process? In what ways was it helpful, and in what ways was it not? Will you use it again?

Additional Resources

1. For more about the relationships between revision, writing experience, and writing processes, see Alice Horning and Anne Becker's *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice* (Parlor Press) and Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Utah State University Press), specifically Doug Downs's chapter, "Revision Is Central to Developing Writing."
2. Just a handful of many important studies that have helped writing scholars better understand what's going on when writers revise are Nancy Sommers's "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers"; Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte's "Analyzing Revision"; Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (Oxford University Press); and Paul Anderson, Chris Anson, Charles Paine, and Robert M. Gonyea's "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-Institutional Study."
3. For more on how to frame revision and feedback for student writers, see Donald Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Wadsworth), Nancy Sommers's *Responding to Student Writers* (Macmillan Learning), and the video "Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback."

Works Cited

Anderson, Paul, Chris Anson, Charles Paine, and Robert M. Gonyea. "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-Institutional Study." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2015, pp. 199–235.

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3.6: Concepts and Strategies for Revision

Concepts and Strategies for Revision

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Let's start with a few definitions. What is an *essay?* It's likely that your teachers have been asking you to write essays for years now; you've probably formed some idea of the genre. But when I ask my students to define this kind of writing, their answers vary widely and only get at part of the meaning of "essay."

Although we typically talk of *an* essay (noun), I find it instructive to think about essay (verb): to try, to test, to explore, to attempt to understand. An essay (noun), then, is an attempt and an exploration. Popularized shortly before the Enlightenment era by Michel de Montaigne, the essay form was invested in the notion that writing invites discovery: the idea was that he, as a layperson without formal education in a specific discipline, would learn more about a subject through the act of writing itself.

What difference does this new definition make for us as writers?

1. **Writing invites discovery.**

   Throughout the act of writing, you will learn more about your topic. Even though some people think of writing as a way to capture a fully formed idea, writing can also be a way to process ideas—in other words, writing can be an act of thinking. It forces you to look closer and see more. Your revisions should reflect the knowledge you gain through the act of writing.

2. **An essay is an attempt, but not all attempts are successful on the first try.**

   You should give yourself license to fail, to an extent. If to essay is to try, then it's OK to fall short. Writing is also an iterative process, which means your first draft isn't the final product.

Now, what is *revision*? You may have been taught that revision means fixing commas, using a thesaurus to brighten up word choice, and maybe tweaking a sentence or two. However, I prefer to think of revision as "re | vision."

Revision isn't just about polishing—it's about seeing your piece from a new angle, with "fresh eyes." Often, we get so close to our own writing that we need to be able to see it from a different perspective in order to improve it. Revision happens on many levels. What you may have been trained to think of as revision—grammatical and mechanical fixes—is just one tier. Here's how I like to imagine it:

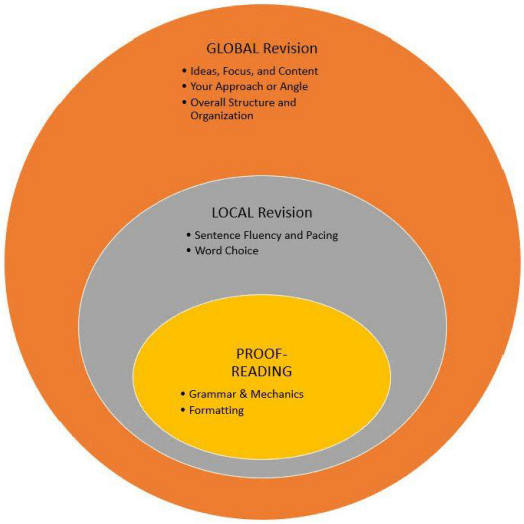


Figure 3.6.1. Global revision, local revision, and proofreading

Even though all kinds of revision are valuable, your global issues are first-order concerns, and proofreading is a last-order concern. If your entire topic, approach, or structure needs revision, it doesn't matter if you have a comma splice or two. It's likely that you'll end up rewriting that sentence anyway.

There are a handful of techniques you can experiment with in order to practice true revision. First, if you can, take some time away from your writing. When you return, you will have a clearer head. You will even, in some ways, be a different person when you come back—since we as humans are constantly changing from moment to moment, day to day, you will have a different perspective with some time away. This might be one way for you to make procrastination work in your favor: if you know you struggle with procrastination, try to bust out a quick first draft the day an essay is assigned. Then you can come back to it a few hours or a few days later with fresh eyes and a clearer idea of your goals.

Second, you can challenge yourself to reimagine your writing using global and local revision techniques, like those included later in this chapter.

Third, you can (and should) read your paper aloud, if only to yourself. This technique distances you from your writing; by forcing yourself to read aloud, you may catch sticky spots, mechanical errors, abrupt transitions, and other mistakes you would miss if you were immersed in your writing. (Recently, a student shared with me that she uses an online text-to-speech voice reader to create this same separation. By listening along and taking notes, she can identify opportunities for local- and proofreading-level revision.)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you should rely on your *learning* community. Because you most likely work on tight deadlines and don't always have the opportunity to take time away from our projects, you should solicit feedback from your classmates, the writing center, your instructor, your peer workshop group, or your friends and family. As readers, they have valuable insight into the rhetorical efficacy of your writing: their feedback can be useful in developing a piece that is conscious of the audience. To begin setting expectations and procedures for your peer workshop, turn to the first activity in this section.

Throughout this text, I have emphasized that good writing cannot exist in a vacuum; similarly, good rewriting often requires a supportive learning community. Even if you have had negative experiences with peer workshops before, I encourage you to give them another chance. Not only do professional writers consistently work with other writers, but my students are nearly always surprised by just how helpful it is to work alongside their classmates.

The previous diagram (of global, local, and proofreading levels of revision) reminds us that everyone has something valuable to offer in a learning community: because there are so many different elements on which to articulate feedback, you can provide meaningful feedback to your workshop, even if you don't feel like an expert writer.

During the many iterations of revising, remember to be flexible and to listen. Seeing your writing with fresh eyes requires you to step outside of yourself, figuratively.

Listen actively and seek to truly understand feedback by asking clarifying questions and asking for examples. The reactions of your audience are a part of writing that you cannot overlook, so revision ought to be driven by the responses of your colleagues.

On the other hand, remember that the ultimate choice to use or disregard feedback is at the author's discretion: provide all the suggestions you want as a group member, but use your best judgment as an author. If members of your group disagree—great! Contradictory feedback reminds us that writing is a dynamic, transactional action that is dependent on the specific rhetorical audience.

Vocabulary	Definition
Essay	A medium, typically nonfiction, by which an author can achieve a variety of purposes. Popularized by Michel de Montaigne as a method of discovery of knowledge: in the original French, *essay* is a verb that means "to try, to test, to explore, to attempt to understand."
Fluff	Uneconomical writing: filler language or unnecessarily wordy phrasing. Although fluff occurs in a variety of ways, it can be generally

	defined as words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that do not work hard to help you achieve your rhetorical purpose.
Iterative	Literally a repetition within a process. The writing process is iterative because it is nonlinear and because an author often has to repeat, revisit, or reapproach different steps along the way.
Learning community	A network of learners and teachers, each equipped and empowered to provide support through horizontal power relations. Values diversity insofar as it encourages growth and perspective but also inclusivity. Also, a community that learns by adapting to its unique needs and advantages.
Revision	The iterative process of changing a piece of writing. Literally revision: seeing your writing with "fresh eyes" in order to improve it. Includes changes on global, local, and proofreading levels. Changes might include the following: ► Rewriting (trying again, perhaps from a different angle or with a different focus) ► Adding (new information, new ideas, new evidence) ► Subtracting (unrelated ideas, redundant information, fluff) ► Rearranging (finding more effective vectors or sequences of organization) ► Switching out (changing words or phrases, substituting different evidence) ► Mechanical cleanup (standardizing punctuation, grammar, or formatting)

Chart 3.6.1. Definitions of terms used in the following chapter.

REVISION ACTIVITIES

ESTABLISHING YOUR PEER WORKSHOP

Before you begin working with a group, it's important for you to establish a set of shared goals, expectations, and processes. You might spend a few minutes talking through the following questions:

- Have you ever participated in a peer workshop before? What worked? What didn't?
- What do you hate about group projects? How might you mitigate these issues?
- What opportunities do group projects offer that working independently doesn't? What are you excited about?
- What requests do you have for your peer workshop group members?

In addition to thinking through the culture you want to create for your workshop group, you should also consider the kind of feedback you want to exchange, practically speaking. In order to arrive at a shared definition for "good feedback," I often ask my students to complete the following sentence as many times as possible with their groupmates: "Good feedback is…"

The list could go on forever, but here are a few that I emphasize:

"Good feedback is…"

Kind	Actionable
Not prescriptive (offers suggestions, not demands)	
Cognizant of process (i.e., recognizes that a first draft isn't a final draft)	Respectful
Honest	
Specific	Comprehensive (i.e., global, local, and proofreading)
Attentive	

Chart 3.6.2. A set of qualities that describe good feedback

Once you've discussed the parameters for the learning community you're building, you can begin workshopping your drafts, asking, "What does the author do well and what could they do better?" Personally, I prefer a workshop that's conversational, allowing the author and the audience to discuss the work both generally and specifically; however, your group should use whatever format will be most valuable for you. Before starting your workshop, try to get everyone on the same page logistically by using the following flowcharts.

To set the tone and expectations for your unique workshop group, talk through the following prompts. Record your answers. The first activity will establish a climate or culture for your group; the second will help you talk through logistics.

Choose the 3-5 descriptors of good feedback that are most important to the members of your group. Discuss for 3-5 minutes: What do each of you need for this Peer Workshop to be effective? **From each other? From the instructor? From yourselves? From your environment?** Record responses on a separate sheet of paper.

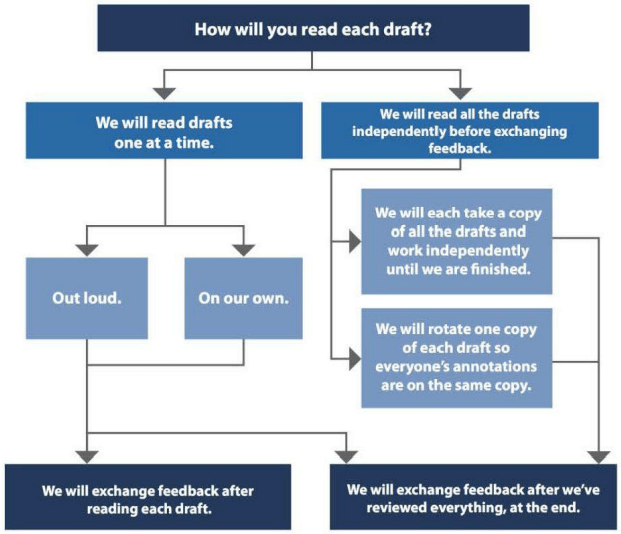


Figure 3.6.2. Establishing your peer workshop

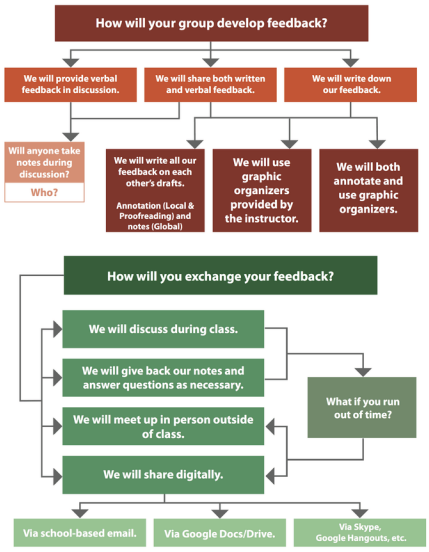


Figure 3.6.3. How will your group develop feedback?

GLOBAL REVISION ACTIVITY FOR A NARRATIVE ESSAY

This assignment challenges you to try new approaches to a draft you've already written. Although you will be "rewriting" in this exercise, you are not abandoning your earlier draft: this exercise is generative, meaning it is designed to help you produce new details, ideas, or surprising bits of language that you might integrate into your project.

First, choose a part of your draft that (1) you really like but think could be better or (2) just isn't working for you. This excerpt should be no fewer than one hundred words and can include your entire essay, if you want.

Then complete your choice of one prompt from the list below: apply the instruction to the excerpt to create new content. *Read over your original once, but do not refer back to it after you start writing. Your goal here is to deviate from the first version, not reproduce it.* The idea here is to produce something new about your topic through constraint; you are reimagining your excerpt on a global scale.

After completing one prompt, go back to the original and try at least one more or apply a different prompt to your new work.

1. ***Change genres.*** For example, if your excerpt is written in typical essay form, try writing it as poetry, or dialogue from a play/movie, or a radio advertisement.
2. **Zoom in.** Focus on one image, color, idea, or word from your excerpt and zoom way in. Meditate on this one thing with as much detail as possible.

3. ***Zoom out.*** Step back from the excerpt and contextualize it with background information, concurrent events, or information about relationships or feelings.
4. ***Change point of view.*** Try a new vantage point for your story by changing pronouns and perspective. For instance, if your excerpt is in first person (I/me), switch to second (you) or third person (he/she/they).
5. ***Change placement.*** Resituate your excerpt in a different place or time.
6. ***Change your audience.*** Rewrite the excerpt anticipating the expectations of a different reader than you first intended. For example, if the original excerpt is in the same speaking voice you would use with your friends, write as if your strictest teacher or the president or your grandmother is reading it. If you've written in an "academic" voice, try writing for your closest friend—use slang, swear words, casual language, whatever.
7. ***Add another voice.*** Instead of just the speaker of the essay narrating, add a listener. This listener can agree, disagree, question, heckle, sympathize, apologize, or respond in any other way you can imagine.
8. ***Change timeline (narrative sequence).*** Instead of moving chronologically forward, rearrange the events to bounce around.
9. ***Change tense.*** Narrate from a different vantage point by changing the grammar. For example, instead of writing in past tense, write in present or future tense.
10. ***Change tone.*** Re-imagine your writing in a different emotional register. For instance, if your writing is predominantly nostalgic, try a bitter tone. If you seem regretful, try to write as if you were proud.

REVERSE OUTLINING

Have you ever written an outline before writing a draft? It can be a useful prewriting strategy, but it doesn't work for all writers. If you're like me, you prefer to brain-dump a bunch of ideas on the paper, then come back to organize and refocus during the revision process. One strategy that can help you here is *reverse* outlining.

Divide a blank piece of paper into three columns, as demonstrated below. Number each paragraph of your

draft, and write an equal numbered list down the left column of your blank piece of paper. Write "Idea" at the top of the middle column and "Purpose" at the top of the right column.

Paragraph Number (¶#)	Idea (What is the ¶ saying?)	Purpose (What is the ¶ doing?)
Paragraph 1	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 2	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 3	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 4	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 5	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 6	Notes:	Notes:
Paragraph 7	Notes:	Notes:

Chart 3.6.3. A worksheet example for reverse formatting

Now wade back through your essay, identifying what each paragraph is *saying* and what each paragraph is *doing*. Choose a few key words or phrases for each column to record on your sheet of paper.

- Try to use consistent language throughout the reverse outline so you can see where your paragraphs are saying or doing similar things.
- A paragraph might have too many different ideas or too many different functions for you to concisely identify. This could be a sign that you need to divide that paragraph up.

Here's a student's model reverse outline:

Paragraph Number (¶)	Idea (What is the ¶ saying?)	Purpose (What is the ¶ doing?)
Paragraph 1	Theater is an important part of education and childhood development.	Setting up and providing thesis statement
Paragraph 2	There have been many changes in recent history to public education in the United States.	Providing context for thesis

Paragraph 3	Theater programs in public schools have been on the decline over the past two decades.	Providing context and giving urgency to the topic
Paragraph 4	a. Theater has social/emotional benefits. b. Theater has academic benefits.	Supporting and explaining thesis
Paragraph 5	a. Acknowledge the argument in favor of standardized testing. b. The STEAM curriculum incorporates arts education into other academic subjects.	Disarming audience, proposing a solution to underfunded arts programs
Paragraph 6	Socioeconomic inequality is also an obstacle to theater education.	Acknowledging broader scope of topic
Paragraph 7	Looking forward to public education reform, we should incorporate theater into public education.	Call to action, backing up and restating thesis

Chart 3.6.4. A model of a reverse outline

Once you have identified the idea(s) and purpose(s) of each paragraph, you can start revising according to your observations. From the completed reverse outline, create a new outline with a different sequence, organization, focus, or balance. You can reorganize by

- combining or dividing paragraphs,
- rearranging ideas, and
- adding or subtracting content.

Reverse outlining can also be helpful in identifying gaps and redundancies: Now that you have a new outline, do any of your ideas seem too brief? Do you need more evidence for a certain argument? Do you see ideas repeated more than necessary?

After completing the reverse outline above, the student proposed this new organization:

Proposed changes based on reverse outline:

1

4a

4b

Combine 2 and 5a

Combine 3 and 6

5b

Write new paragraph on other solutions

Chart 3.6.5. Student proposed changes based on previous table

You might note that this strategy can also be applied on the sentence and section level. Additionally, if you are a kinesthetic or visual learner, you might cut your paper into smaller pieces that you can physically manipulate.

Be sure to read aloud after reverse outlining to look for abrupt transitions.

You can see a simplified version of this technique demonstrated in this video.

Local Revision Activity: Cutting Fluff

When it's late at night, the deadline is approaching, and we've simply run out of things to say…we turn to fluff. Fluff refers to language that doesn't do work for you—language that simply takes up space or sits flat on the page rather than working economically and impactfully. Whether or not you've used it deliberately, all authors have been guilty of fluffy writing at one time or another.

Example of fluff on social media ["Presidents don't have to be smart" from funnyjunk.com].

Fluff happens for a lot of reasons.

- Of course, reaching a word or page count is the most common motivation.
- Introductions and conclusions are often fluffy because the author can't find a way into or out of the subject or because the author doesn't know what their exact subject will be.
- Sometimes, the presence of fluff is an indication that the author doesn't know enough about the subject or that their scope is too broad.
- Other times, fluffy language is deployed in an effort to sound "smarter" or "fancier" or "more academic"—which is an understandable pitfall for developing writers.

These circumstances, plus others, encourage us to use language that's not as effective, authentic, or economical. Fluff happens in a lot of ways; here are a few I've noticed:

Fluff's Supervillainous Alter-Ego	Supervillain Origin Story
Thesaurus	A writer uses inappropriately complex

syndrome	language (often because of the right-click “Synonyms” function) to achieve a different tone. The more complex language might be used inaccurately or sound inauthentic because the author isn’t as familiar with it.
Roundabout phrasing	Rather than making a direct statement (“That man is a fool.”), the author uses couching language or beats around the bush (“If one takes into account each event, each decision, it would not be unwise for one to suggest that that man’s behaviors are what some would call foolish.”)
Abstraction or generalities	If the author hasn’t quite figured out what they want to say or has too broad of a scope, they might discuss an issue very generally without committing to specific, engaging details.
Digression	An author might get off topic, accidentally or deliberately, creating extraneous, irrelevant, or unconnected language.
Ornamentation or flowery language	Similarly to thesaurus syndrome, often referred to as “purple prose,” an author might choose words that sound pretty or smart but aren’t necessarily the right words for their ideas.
Wordy sentences	Even if the sentences an author creates

are grammatically correct, they might be wordier than necessary.

Chart 3.6.6. A list of common fluff origin stories

Of course, there's a very fine line between *detail* and *fluff*. Avoiding fluff doesn't mean always using the fewest words possible. Instead, you should occasionally ask yourself in the revision process, *How is this part contributing to the whole?* Is this somehow building toward a bigger purpose? If the answer is no, then you need to revise.

The goal should not necessarily be "Don't write fluff" but rather "Learn to get rid of fluff in revision." In light of our focus on process, you are allowed to write fluff in the drafting period, so long as you learn to "prune" during revisions. (I use the word prune as an analogy for caring for a plant: just as you must cut the dead leaves off for the plant's health and growth, you will need to cut fluff so your writing can thrive.)

Here are a few strategies:

- Read out loud.
- Ask yourself what a sentence is *doing*, rhetorically.
- Combine like sentences, phrases, or ideas.
- Use signposts, like topic-transition sentences (for yourself during revision and for your reader in the final draft).
- Be specific—stay cognizant of your scope (globally) and the detail of your writing (locally).

To practice revising for fluff, workshop the following excerpt by yourself or with a partner. Your goal is not to cut back to the smallest number of words but rather to prune out what you consider to be fluff and leave what you consider to be detail. You should be able to explain the choices you make.

There was a time long before today when an event occurred involving a young woman who was known to the world as Goldilocks. On the particular day at hand, Goldilocks made a spontaneous decision to wander through the forest, the trees growing up high above her flowing blonde pigtails. Some time after she commenced her voyage, but not after too long, she saw sitting on the horizon a small residency. Goldilocks rapped her knuckles on the door, but alas, no one answered the door. Therefore, Goldilocks decided that it would be a good idea to enter the unattended house, so she entered it. Atop the average-sized table in the kitchen of the house, there were three bowls of porridge, which is similar to oatmeal. Porridge is a very common dish in Europe; in fact, the Queen of England is well known for enjoying at least one daily bowl of porridge per day. Goldilocks, not unlike the Queen of England, enjoys eating porridge for its nutritional value. On this day, she was feeling quite hungry and wanted to eat. She decided that she should taste one of the three bowls of porridge, from which steam was rising indicating its temperature. But because she apparently couldn't tell, she imbibed a spoonful of the porridge and vocalized the fact that the porridge was of too high a temperature for her to masticate and consume: "This porridge is too hot!"

ATTRIBUTION

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3.7: Refining the Thesis and Organizing the Essay

Refining the Thesis and Organizing the Essay

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities:

- **Specificity.** A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.
- **Precision.** A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.
- **Ability to be argued.** A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.
- **Ability to be demonstrated.** For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.
- **Forcefulness.** A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.
- **Confidence.** In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as *I feel* or *I believe* actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Avoid First Person

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as in my opinion or I believe. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
- Precision
- Ability to be argued
- Ability to be demonstrated
- Forcefulness
- Confidence

The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.

Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.

Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.

J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.

Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.

Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.

In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

[

These Are Everywhere

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

1. A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.

   Weak thesis statement: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.

2. A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.

   Weak thesis statement: Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.

3. A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.

   Weak thesis statement: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.

4. A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.

   Weak thesis statement: The life of Abraham Lincoln was long and challenging.

Writing at Work

Often in your career, you will need to ask your boss for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your boss know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

Question Everything

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to

those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

Replace Nonspecific Words

Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

> **Working thesis:** Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.
>
> **Revised thesis:** Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

Clarify Ideas

Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

> **Working thesis:** The welfare system is a joke.
>
> **Revised thesis:** The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for a *joke*. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions. By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better

guide the writing of the essay.

Add Action Verbs

Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

> **Working thesis:** Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.
>
> **Revised thesis:** The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, "Why are they not paid enough?" But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered "enough"?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results?

Add Specificity

Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

> **Working thesis:** Today's teenage girls are too sexualized.
>
> **Revised thesis:** Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman's worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

It is true that some young women in today's society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?

- What constitutes “too” sexualized?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behavior show up?
- What are the repercussions?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Speed Thesis:** On a separate sheet of paper, write a thesis statement for one of the following topics. Remember to make each statement specific, precise, demonstrable, forceful, and confident.
   Topics:

   - Texting while driving
   - The legal drinking age in the United States
   - Steroid use among professional athletes
   - Abortion
   - Racism
2. Read the following thesis statements. On a separate piece of paper, identify each as weak or strong. For those that are weak, list the reasons why. Then revise the weak statements so that they conform to the requirements of a strong thesis.

   a. The subject of this paper is my experience with ferrets as pets.
   b. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
   c. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet who lived in Baltimore during the nineteenth century.
   d. In this essay, I will give you lots of reasons why slot machines should not be legalized in Baltimore.
   e. Despite his promises during his campaign, President Kennedy took few executive measures to support civil rights legislation.
   f. Because many children’s toys have potential safety hazards that could lead to injury, it is clear that not all children’s toys are safe.
   g. My experience with young children has taught me that I want to be a disciplinary parent because I believe that a child without discipline can be a parent’s worst nightmare.

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3.8: Reverse Outlining

Reverse Outlining

Often, outlining is recommended as an early component of the writing process, a way to organize and connect thoughts so the shape of what you are going to write is clear before you start drafting it. This is a tool many writers use that is probably already familiar to you.

Reverse outlining, though, is different in a few ways. First, it happens later in the process, after a draft is completed rather than before. Second, it gives you an opportunity to review and assess the ideas and connections that are actually present in the completed draft. This is almost an opposite approach from traditional outlining, as the traditional pre-writing outline considers an initial set of ideas, which might shift as the draft is actually being written and new ideas are added or existing ones are moved, changed, or removed entirely. A reverse outline can help you improve the structure and organization of your already-written draft, letting you see where support is missing for a specific point or where ideas don't quite connect on the page as clearly as you wanted them to.

How to Create a Reverse Outline

1. At the top of a fresh sheet of paper, write your primary thesis or claim for the text you want to outline. This should be the thesis exactly as it appears in your draft, not the thesis you know you intended. If you can't find the actual words, write down that you can't find them in this draft of the paper—it's an important note to make!
2. Draw a line down the middle of the page, creating two columns below your thesis.
3. Read, preferably out loud, the first body paragraph of your draft.
4. In the left column, write the single main idea of that paragraph (again, this should be using only the words that are actually on the page, not the ones you want to be on the page). If you find more than one main idea in a paragraph, write down all of them. If you can't find a main idea, write that down, too.
5. In the right column, state how the main idea of that paragraph supports the thesis.
6. Repeat steps 3–5 for each body paragraph of the draft.

Once you have completed these steps, you have a reverse outline! It might look a little something like this (this one is only looking at two paragraphs of a draft for the sake of example; yours will likely be looking at more paragraphs than just two):

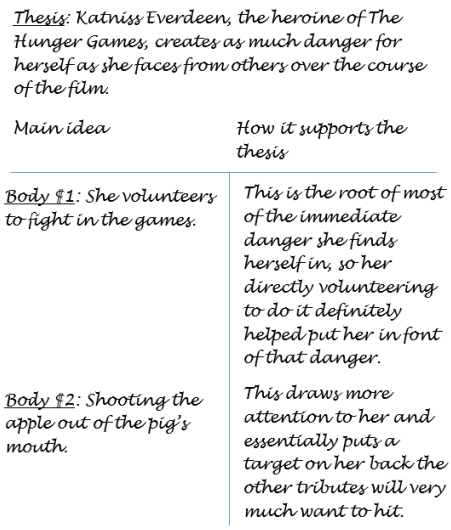


Figure 3.8.1. Reverse Outline

Working with the Results of Your Reverse Outline

Now what? You've probably already made some observations while completing this. Often students will speak up in class after we create these to tell me that they notice places where they are repeating themselves or that some of their paragraphs have too many points or don't clearly support the thesis.

There are a number of observations that can be made with the aid of a reverse outline, and a number of ways it can help you strengthen your paper. Try considering the following questions as you review yours.

Do Multiple Paragraphs Share the Same Main Idea?

If so, you might try combining them, paring back the information for that specific idea so it doesn't feel imbalanced in how much space it takes up, and/or organizing these paragraphs about the same point so they are next to each other in the paper.

Do Any Paragraphs Have Multiple Main Ideas?

Each paragraph should have only one primary focus. If you notice a paragraph does have more than one main idea, you could look for where some of those ideas might be discussed in other paragraphs and move them into a paragraph already focusing on that point, or select just the one main idea you think is most important to this paragraph and cut the other points out, or you might split that paragraph into multiple paragraphs and

expand on each main idea.

Do Any Paragraphs Lack a Clear Main Idea?

If it was hard for you to find the main idea of a paragraph, it will also be hard for your reader to find. For paragraphs that don't yet have a main idea, consider whether the information in that paragraph points to a main idea that just isn't written on the page yet. If the information does all support one main idea, adding that idea to the paragraph might be all that is needed. Alternatively, you may find that some of the ideas fit into other paragraphs to support their ideas, or you may not need some of them in the next draft at all.

Do Any Main Ideas Not Connect Clearly and Directly Back to the Thesis?

Since the point of almost every paper is to support its thesis statement, this one can be critical. It should be clear how the main idea of each paragraph supports the thesis or claim of the paper. If that connection is not directly stated, ask yourself how the main idea of that paragraph furthers your thesis and then write that response.

Do Ideas Flow from Paragraph to Paragraph? Are There Gaps in Reasoning?

If a paper starts out introducing something that is a problem in a community, then presents a solution to the problem, and then talks about why the problem is…well, a problem, this organization is likely to confuse readers. Reorganizing to introduce the problem, discuss why it is a problem, and then move on to proposing a solution would do good work to help strengthen the next draft of this paper.

Note that you may need to move, revise, or add transition statements after moving paragraphs around.

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3.9: Editing

Editing

When you are working on improving the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other formal aspects of your writing, instructors usually refer to that task as editing (not revising).

Use a checklist to ensure you are catching errors and actually fixing them. You may have seen examples of editing checklists. One type of checklist is a general list of common errors that writers often make; another type is a checklist based on an assignment; and a third type is a checklist you make yourself that tracks the kinds of errors you make most often.

Using Technology to Edit

Computers revolutionized the way that we edit writing. Here are some useful tools to make editing easier and faster.

Find and Replace

If you know that you frequently make the same spelling or punctuation error, use the Find and Replace function on your computer (on most, pressing and holding the “CTRL” key (“CMD” on Mac) and then simultaneously pressing the “F” key will get you to the Find and Replace function). For example, if you know that you often type “though” instead of “through,” you can search for all instances of “though” and replace them, one by one, with “through,” checking each item to be sure you are making the right choice.

Spell Checkers

Always use spell check. Do understand that spell check cannot find misspellings that are actual words. Spell check should mark “tge” as an error, but if you typed “accept” when you meant “except,” spell check will not help you. (See “Find and Replace” in the previous paragraph.)

Grammar Checkers

Grammar checkers are sometimes correct, sometimes not. If you use a grammar checker and disagree with a suggested correction, use other resources such as dictionaries, grammar handbooks, or websites like Purdue OWL to determine what is correct. If you find that you often make a certain kind of mistake, it's worthwhile to study up on the topic and perhaps keep an editing checklist to help you remember to check for that type of error. Whatever you do, don't start randomly changing things just to make the grammar marks go away!

Screen readers

Sometimes it helps to hear your words aloud. Using a screen reader can do that for you, and it will definitely read a mistake as a mistake, without correcting it. Many word processing programs have a screen reader built in. There are also apps you can purchase, and some schools provide applications to students for free.

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3.10: Proofreading

PROOFREADING

Proofreading is the final step, and it means using a system to ensure you've made all the corrections necessary.

USING A SYSTEM

Circle, highlight, underline: Select one method to mark all the corrections you want to make. You might choose to circle, underline, or highlight all errors you find. Check off each circle, highlight, or underline when you make the correction in the electronic document.

Check marks and checkboxes: Some writers make a check mark in the margin for every error they find in a line of typing, then put a slash through the check mark once it is corrected. You can also make checkboxes and then check the box once the correction is made.

Using editor's marks: You may have certain marks that you have learned to make for some kinds of errors, either from an instructor or from professional editing marks. If so, feel free to use those. For an extensive list of editing marks, consult the proofreading page at The Chicago Manual of Style Online.

PROOFREADING

WHY BOTHER WITH PROOFREADING?

Proofreading needs to be considered as an important stage in writing and editing processes.

Writing and revising focus on how to communicate the topic content most effectively while proofreading focuses on the mechanics of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. If you miss this stage or proofread too quickly, you will not notice critical errors that reduce the effectiveness of what you write.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GO ABOUT PROOFREADING?

Work with Another Student or Family Member in an Editing Role

Did you know that…

- It is much harder to spot mistakes in your own writing than in someone else's work?
- Someone with a fresh set of eyes might offer excellent suggestions for improvement?
- Professional writers hire editors who proofread each page up to ten times and pick up new errors each time?
- Publishers use teams of editors who work in pairs, reading out loud to each other in order to spot errors?

Know Your Typical Errors

If you know you often make certain errors, double check for these in particular.

Make a note of your errors each time you get work marked and look for patterns. For example, missppellingss, keyboarding letters bcak ot frotn, missing words because your brain works far faster than you can write type.

Did you spot all those kinds of errors in the previous sentence?

Read Aloud, Word for Word

Take advantage of the dual power of sight and hearing working together and you may hear a mistake that you can't see, such as an omitted or repeated word. Also, note that wherever you pause, you often need some punctuation.

Slow Down to about 25% of Your Normal Reading Speed

This will help you to read what is actually on the page, not what you think is there. When you read what you wrote, because you already know what is there, it is harder to concentrate on each word.

When you read at normal speed, you "fix your eyes" on the page only three or four times per line, or less. You unconsciously predict the words between these points and often pick out only as much of the words as you need to do this–perhaps only as much as the first and last letters.

To proofread effectively, you need to focus consciously on every word you have written and maybe do it twice in longer words. You have to look attentively at each word, not slide over it.

Check for Consistency and Accuracy

- Check through all the verbs to make sure tenses are consistent (all match in time sequence)
- Ask *who?*/*what?* for each verb to make sure singular/plural subjects match with verbs. Check every sentence has a full stop (for example, did you notice that the line above this one needed a full stop at the end?).

Some bits of your writing need to be double checked, such as the accuracy of statistics, dates, page references, or quotations you have copied, to make sure that the evidence you have selected is absolutely correct. This may mean re-reading sections of your sources again.

Read from the End

Instead of starting at the beginning of your page, start with the very last sentence and read that on its own, then read each sentence individually, working back towards the beginning, a sentence at a time.

This will stop you sliding over the words and help you see if you have complete sentences or fragments and run-on sentences. It will also help you see if you have pronouns (like it or this) that do not have full meaning because they are too far from their corresponding noun.

Read for Formality

Look through your writing for symptoms that your text is not formal enough. You can do this easily using the *Find and Replace* tool in Microsoft Word and searching for apostrophes in words like *it's*, *they're*, *you're*, *can't*. These contractions need to be replaced by the full words to be formal enough for an academic essay or report.

Then search for the capital *I* because first person may not be appropriate and might need to be replaced by the passive or third person ("Results from this experiment show that…" instead of "I did an experiment that shows…").

Use Built-In Grammar Tools

Many writing programs include grammar tools that can help identify potential problems with sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and clarity. These tools often highlight possible issues with colored underlines or suggestions and can provide explanations for why a change may be needed. While grammar tools can be helpful for catching errors, they are not always correct, so review each suggestion carefully before accepting it.

Check Your Reference List

Check through your reference list systematically for alphabetical order and for all required commas, full stops, parentheses, and for missing details such as place or publisher or date that you accessed a website.

Finally, try some read-aloud software to help with proofreading. If the word or structure is wrong in some way, the text reader will read it wrongly and you will immediately see what you need to fix. Of course, this will not identify differences between words that sound exactly the same, such as *there*/*their*/*they're* or *weather*/*whether*.

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3.11: It's not Just What You Say, It's How You Say It Style as a Series of Choices

It's not Just What You Say, It's How You Say It

Style as a Series of Choices

What you have to say matters. Writing is all about communicating your ideas, argument, or perspective with others. When we talk about thesis statements, supporting arguments, evidence, exigency, and more—that's all about *what* you say.

In this chapter, though, we are going to shift away from *what* you have to sa y to how you say it. Style is something that many writers develop on their own over time, but giving language to the different elements of style—as we will do in this chapter—can help us better recognize and understand what works for us and why.

How To Decide

PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, CONTEXT

Over the course of your day as a college student, you might write a lab report, a personal essay, an email to a professor, and a bunch of texts to your roommate. As a writer, you know instinctively that these different categories (or genres) of writing require different approaches. The content is varied, yes, but *how* you write is also distinct in each case.

A lab report is objective, fact-based, and it often uses passive voice with no "I"; its sentences may be short, clear, and direct. A personal narrative, on the other hand, almost certainly uses an active "I" voice and potentially more adjectives and sensory language. Your personal style might lead you to longer sentences in that context, even experimenting with semicolons or em dashes.

You can imagine similar (or even more pronounced) differences between an email to a professor and a text to your roommate. How does your voice or style change between the two contexts? How do you adapt your vocabulary, formality, punctuation, and more to fit each situation? What's the problem with sending an email filled with emojis and no caps to your professor? They might get your meaning, but an email like that might also (perhaps unfairly) reduce your credibility with that particular audience. When we think about how to

write something, the most important thing to consider is who will read it and why. In other words, read the room, people.

And that brings us to an important point: how you write or speak in your community might be very different from the expectations of academic writing. This extends beyond just emojis; depending on your family and history, you may use a different system of grammar, syntax, and dialect than what is sometimes called "standard" English. That's OK! We don't want to change who you are or how you speak with your family or friends.

Some have even argued that the academic insistence on standardized English is racist and socially unjust. For example, Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young argues that the college writing classroom's focus on standardized English reveals a prejudice against Black and other nonwhite dialects and privileges white language practices (110–111). Dr. Asao Inoue argues that traditional writing assessment (which emphasizes "correctness") ignores students' experiences and leads to a racist writing classroom with inequitable outcomes (52–53). For these reasons—among others—there is a move within rhetoric and composition classrooms to more widely embrace a variety of student dialects rather than insisting on one single mode of writing and speaking.

That said, though, writing is a series of choices—often impacted by audience and purpose—and those choices can impact the effectiveness of your message. The goal of this chapter is to help you identify the places in your writing where you can make a choice—more or less formal, longer or shorter sentences, dialect or standardized English (or a blend)—to communicate your ideas in a particular context. Choices like this can make your writing clearer and more rhetorically effective.

We make these stylistic changes not to hide who we are but because the purpose, audience, and context of each writing task are different. It is true, though, that some people feel like they have to hide their voice more than others in order to "fit" in college writing. The question of how to honor a diversity of voices and experiences—while still acknowledging that standardized English or academic writing is the expectation in many settings—is a significant challenge and conversation in college writing classrooms.

Our goal is to be rhetorically effective in our writing, and our strategies may vary based on the particular rhetorical situation in which we find ourselves. As writers, it is a powerful tool to be able to move back and forth between stylistic modes and communication styles—the better to reach our readers.

The following elements of style (in alphabetical order) are just some of the areas where you can make these writerly choices.

Concise Writing

Concision is the opposite of wordiness. Concise writing is tight and bright; it is clear and content-rich. In other words, it contains no additional fluff or unnecessary words.

Why is fluff a problem, at a sentence or paragraph level? Why does this matter, do you think?

In the worst cases, wordiness leads to whole paragraphs of fluff and repetition. Sometimes this happens when students are asked to meet a page-length requirement for an assignment. "How can I possibly write five to six pages about the Endangered Species Act?" you may wonder. That's a great question and one you could work

on with your instructor—but the answer should ultimately boil down to better content, not fluff paragraphs. (A few ideas: add a counterargument, bring in another source, give an example, ask a more complex question, etc.)

In most writing, though, wordiness happens unconsciously. The kinds of extra words that we add in conversation can make a written sentence confusing and less impactful. Because writing is a more crafted form of communication, we can take the time to edit ourselves and remove the fluff for a stronger final product.

Consider the following examples:

> ***Wordy:*** The author of this article, Dr. Belinda Jackson, who is a psychologist and researches cognition, makes the argument that metacognition is very helpful for student learning.
>
> ***Concise:*** Cognitive psychologist Dr. Belinda Jackson argues that metacognition improves student learning.

Notice that the *content* of the sentence didn't change. Concision is not about simplifying your ideas or removing important details. Instead, the goal is to remove unnecessary words that dilute or confuse the sentence. A more concise sentence is easier to understand and therefore makes a stronger impact. In fact, it leaves room for *more* content: a concise writer can pack an incredible amount of information and ideas into a paragraph.

Conciseness is an ongoing exercise for all writers. Here are a few tips to make your writing more concise:

- Remove unnecessary repetition. For example, a "slow, unhurried, leisurely stroll" could be rewritten as simply "a leisurely stroll."
- Remove empty modifiers—adjectives and adverbs that don't significantly contribute to the meaning of the sentence and are used only to intensify the word they are modifying. The most common ones are *very, really, pretty, totally,* and *just*.
- Use an active voice when it makes sense to do so. More on this in the "Passive and Active Voice" section below.
- Combine sentences to avoid repetition. For example, this version is wordy: "I went to the store. The store was Winco. They were closed." A more concise version would be "I went to Winco, but they were closed." Notice that concise writing does not always mean short, simple sentences.

As Strunk and White put it in their famous book *The Elements of Style*,

> *Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. (46)*

That's a high bar but something to aspire to as you work to make your writing concise and content-rich.

CORRECTNESS

Many writers feel concerned about "grammar" (I used quote marks here because often what they really mean is clarity, syntax, punctuation, or even spelling—any kind of English usage or mechanics). Often, these writers have been told that their writing contains errors or that it's difficult to understand. This can happen for many reasons. Knowledge of mechanics and English usage comes from a combination of the language or dialect you spoke growing up, the way you process language, your exposure to written language, and more.

This anxiety can be exacerbated by encounters with "grammar Nazis"—people who take it upon themselves to get out their (literal or figurative) red pen and tell you (and the world) exactly what you've done wrong. You may have a grammar stickler in your own life, and the internet is certainly full of them. We've all seen the correction **you're* as a saucy retort to haters in the comments section (one of the most satisfying and, it has to be said, pedantic responses out there).

The internet itself—and all digital communication—is a great example of how language and English usage are constantly in flux. How often do you see a period at the end of a text message—and if you do, what did you do to make the writer angry? How long has the phrase "because internet" been considered a complete thought? Internet linguistics is fascinating in its own right, but I bring it up here as an example of a larger point: grammar is made up. Yes, there are some stylistic and usage choices that make our meaning clearer and more graceful, but some rules are arbitrary and were invented by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians. ("Never end a sentence with a preposition," I'm looking at you—an arbitrary rule if I ever heard one.)

There is something to be said for correctness. Errors can distract readers from ideas or make meaning murky, and it is true that others may judge us (again, unfairly) for errors and typos in our emails. (Interestingly, one study suggests that the people most bothered by these kinds of errors are not united by age, education, or time spent reading; instead, their commonality is personality type. Extroverts are more willing to overlook written errors that introverted people may judge negatively [Boland and Queen].)

In the field of rhetoric and composition, though, we have moved away from a heavy emphasis on correct usage in the past few years. While there is value in correctness, the most important thing is for your meaning to be clear and your ideas to be sound. Too much focus on where the apostrophe goes can detract from the larger issues of how to build an argument, support a stance, or structure an essay. We need to work on those global aspects of writing before getting down to the nitty-gritty of comma usage. As Stephen Pinker put it,

> *For all the vitriol brought out by matters of correct usage, they are the smallest part of good writing. They pale in importance behind coherence, classic style and overcoming the curse of knowledge, to say nothing of standards of intellectual conscientiousness. If you really want to improve the quality of your writing, or if you want to thunder about sins in the writing of others, the principles you should worry about the most are not the ones that govern fused participles and possessive antecedents but the ones that govern critical thinking and factual diligence. (485)*

In other words, grammar and usage are only a small part of the larger writing picture. Your instructor may note patterns of error or point out places where a comma would make your writing clearer—but it will not be the primary focus of most college writing classes.

However, when you leave school, it will be up to you to judge the rhetorical situation of any piece of writing and handle correctness accordingly. You already know this subconsciously; just think again about the example of texting a friend versus emailing an instructor.

English usage and mechanics are another way to make your writing more effective, powerful, and clear. Think of them as tools to help you strengthen the rhetorical impact of your words and ideas. How can you use these tools to clarify your meaning and help your readers focus on the good stuff?

See the "Additional Resources" and "Activities" sections for more practical and specific guidance on comma usage and more.

Passive and Active Voice

Maybe this is a familiar phrase: "Ugh, he's so passive! Why won't he speak up for himself?" When we describe a person as passive, we mean that they let things happen *to* them. They don't take action; instead, they allow things to happen without resistance.

That definition is helpful when learning about passive voice in writing as well. In passive voice, the object (or recipient) of the action becomes the subject of the sentence. In other words, the focus is on who (or what) received the action rather than on who (or what) completed the action. Here's an example to show you what I mean:

> ***Passive:*** The coffee was drunk by Poppy.
>
> ***Active:*** Poppy drank the coffee.

Both of these sentences are grammatically correct, but as you can see, they have some notable differences. The passive construction is a little longer, and it emphasizes the coffee (the recipient of the action) rather than Poppy (the doer of the action). The active version is more concise, and it focuses on Poppy and her actions.

These may seem like small differences, but they add up over the course of a paper. Active voice is often considered sharper, clearer, and cleaner than passive voice. In the example above, you can see why.

So why would anyone ever use passive voice? Well, in some cases, the doer of the action is unknown or irrelevant, as in "The package was delivered this morning" (passive). We don't know who delivered it, and while the delivery person matters as a human, they don't matter in the meaning of this sentence.

In other cases, the receiver of the action is more important than the doer; we emphasize the recipient of the action because that's what matters in the context of the sentence. For example, we almost always say, "She was born in 1994," which is a passive construction. In this situation, who did the action (her mother) is not the most relevant information. If we wrote, "Her mother gave birth to her in 1994" (active voice), we would be making a conscious decision to highlight her mother's role in the moment.

This is often true in technical and scientific writing as well, which is why the passive voice is more common in STEM fields. In a lab report, for example, the experiment is more important than the researcher; for that reason, it's common to write in the passive voice. For example, "Hydrochloric acid was then added" (passive)

is more common than “I added hydrochloric acid.”

We also often use passive voice to avoid blaming others in a negative situation. In some cases, this is considered the most polite route. It may feel accusatory or aggressive to say, “You did this assignment incorrectly” (active). Instead, we might say, “This assignment was done incorrectly.” Again, both are correct, but we can make a writerly choice here to focus on the receiver of the action (the assignment) and in this case spare someone’s feelings.

However, be careful! The passive voice is sometimes used in this way to avoid taking responsibility. Newspapers famously use passive voice in a way that emphasizes the victims rather than the criminals. Politicians, corporations, and regular people also use the passive voice to duck blame or responsibility. Consider the following examples:

Passive: She was assaulted at a party.

Active: An unknown male assaulted her at a party.

Passive: Authors of color have been historically marginalized by the publishing industry.

Active: Historically, the publishing industry marginalized authors of color.

Passive: Mistakes were made.

Active: We made a mistake. (Or even more unthinkable: *I* made a mistake.)

How does the active voice shift the focus of the sentence and potentially the cultural framing of sexual assault, racism, and other errors? You can see how the use of active or passive voice can be a political choice as well as a stylistic one.

Passive voice isn’t grammatically incorrect, and it has its place. The key (as with all elements of style) is to consider how its use impacts your writing. Notice it and make a choice about when to use it and when to cut it.

You can check your own writing for passive voice. Does the “doer” of the action come *after* the action (the thing that was done)? Or does the doer disappear completely? If so, the sentence is likely in a passive voice. You can also look for this construction in your sentences:

“to be” verb (is, are, was, etc.) + past participle (walked, taken, seen, etc.) = passive voice

Point of View: To “I” or Not to “I”

As a general rule, an “I” voice will give your writing a more personal and subjective feel. That’s why a first-person perspective is common in memoirs and personal essays but rarely seen in STEM fields (although some scientific articles do refer to the researchers as “we,” which is a personal pronoun but somehow slightly less intimate than “I”). Academic writing in the humanities and social sciences is somewhere in between these two extremes—depending on the subject and context, a writer can make their own choice. Many well-known scholars in these fields use an “I” in their academic papers, especially if their connection to the subject

is important to understanding their perspective or point. Some authors use it just a little bit—maybe they open their article with a personal anecdote before moving into a more objective tone—while others use it throughout a piece of writing.

It's worth noting that although writing without the "I" can be read as more objective, all writing is created by people with perspectives and stances. If I make an argument, it doesn't matter if I frame it with "I argue" or not; it's still my argument. From one perspective, then, using an "I" voice is simply more transparent about the subjectivity of the work.

The "I" voice is slightly less formal, although it can still have a place in academic writing. It can also feel quite personal, depending on the subject. Consider the difference between these two sentences:

> While I recognize the potential value of a longer school day in improving test scores, I don't agree that the benefits are worth the cost.

> While a longer school day may improve test scores, the benefits aren't worth the cost.

How would you describe the difference between these two? You can see how even minor changes like this have an impact on how they "sound" to the reader's ear.

Syntax

The word *syntax* comes originally from ancient Greek: *sun* (arrange) and *tassein* (together) became the Greek word *suntaxis*. The syntax of a sentence is how it's arranged or how the words are put together. This isn't just a question of correctness; the structure or order of a sentence affects how it strikes its audience.

Consider a widespread example from the well-known style guide by Strunk and White. Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." How do these rewrites change the impact of the message?

- Times like these try men's souls.
- How trying it is to live in these times!
- These are trying times for men's souls.
- Soulwise, these are trying times.

As you can see, sentences gain or lose power depending on how they're structured. Longer sentences can seem more formal, but shorter sentences can be more direct and impactful in their own way. Sentences can be combined using semicolons, em dashes, and more; each method will have a slightly different "feel."

This can be a fun thing to play around with! Experiment with your own writing by rewriting one sentence in three ways. Which one do you like most?

Tone

When you were a kid, you may have heard a grown-up say, "Don't use that tone with me!" As a parent myself,

I have to admit that I have said these words more than I ever imagined I would. When someone says this, they are usually hearing something in your tone—the attitude of your voice—that they don't like. In other words, the way you speak conveys your attitude toward the listener or the situation.

The same is true in writing. **Tone** is the author's attitude toward their subject or their audience. It might be humorous, sarcastic, intimate, distanced, light, serious, warm, cold, subjective, objective, gloomy, cheerful, formal, informal, or something else. This tone comes from word choice (diction), point of view, sentence structure (syntax), and even punctuation.

FORMALITY

The level of formality in your writing is one important element of tone. This is one of the most obvious differences between a text message and an email to your professor, as we considered above. Academic writing tends to be somewhat formal, although it should still be clear and understandable.

Formality is determined by word choice (diction) and sentence structure (syntax). In English, there are often many phrases and words that mean the same thing, but they have different connotations—including their level of formality. Consider the following:

> The research team will *look into* these issues.

> The research team will *investigate* these issues.

Which is more formal? As you can see, word choice has a big impact. Try it for yourself. Can you come up with a more formal substitution for the following phrases?

- Come around
- Decide
- Do tests
- Find
- Fit in
- Futz around
- Judge
- Make of (as in "What do you make of it?")
- Pin down
- Stick to my position
- Read up on
- Turn up
- Work with

Again, the goal here isn't to change who you are or how you speak. It's about fitting into the genre expectations of whatever you're writing, knowing that your ideas can be more effectively communicated if

you adapt to the audience and context. In academic writing, this means making your word choice a bit more formal.

The reverse is also true: your friends might roll their eyes if you started texting them with formal academic language! How would you adapt these phrases into a more conversational style?

- Examine
- Indoctrinate
- Interrogate
- Probe
- Regulate
- Resolve
- Scrutinize

Three more simple ways to adjust the level of formality in your writing:

1. Contractions (can't, don't, it's) are an informal move. You can remove them to make your writing more formal. However, this is not a strict rule! It's a choice that you can make as a writer: How formal do you want to be? Are there times, even in academic writing, where a contraction flows better?
2. Some common transition phrases are inherently formal. Have you ever heard someone say "while this may be the case" or "therefore" in casual conversation?! Only if you have very fancy friends. You can add these to boost your formality or cut them to make your writing more approachable and relatable.
3. Exclamation points are also informal. Again, they're not forbidden in academic writing—but they are infrequent. Use them only with intention and care to highlight an important point.

VOICE

Imagine you're sitting around with your friends, debating the qualities of a recent Netflix series. Even though you're all talking about the same thing, the way you say things is different: the resonance of your actual voice, of course, but also your word choice, accent, speed, and more.

This is true in writing too. In any piece of writing, you can include some of your personal "voice" in the piece. Letting yourself shine through often makes a paper more interesting and engaging to read! Voice is the part of your writing that is unique to you as a writer; it's like your fingerprint (or, well, your voice). It comes from word choice, syntax, punctuation, and point of view.

Voice is related to tone but slightly different. Voice is about who you are as a writer, while tone is about how you feel about your subject or audience. In other words, my voice is still my own, whether I'm annoyed, charmed, or frazzled.

What part of your voice comes through—and how much—might depend on the audience and context of the piece. For that reason, many writers have an academic writing "persona." In other words, writers choose (consciously or unconsciously) to present a particular aspect of their character in an academic setting. That doesn't mean it's fake, but it's how they want to be seen in that context (and is probably not a full view of every part of who they are).

Of course, you can imagine how this could *feel* fake if you are new to academic writing or if academic style asks you to push aside your language background or dialect. Writing personas and voice raise complicated questions about what we expect of writers and students.

For example, in writing this chapter, I am writing in a teacherly persona. My voice here is similar to how I would speak in a classroom: warm, friendly, and unpretentious. My tone or attitude toward the subject (style) and the audience (you) is informal and, I hope, encouraging and helpful without being patronizing.

The voice I am using here is authentic—it does really feel true to me and who I am—and that's easy for me to achieve after teaching for many years. It's mostly unconscious at this point, but that certainly wasn't the case when I started my career! Even still, this writing voice isn't every part of me. My voice can be sassier—or even raucous!—in a lively text chain with friends, and it's stern in an angry email to my insurance company. However, in all of those scenarios, you can hear me. How I write is always a little different than how you write—and that's a good thing. It makes writing more interesting and engaging to read.

One of the best ways to develop your voice is to write a lot. You might try writing a page a day, or reading your own work out loud, or asking a friend to read through your work. Writers have to "find" their own voice through time and practice.

Ultimately, the goal is to find a balance between yourself and the writing expectations of the genre. Find an academic writing style (or persona) that feels appropriate and—if possible—true to who you are.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think it's problematic to ask students to write only in standardized English? Who benefits from this expectation and who is harmed? How might this expectation impact writers' experience or success in the classroom or other settings?
2. Vershawn Ashanti Young argues that rather than expecting students to shift between their personal dialects and dominant (standardized) English, we should all become "plurilingual" in order to better understand and be open to a mix of dialects. What do you think about this solution?
3. Why is wordiness a problem at a sentence or paragraph level? Why does this matter, do you think? What is the risk of filling up 10% of your paper with fluff? How will that change the quality of the final product?
4. How would you describe the tone and voice of this chapter? What writerly choices impact the tone here? Why do you think I made those choices? Is it effective?

Activities

1. Select one paragraph from a paper that you have previously completed (for this class or another). Revise it for conciseness using the guidelines in this chapter. What patterns do you notice in your own writing? Which version of the paragraph do you like better and why?
2. Research one of the following areas of English usage and mechanics, and then teach it to a small or large group of your peers. Be sure to explain the rule and why/if it matters. Write two to three good examples and one bad example of the rule to help your audience understand.

   - Comma to separate independent clauses
   - Comma after an introductory phrase
   - Comma to set off nonrestrictive clauses

- Semicolons
- Colons
- Parallelism
- Singular they

3. Look at three to four magazine or journal articles. Does the author use an "I" voice? How does this decision affect the tone of the piece? Why might they have made this writerly choice?

4. Find a recent text chain or social media post that you wrote and "translate" it into more formal, academic language.

5. Take a paragraph from a scholarly article and "translate" it into more informal, conversational language. Which do you think is more effective? What are some different audiences that might work for both?

6. Select four to five sentences from an article or book that you admire. Now, try writing your own sentences in the same syntax as the original. In other words, steal the structure of the sentence, but write about an entirely new topic. Example: I came, I saw, I conquered. My rewrite: She woke, she blinked, she sighed.

7. Rewrite each of the following sentences in three different ways (same content and ideas, just a different order). Which version do you like best?

    - She walked the dog past the empty post office, and the dog barked twice.
    - The soup may be brothy, but it is delicious. It's also vegetarian!
    - Huang argues that the previous studies were incomplete, since they underestimated the impact of political belief on the survey results.

8. Try writing the worst possible version of the following famous quotes. What makes the new versions so ineffective?

    - Fortune favors the bold. (Virgil)
    - I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse. (The Godfather)
    - No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. (Eleanor Roosevelt)
    - You think your pain and heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. (James Baldwin)
    - May the Force be with you. (Star Wars)

Additional Resources

1. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has many excellent handouts on and examples of elements of style, including passive voice, conciseness, semicolons, commas, and more.
2. For more on "correctness" in writing, including the correct and incorrect usage of commas, colons, modifiers, and more, see Amy Guptill's chapter on Getting the Mechanics Right.
3. Oregon State University has a growing video series on grammar, including topics like commas, parallelism, and gender-neutral language. Check out the playlist at The Oregon State Guide to Grammar.
4. For interactive learning and practice with standardized English, including parts of speech, punctuation, and syntax, dig into the Khan Academy Grammar series.

If you are interested in internet linguistics and how language has changed in the digital age, check out Gretchen McCullough's book *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language*.

Another fun one is Emmy Favilla's *A World without "Whom": The Essential Guide to Language in the*

Buzzfeed Age. Favilla was the global copy chief at Buzzfeed and often had to invent the rules for writing in internet speak. The many screenshots and chat debates here show the social and invented nature of grammar!

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3.12: Tone, Voice, and Point

Tone, Voice, and Point of View

Yo! Wassup?

Hey, how you doin'?

Hello, how are you today?

Which of the above greetings sounds most formal? Which sounds the most informal? What causes the change in tone?

Your voice can't actually be heard when you write, but it can be conveyed through the words you choose, the order you place them in, and the point of view from which you write. When you decide to write something for a specific audience, you often know instinctively what tone of voice will be most appropriate for that audience: serious, professional, funny, friendly, neutral, etc.

What is point of view, and how do I kno which one to use?

Point of view can be tricky, so this is a good question. Point of view is the perspective from which you're writing, and it dictates what your focus is. Consider the following examples:

- I love watching the leaves change in the fall. (First person point of view)
- You will love watching the leaves change color. (Second person)
- The leaves in fall turn many vibrant colors. (Third person)

Which of the above sentences focuses most clearly on the leaves? Third person, right? The first person sentence focuses on what "I" love, and the second person sentence focuses on what "you" will love.

- **First person** uses the following pronouns: I, me, my, us, we, myself, our, ours … any words that include the speaker/writer turn the sentence into first person.
- **Second person** uses any form of the word "you," which has the effect of addressing the reader.
- **Third person** uses pronouns like he, she, it, they, them … any words that direct the reader to a person or thing that is not the writer or reader turn the sentence into third person.

That's a lot to think about. When is it okay to use each of these points of view?

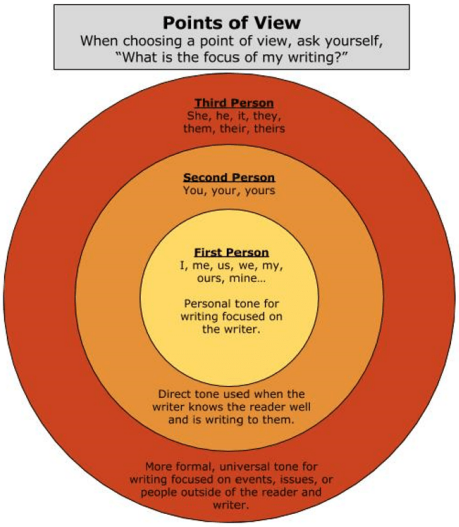


Figure 3.12.1. Point of View

Many of your college instructors will ask you to write in third person only and will want you to avoid first or second person. Why do you think that is? One important reason is that third person point of view focuses on a person or topic outside yourself or the reader, making it the most professional, academic, and objective way to write. The goal of third person point of view is to remove personal, subjective bias from your writing, at least in theory. Most of the writing you will do in college will require you to focus on ideas, people, and issues outside yourself, so third person will be the most appropriate. This point of view also helps your readers stay focused on the topic instead of thinking about you or themselves.

The best answer to your question is that the point of view you choose to write in will depend on your audience and purpose. If your goal is to relate to your audience in a personal way about a topic that you have experience with, then it may be appropriate to use first person point of view to share your experience and connect with your audience.

The least commonly used point of view is second person, especially in academic writing, because most of the time you will not know your audience well enough to write directly to them. The exception is if you're writing a letter or directing your writing to a very specific group whom you know well. (Notice that I'm using second person in this paragraph to directly address you. I feel okay about doing this because I want you to do specific things, and I have a pretty good idea who my audience is: reading and writing students.) The danger of using second person is that this point of view can implicate readers in your topic when you don't mean to do that. If you're talking about crime rates in your city, and you write something like, "When you break into someone's house, this affects their property value," you are literally saying that the reader breaks into people's houses. Of course, that's not what you mean. You didn't intend to implicate the readers this way, but that's one possible consequence of using second person. In other words, you might accidentally say that readers have done something that they haven't or know, feel, or believe something that they don't.

First Person is OK in the Draft

Even when you intend to use third person in an academic essay, it's fine in a rough draft to write "I think that" or "I believe" and then to delete these phrases in the final draft. This is especially true for the thesis statement. You want to eliminate the first person from the final draft because it moves the focus—the subject and verb of the sentence—to the writer rather than the main point. That weakens the point because it focuses on the least important aspect of the sentence and also because it sounds like a disclaimer. I might say "I think" because I'm not sure, or "I believe" because I want to stress the point that this is only my opinion. Of course, it's okay to use a disclaimer if you really mean to do so, and it's also fine to use first person to render personal experience or give an anecdote.

Does anything else affect the tone of my writing?

Yes! Many times writers are so focused on the ideas they want to convey that they forget the importance of something they may never think about: sentence variety. The length of your sentences matters. If you start every sentence with the same words, readers may get bored. If all of your sentences are short and choppy, your writing may sound unsophisticated or rushed. Some short sentences are nice though. They help readers' brains catch up. This is a lot to think about while you're writing your first draft though, so I recommend saving this concern for your second or third draft.

Visit the Purdue OWL page "Strategies for Variation" for some examples of sentence variety and exercises that will improve your sentence variety superpowers.

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3.13: Clarity and Concision

Clarity and Concision

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Writing Like You Drive

Many student writers get hung up on sentence-level expression, thinking that only elegant, erudite sentences will earn top grades. Or worse, some students assume that they'll never produce strong papers if they do not already have some kind of inborn gift for wordsmithing.

While it is true that some people can produce extraordinarily elegant and graceful prose, it is also true that anyone can learn to write effectively in ways that will persuade and satisfy readers. Producing and reading elegant writing is a pleasure, but what really matters in academic writing is precision.

However, focusing first or only on sentence-level issues is a troublesome approach. Doing so is like driving while looking only at the few feet of the road right in front of the bumper.

Experienced drivers instead take in the larger scene and more effectively identify and avoid potential hazards with ongoing course corrections. Writing well is like that. When you've put in the time and effort to take in the bigger picture of your analysis, most of the microscale moves happen automatically. That is, if you have a well-developed thesis and a carefully sequenced argument organized into cohesive and coherent paragraphs, many of the sentence-level issues take care of themselves. It's easier to write effective sentences when their purpose is clear.

You'll still have to edit for clarity, concision, and mechanics, but if the thinking process behind the writing is well developed, editing shouldn't be a huge chore. It can actually be a satisfying part of the process. One common metaphor notes that a good edit is like the last twist of a camera lens that brings the whole picture into focus.

One approach that often leads to a difficult writing process and a clunky result is the pursuit of "academese": an effort to write in an ornamented and "scholarly" way. As Michael Harvey explains, the desire to sound more academic might prompt a student to write "To satisfy her hunger for nutrition, she ate the bread" rather than simply "She was hungry, so she ate the bread" (3). It is true that a lot of academic writing is laden with unnecessary jargon, but the culture is shifting among scholars to favor plainer language and insist on clarity. Your instructors are much more likely to find a self-consciously highbrow writing style tedious than

impressive. As the saying goes, any fool can make simple things complicated; it takes a genius to make complicated things simple.

My hope with this chapter is to help you see those habits for yourself and, most importantly, how your readers experience them. If you've fallen prey to the habit of using academese, I hope this chapter helps you develop a more straightforward writing style, one well suited to nuanced thinking and effective communication. And while I don't want you to think of sentence-level wordsmithing as some kind of abstract, enchanted virtue, I do want you to understand that clarity and concision are more than aesthetics. Convoluted or wordy prose may contain some insightful or intriguing ideas, but if you can render those ideas in clear and concise prose, then you will inevitably develop those ideas even further in the course of writing. Unclear and bloated prose isn't just tedious to your reader; it's a needless obstacle to your own thinking.

The best way to achieve clarity and concision in writing is to separate the drafting process from the revision process. Highly effective writers routinely produce vague, tortuous, and bloated drafts and are happy to do so. It usually means that they're onto an interesting idea. Similarly, writers often write the same idea three or four different ways as they're getting their thoughts down on paper. That's fine. In fact, that's better than fine because each repetition helps develop key ideas and alternative approaches to the argument. A snarly first draft is often a great achievement. One just needs to take the time to develop relevant ideas and make them clear to the reader.

For that reason, this chapter envisions someone who has already cranked out a very rough draft and is now in the process of revising for clarity and concision.

Revising For Clarity: Who Did What To Whom?

What makes a complex line of thinking easy to follow? The tricks of cohesion and coherence 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: "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" (29). 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 (and another reason why you should never use such sites!):

> *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. (MV22091)*

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 four hundred years; 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 whom), something that 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 (edited for the purposes of this demonstration):

> *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 involve a role for mast cells. Recent findings show that their functionality not only is proinflammatory 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—that 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:

> *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. (Kraneveld et al. 96)*

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 straightforward passage and rewrite it so that the characters are objects (rather than subjects) and the actions are nouns (rather than verbs). Here's the clear original:

> *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. (Coontz 34)*

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) and to whom (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.

Concision

Concision is important in all types of writing: every word and sentence should be doing some significant work for the paper as a whole. Sometimes that work is more to provide pleasure than meaning—you needn't ruthlessly eliminate every rhetorical flourish—but everything in the final version should add something unique to the paper. As with clarity, the benefits of concision are intellectual as well as stylistic: revising for concision forces writers to make deliberate decisions about the claims they want to make and their reasons for making them.

Michael Harvey notes that fluffy, wordy prose does not necessarily result from an underdeveloped writing process. Sometimes it reflects the context of academic writing:

> *Many of us are afraid of writing concisely because doing so can make us feel exposed. Concision leaves us fewer words to hide behind. Our insights and ideas might appear puny stripped of those inessential words, phrases, and sentences in which we rough them out. We might even wonder, were we to cut out the fat, would anything be left? It's no wonder, then, that many students make little attempt to be concise—[and] may, in fact, go out of their way not to be. (1)*

Effortful thinking is something most people naturally try to avoid most of the time. It's both arduous and anxiety provoking to go beyond existing knowledge and assumptions to venture into unknown territory. In some ways, too, the general structure of education conditions students to approach papers as blanks to be filled rather than open-ended problems to explore. When students actively avoid concision, it's often because they want to avoid the hard thinking concision requires, they assume that writing is all about expressing opinions rather than undertaking a rigorous thought process, or they fear that they can't adequately perform

and communicate an ambitious analysis.

Many writing guides describe editing strategies that produce a vivid, satisfying concision. Most of the advice boils down to a few key moves:

1. Look for words and phrases that you can cut entirely. Look for bits that are redundant ("*each and every*," "*unexpected* surprise," "predictions *about the future*"), meaningless ("*very* unique," "*certain* factors," "*slightly* terrifying"), or clichéd ("as far as the eye can see," "long march of time").
2. Look for opportunities to replace longer phrases with shorter phrases or words. For example, "*the way in which*" can often be replaced by "how" and "*despite the fact that*" can usually be replaced by "although." Strong, precise verbs can often replace bloated phrases. Consider this example: "The goal of Alexander the Great *was to create a united empire across a vast distance*." And compare it to this: "Alexander the Great sought to *unite a vast empire*."
3. Try to rearrange sentences or passages to make them shorter and livelier. Williams and Bizup recommend changing negatives to affirmatives (130). Consider the negatives in this sentence: "School nurses often do not notice if a young schoolchild does not have adequate food at home." You could more concisely and clearly write, "School nurses rarely notice if a young schoolchild lacks adequate food at home." It says the same thing but is much easier to read, which makes for a happier and more engaged reader.

Good parallelism can also help you write shorter text that better conveys your thinking. For example, Stacy Schiff writes this in her best-selling biography of Cleopatra: "A goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity soon thereafter, she was an object of speculation and veneration, gossip and legend, even in her own time" (1). Imagine if, instead, Schiff wrote this: "Cleopatra was seen as divine when she was a child. She became the sovereign ruler at eighteen, and she became well known throughout the ancient world early in her reign. People speculated about her, worshipped her, gossiped about her, and told legends about her, even in her own time." The second version says the same thing, but the extra words tend to obscure Schiff's point. The original ("a goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity soon thereafter") effectively uses parallelism to vividly convey the dramatic shifts in Cleopatra's roles and her prominence in the ancient world.

Concision as Clarity

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

Consider the following example from Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, a sociological theorist noted for both his intellectual force and his utterly impenetrable writing style. In reading this passage, imagine "ego" and "alter" as two people interacting:

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

> *interaction is mediated. (Parsons and Shils 105)*

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

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

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

GRACE

Academic writing is not wholly utilitarian. An elegant and apt turn of phrase is satisfying both to write and to read. While you can't often summon elegance out of nowhere, you can learn a few structures that are pleasing to the reader's ear because they harmonize *what* you're saying with how you're saying it. Here are two rhetorical tricks that you can use to reinforce your points.

TRICK #1

BALANCE

Readers often find balanced sentences and phrases pleasing. The Cleopatra example above ("a goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity soon thereafter") illustrates parallelism, which is one kind of balance: using parallel structures to convey a parallel idea. This parallelism not only helps Schiff be powerfully concise but also quickly and vividly conveys the idea that Cleopatra led a remarkable life. Williams and Bizup offer another example of an elegant sentence in which the two parts are balanced in their structure: "A government that is unwilling to listen to the moderate hopes of its citizenry must eventually answer to the harsh justice of its revolutionaries" (171). The same sentence with the parallel parts marked: "A government that is unwilling to listen to the *moderate hopes* of its *citizenry* must eventually answer to the *harsh justice* of its *revolutionaries*." The balanced structure and contrasting language reinforce the author's either/or point: "listen" *or* "answer"; "moderate hopes" *or* "harsh justice"; "citizenry" or "revolutionaries." The balanced structure adds rhetorical force to the argument.

TRICK #2

EMPHASIS

Read these sentences from Michael Moss's book *Salt Sugar Fat* (328) out loud, or imagine yourself doing so:

> ***Version 1:*** But far and away, the largest weight-inducing food, out-stripping all others, was the potato chip
>
> ***Version 2:*** But far and away, the potato chip was the largest weight-inducing food, out-stripping all others.

The first version places a particular rhetorical emphasis on "the potato chip" because it comes last in the sentence after a three-part buildup. The second version says the exact same thing, and it isn't hard to see that "potato chip" is the key part of the sentence. However, the rhetorical emphasis on "the potato chip" is somewhat weaker. This common rhetorical trick is to put the part you want to emphasize at the very end of the sentence.

These are just two rhetorical structures that scholars have identified. You can find others (Google "rhetorical device") that you can bring into your repertoire. Most people can't set out to write elegantly per se, and you certainly shouldn't spend your writing time crafting elegantly balanced sentences that have little to do with your argument or analysis. But the more familiar you are with these rhetorical structures, the more often you can recognize and use them.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever found yourself writing "academese"? Why do you think you did this? How did it feel?
2. Why do academics sometimes write in "academese"? Is there any value to writing in this way, or is it all bad?

Activities

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

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

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

   - "Statisticians prepared to use spatial models need to keep the role of the models in perspective. When scientific interest centers on the large-scale effects, the idea is to use a few extra small-scale parameters so that the large-scale parameters are estimated more efficiently" (Cressie 435).
   - "Social scientists will be led astray if they accept the lies organizations tell about themselves. If, instead, they look for places where the stories told don't hold up, for the events and activities those speaking for the organization ignore, cover up, or explain away, they will find a wealth of things to include in the body

of material from which they construct their definitions" (Becker 118).

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

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

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CHAPTER 4: BUILDING ARGUMENTS AND THESIS DEVELOPMENT

4.1: Find the Good Argument Or, Why Bother with Logic?

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4.1: Find the Good Argument Or, Why Bother with Logic?

FIND THE GOOD ARGUMENT

Or, Why Bother with Logic?

Rebecca Jones

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

The word *argument* often means something negative. In Nina Paley's cartoon (see figure 10.1), the argument is literally a catfight. Rather than envisioning an argument as something productive and useful, we imagine intractable sides and use descriptors such as "bad," "heated," and "violent." We rarely say, "Great argument. Thanks!" Even when we write an academic "argument paper," we imagine our own ideas battling others.

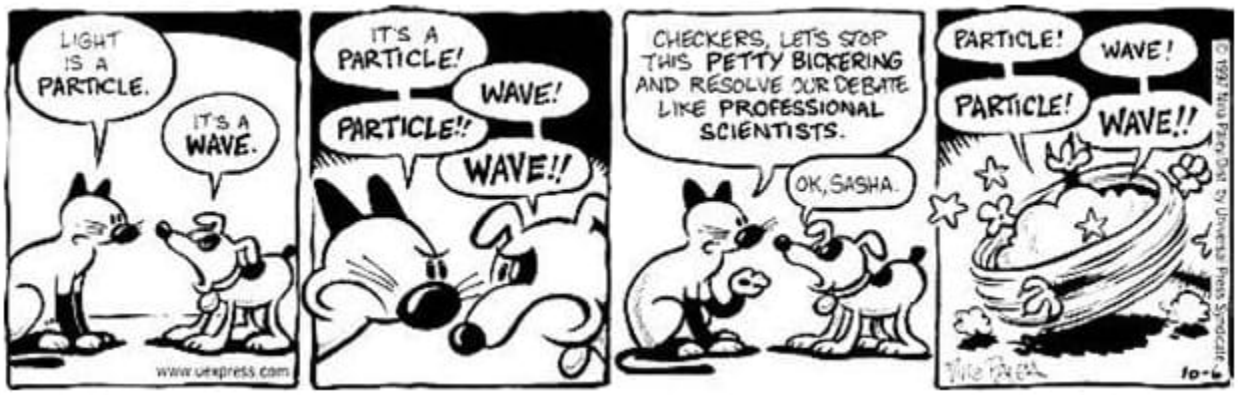


Figure 4.1.1. This cartoon demonstrates the absurdity of either/or arguments.

Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that the controlling metaphor we use for argument in Western culture is war:

> *It is important to see that we don't just talk about arguments in terms of war. We actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. (4)*

If we follow the war metaphor along its path, we come across other notions such as "All's fair in love and war." If all's fair, then the rules, principles, or ethics of an argument are up for grabs. While many warrior metaphors are about honor, the "all's fair" idea can lead us to arguments that result in propaganda, spin, and dirty politics. The war metaphor offers many limiting assumptions: there are only two sides, someone must win decisively, and compromise means losing. The metaphor also creates a false opposition where argument (war) is action and its opposite is peace or inaction. Finding better arguments is not about finding peace—the opposite of antagonism. Quite frankly, getting mad can be productive. Ardent peace advocates, such as Jane Addams, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr., offer some of the most compelling arguments of our time through concepts that are hardly inactive, like civil disobedience.

While "argument is war" may be the default mode for Americans, it is not the only way to argue. Lakoff and Johnson ask their readers to imagine something like "argument is dance" rather than "argument is war" (5). While we can imagine many alternatives to the war metaphor, concepts like argument as collaboration are more common even if they are not commonly used. Argument as collaboration would be more closely linked to words such as *dialogue* and *deliberation*, cornerstone concepts in the history of American democracy.

Argument in the Media

However, argument as collaboration is not the prevailing metaphor for public argumentation we see/hear in the mainstream media. One can hardly fault the average American for not being able to imagine an argument beyond the war metaphor. Think back to the coverage of the major election cycle in 2008. The opponents on either side (Democrat/Republican) dug in their heels and defended every position, even if it was unpopular or irrelevant to the conversation at hand. The political landscape divided into two sides with no alternatives. In addition to the entrenched positions, blogs and websites such as FactCheck.org flooded us with lists of inaccuracies, missteps, and plain old fallacies that riddled the debates. Unfortunately, the "debates" were more like speeches given to a camera than actual arguments deliberated before the public. These important moments that fail to offer good models lower the standards for public argumentation.

On an average news day, there are entire websites and blogs dedicated to noting ethical, factual, and legal problems with public arguments, especially on the news and radio talk shows. This is to say not that all public arguments set out to mislead their audiences but that the discussions they offer are often merely opinions or spins on a particular topic and not carefully considered, quality arguments. What is often missing from these discussions is research, consideration of multiple vantage points, and, quite often, basic logic.

On news shows, we encounter a version of argument that seems more like a circus than a public discussion. Here's the visual we get of an "argument" between multiple sides on the average news show. In this example (see Figure 4.1.2), we have a four-ring circus.

While all of the major networks use this visual format—multiple speakers in multiple windows, like *The Brady Bunch* for the news—it is rarely used to promote ethical deliberation. These talking heads offer a simulation of an argument. The different windows and figures pictured in them are meant to represent different views on a topic, often "liberal" and "conservative." This is a good start because it sets up the possibility for thinking through serious issues in need of solutions. Unfortunately, the people in the windows never actually engage in an argument. As we will discuss below, one of the rules of good argument is that participants in an argument agree on the primary standpoint and that individuals are willing to concede if

a point of view is proven wrong. If you watch one of these "arguments," you will see a spectacle where prepared speeches are hurled across the long distances that separate the participants. Rarely do the talking heads respond to the actual ideas/arguments given by the person pictured in the box next to them on the screen unless it is to contradict one statement with another of their own.

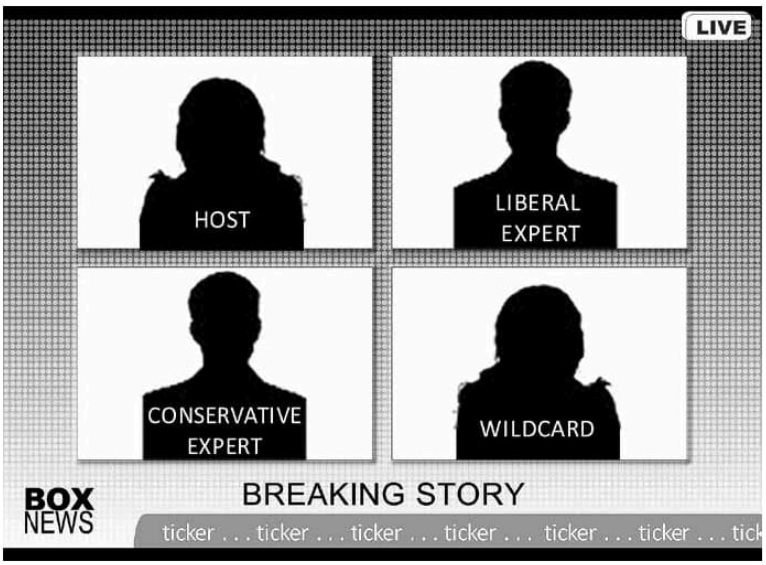


Figure 4.1.2. This mock-up of a typical news show created by Colin Charlton offers a visual of the attempt to offer many "sides" of an argument.

Even more troubling is the fact that participants do not even seem to agree on the point of disagreement. For example, one person might be arguing about the congressional vote on health care, while another is discussing the problems with Medicaid. While these are related, they are different issues with different premises. This is not a good model for argumentation despite being the predominant model we encounter.

These shallow public models can influence argumentation in the classroom. One of the ways we learn about argument is by thinking in terms of pro and con arguments. This replicates the liberal/conservative dynamic we often see in the papers or on television (as if there are only two sides to health care, the economy, war, the deficit). This either/or fallacy of public argument is debilitating. You are either for or against gun control, for or against abortion, for or against the environment, for or against everything. Put this way, the absurdity is more obvious. For example, we assume that someone who claims to be an "environmentalist" agrees with every part of the green movement. However, it is quite possible to develop an environmentally sensitive argument that argues against a particular recycling program.

While many pro and con arguments are valid, they can erase nuance, negate the local and particular, and shut down the very purpose of having an argument: the possibility that you might change your mind, learn something new, or solve a problem. This limited view of argument makes argumentation a shallow process. When all angles are not explored or are fallacious or when incorrect reasoning is used, we are left with ethically suspect public discussions that cannot possibly get at the roots of an issue or work toward solutions.

Rather than an either/or proposition, an argument is multiple and complex. An argument can be logical, rational, emotional, fruitful, useful, and even enjoyable. As a matter of fact, the idea that argument is necessary (and therefore not always about war or even about winning) is an important notion in a culture that

values democracy and equity. In America, where nearly everyone you encounter has a different background and/or political or social view, skill in arguing seems to be paramount, whether you are inventing an argument or recognizing a good one when you see it.

The remainder of this chapter takes up this challenge—inventing and recognizing good arguments (and bad ones). From classical rhetoric, to Toulmin's model, to contemporary pragma-dialectics, this chapter presents models of argumentation beyond pro and con. Paying more attention to the details of an argument can offer a strategy for developing sound, ethically aware arguments.

Models of Argumentation

So far, I have listed some obstacles to a good argument. I would like to discuss one other. Let's call it the mystery factor. Many times I read an argument, and it seems great on the surface, but I get a strange feeling that something is a bit off. Before studying argumentation, I did not have the vocabulary to name that strange feeling. Additionally, when an argument is solid, fair, and balanced, I could never quite put my finger on what distinguished it from other similar arguments. The models for argumentation below give us guidance in revealing the mystery factor and naming the qualities of a logical, ethical argument.

Classical Rhetoric

In James Murphy's translation of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria,* he explains that "education for Quintilian begins in the cradle, and ends only when life itself ends" (xxi). The result of a life of learning, for Quintilian, is a perfect speech where "the student is given a statement of a problem and asked to prepare an appropriate speech giving his solution" (xxiii). In this version of the world, a good citizen is always a *public* participant. This forces the good citizen to know the rigors of public argumentation: "Rhetoric, or the theory of effective communication, is for Quintilian merely the tool of the broadly educated citizen who is capable of analysis, reflection, and powerful action in public affairs" (xxvii). For Quintilian, learning to argue in public is a lifelong affair. He believed that the "perfect orator…cannot exist unless he is above all a good man" (6). Whether we agree with this or not, the hope for ethical behavior has been a part of public argumentation from the beginning.

The ancient model of rhetoric (or public argumentation) is complex. As a matter of fact, there is no single model of ancient argumentation. Plato claimed that the Sophists, such as Gorgias, were spin doctors weaving opinion and untruth for the delight of an audience and to the detriment of their moral fiber. For Plato, at least in the Phaedrus, public conversation was only useful if one applied it to the search for truth. In the last decade, the work of the Sophists has been redeemed. Rather than spin doctors, Sophists like Isocrates and even Gorgias, to some degree, are viewed as arbiters of democracy because they believed that many people, not just male, property-holding Athenian citizens, could learn to use rhetoric effectively in public.

Aristotle gives us a slightly more systematic approach. He is very concerned with logic. For this reason, much of what I discuss below comes from his work. Aristotle explains that most men participate in public argument in some fashion. It is important to note that by "men," Aristotle means citizens of Athens: adult males with

the right to vote, not including women, foreigners, or slaves. Essentially this is a homogenous group by race, gender, and religious affiliation. We have to keep this in mind when adapting these strategies to our current heterogeneous culture. Aristotle explains,

> *For to a certain extent all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either at random or through practice and from acquired habit. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and every one will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art. (Honeycutt 1354a I i)*

For Aristotle, inquiry into this field was artistic in nature. It required both skill and practice (some needed more of one than the other). Important here is the notion that public argument can be systematically learned.

Aristotle did not dwell on the ethics of an argument in *Rhetoric* (he leaves this to other texts). He argued that "things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites" and finally that "things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in" (Honeycutt 1355a I i).

As a culture, we are skeptical of this kind of position, though I think that we do often believe it on a personal level. Aristotle admits in the next line that there are people who will use their skills in rhetoric for harm. As his job in this section is to defend the use of rhetoric itself, he claims that everything good can be used for harm, so rhetoric is no different from other fields. If this is true, there is even more need to educate the citizenry so that they will not be fooled by unethical and untruthful arguments.

Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

For many, logic simply means reasoning. To understand a person's logic, we try to find the structure of their reasoning. Logic is not synonymous with fact or truth, though facts are part of evidence in logical argumentation. You can be logical without being truthful. This is why more logic is not the only answer to better public argument.

Our human brains are compelled to categorize the world as a survival mechanism. This survival mechanism allows for quicker thought. Two of the most basic logical strategies include inductive and deductive reasoning. **Deductive reasoning** (see Figure 4.1.3) starts from a premise that is a generalization about a large class of ideas, people, and so on and moves to a specific conclusion about a smaller category of ideas or things (e.g., "All cats hate water; therefore, my neighbor's cat will not jump in our pool"). While the first premise is the most general, the second premise is a more particular observation. So the argument is created through common beliefs/observations that are compared to create an argument. For example,

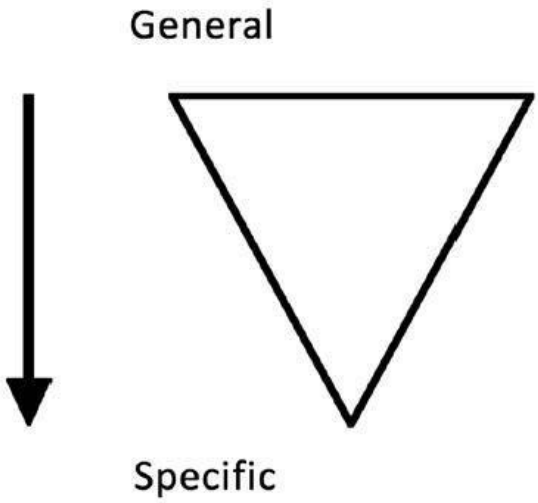


Figure 4.1.3. Deductive reasoning.

Major Premise: People who burn flags are unpatriotic.
Minor Premise: Sara burned a flag.
Conclusion: Sara is unpatriotic.

The above is called a *syllogism.* As we can see in the example, the major premise offers a general belief held by some groups and the minor premise is a particular observation. The conclusion is drawn by comparing the premises and developing a conclusion. If you work hard enough, you can often take a complex argument and boil it down to a syllogism. This can reveal a great deal about the argument that is not apparent in the longer, more complex version.

Stanley Fish, professor and *New York Times* columnist, offers the following syllogism in his July 22, 2007, blog entry titled "Democracy and Education": "The syllogism underlying these comments is (1) America is a democracy (2) Schools and universities are situated within that democracy (3) Therefore schools and universities should be ordered and administered according to democratic principles."

Fish offered the syllogism as a way to summarize the responses to his argument that students do not, in fact, have the right to free speech in a university classroom. The responses to Fish's standpoint were vehemently opposed to his understanding of free speech rights and democracy. The responses are varied and complex. However, boiling them down to a single syllogism helps summarize the primary rebuttal so that Fish could then offer his extended version of his standpoint.

Inductive reasoning moves in a different direction than deductive reasoning (see figure 10.4). Inductive reasoning starts with a particular or local statement and moves to a more general conclusion. I think of inductive reasoning as a stacking of evidence. The more particular examples you give, the more it seems that your conclusion is correct.

Inductive reasoning is a common method for arguing, especially when the conclusion is an obvious probability. Inductive reasoning is the most common way that we move around in the world. If we experience something habitually, we reason that it will happen again. For example, if we walk down a city street and every person smiles, we might reason that this is a "nice town." This seems logical. We have taken many

similar, particular experiences (smiles) and used them to make a general conclusion (the people in the town are nice).

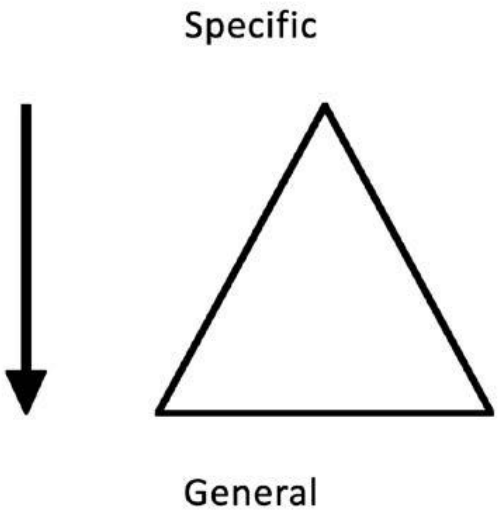


Figure 4.1.4. Inductive reasoning

Most of the time, this reasoning works. However, we know that it can also lead us in the wrong direction. Perhaps the people were smiling because we were wearing inappropriate clothing (country togs in a metropolitan city), or perhaps only the people living on that particular street are "nice" and the rest of the town is unfriendly. Research papers sometimes rely too heavily on this logical method. Writers assume that finding ten versions of the same argument somehow proves that the point is true.

Here is another example: In Ann Coulter's book *Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America*, she makes her (in)famous argument that single motherhood is the cause of many of America's ills. She creates this argument through a piling of evidence. She lists statistics by sociologists; she lists all the single moms who killed their children; she lists stories of single mothers who say outrageous things about their lives, children, or marriages in general; and she ends with a list of celebrity single moms that most would agree are not good examples of motherhood. Through this list, she concludes, "Look at almost any societal problem and you will find it is really a problem of single mothers" (36). While she could argue, from this evidence, that being a single mother is difficult, the generalization that single motherhood is the root of social ills in America takes the inductive reasoning too far. Despite this example, we need inductive reasoning because it is the key to analytical thinking. To write an "analysis paper" is to use inductive reasoning.

Most academic arguments in the humanities are inductive to some degree. When you study humanity, nothing is certain. When observing or making inductive arguments, it is important to get your evidence from many different areas, judge it carefully, and acknowledge the flaws. Inductive arguments must be judged by the quality of the evidence, since the conclusions are drawn directly from a body of compiled work.

The Aristotelian Appeals

"The appeals" offer a lesson in rhetoric that sticks with you long after the class has ended. Perhaps it is the rhythmic quality of the words (ethos, logos, pathos) or simply the usefulness of the concept. Aristotle imagined logos, ethos, and pathos as three kinds of artistic proof. Essentially, they highlight three ways to appeal to or persuade an audience: "(1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in its various forms, (3) to understand emotions" (Honeycutt 1356a I i).

While Aristotle and others did not explicitly dismiss emotional and character appeals, they found the most value in logic. Contemporary rhetoricians and argumentation scholars, however, recognize the power of emotions to sway us. Even the most stoic individuals have some emotional threshold over which no logic can pass. For example, we can seldom be reasonable when faced with a crime against a loved one, a betrayal, or the face of an adorable baby.

The easiest way to differentiate the appeals is to imagine selling a product based on them. Commercials, such as car commercials, offer a prolific source of logical, ethical, and emotional appeals.

Table 4.1.1. How to sell a car: A guide by Aristotle

Aristotelian Appeal	Definition
The Car Commercial	
Logos	Using logic as proof for an argument. For many students, this takes the form of numerical evidence. But as we have discussed above, logical reasoning is a kind of argumentation.
(Syllogism) Americans love adventure—Ford Escape allows for off-road adventure—Americans should buy a Ford Escape, or: The Ford Escape offers the best financial deal.	
Ethos	Calling on particular shared values (patriotism), respected figures of authority (Martin Luther King Jr.), or one's own character as a method for appealing to an audience.
Eco-conscious Americans drive a Ford Escape, or: [Insert favorite celebrity] drives a Ford Escape.	
Pathos	Using emotionally driven images or language to sway your audience.
Images of a pregnant woman being safely rushed to a hospital. Flash to two car seats in the back seat. Flash to family hopping out of their Ford Escape and witnessing the majesty of the Grand Canyon, or: After an image of a worried mother watching her sixteen-year-old daughter drive away: "Ford Escape takes the fear out of driving."	

The appeals are part of everyday conversation, even if we do not use the Greek terminology. Understanding the appeals helps us make better rhetorical choices in designing our arguments. If you think about the appeals as a choice, their value is clear.

Toulmin: Dissecting the Everyday Argument

Philosopher Stephen Toulmin studies the arguments we make in our everyday lives. He developed his method out of frustration with logicians (philosophers of argumentation) that studied argument in a vacuum or through mathematical formulations:

All A are B. All B are C.
Therefore, all A are C. (van Eemeren et al. 131)

Instead, Toulmin views argument as it appears in a conversation, in a letter, or in some other context because real arguments are much more complex than the syllogisms that make up the bulk of Aristotle's logical program. Toulmin offers the contemporary writer/reader a way to map an argument. The result is a visualization of the argument process. This map comes complete with vocabulary for describing the parts of an argument. The vocabulary allows us to see the contours of the landscape—the winding rivers and gaping caverns. One way to think about a "good" argument is that it is a discussion that hangs together, a landscape that is cohesive (we can't have glaciers in our desert valley). Sometimes we miss the faults of an argument because it sounds good or appears to have clear connections between the statement and the evidence when in truth the only thing holding the argument together is a lovely sentence or an artistic flourish.

For Toulmin, argumentation is an attempt to justify a statement or a set of statements. The better the demand is met, the higher the audience's appreciation. Toulmin's vocabulary for the study of argument offers labels for the parts of the argument to help us create our map.

Table 4.1.2. Toulmin's terms for the study of argument.

Terms	Definition
Claim	The basic standpoint presented by a writer or speaker.
Data	The evidence that supports the claim.
Warrant	The justification for connecting particular data to a particular claim. The warrant also makes clear the assumptions underlying the argument.
Backing	Additional information is required if the warrant is not clearly supported.
Rebuttal	Conditions or standpoints that point out flaws in the claim or alternative positions.
Qualifiers	Terminology that limits a standpoint. Examples include applying the following terms to any part of an argument: *sometimes*, *seems*, *occasionally*, *none*, *always*, *never*, and so on.

The following paragraphs come from an article reprinted in Utne Reader by Pamela Paxton and Jeremy Adam Smith titled "Not Everyone Is Out to Get You." Charting this excerpt helps us understand some of the

underlying assumptions found in the article.

"Trust No One"

> *That was the slogan of The X-Files, the TV drama that followed two FBI agents on a quest to uncover a vast government conspiracy. A defining cultural phenomenon during its run from 1993 to 2002, the show captured a mood of growing distrust in America.*
>
> *Since then, our trust in one another has declined even further. In fact, it seems that "Trust no one" could easily have been America's motto for the past 40 years—thanks to, among other things, Vietnam, Watergate, junk bonds, Monica Lewinsky, Enron, sex scandals in the Catholic Church, and the Iraq war.*
>
> *The General Social Survey, a periodic assessment of Americans' moods and values, shows an 11-point decline from 1976–2008 in the number of Americans who believe other people can generally be trusted. Institutions haven't fared any better. Over the same period, trust has declined in the press (from 29 to 9 percent), education (38–29 percent), banks (41 percent to 20 percent), corporations (23–16 percent), and organized religion (33–20 percent). Gallup's 2008 governance survey showed that trust in the government was as low as it was during the Watergate era.*
>
> *The news isn't all doom and gloom, however. A growing body of research hints that humans are hardwired to trust, which is why institutions, through reform and high performance, can still stoke feelings of loyalty, just as disasters and mismanagement can inhibit it. The catch is that while humans want, even need, to trust, they won't trust blindly and foolishly. (44–45)*

Figure 4.1.5 demonstrates one way to chart the argument that Paxton and Smith make in "Not Everyone Is Out to Get You." The remainder of the article offers additional claims and data, including the final claim that there is hope for overcoming our collective trust issues. The chart helps us see that some of the warrants, in a longer research project, might require additional support. For example, the warrant that TV mirrors real life is an argument and not a fact that would require evidence.

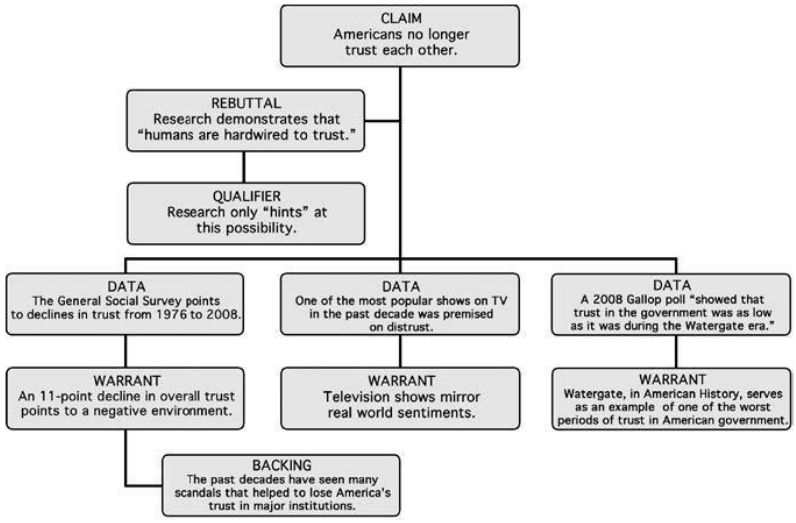


Figure 4.1.5. This chart demonstrates the utility of visualizing an argument.

Charting your own arguments and others helps you visualize the meat of your discussion. All the flourishes are gone and the bones revealed. Even if you cannot fit an argument neatly into the boxes, the attempt forces you to ask important questions about your claim, your warrant, and possible rebuttals. By charting your argument, you are forced to write your claim in a succinct manner and admit, for example, what you are using for evidence. Charted, you can see if your evidence is scanty, if it relies too much on one kind of evidence over another, and if it needs additional support. This charting might also reveal a disconnect between your claim and your warrant or cause you to reevaluate your claim altogether.

Conclusion

Even though our current media and political climate do not call for good argumentation, the guidelines for finding and creating it abound. There are many organizations such as America Speaks that are attempting to revive quality, ethical deliberation. On the personal level, each writer can be more deliberate in their argumentation by choosing to follow some of these methodical approaches to ensure the soundness and general quality of their argument. The above models offer the possibility that we can imagine modes of argumentation other than war. These approaches see argument as a conversation that requires constant vigilance and interaction by participants. Argument as conversation, as new metaphor for public deliberation, has possibilities.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the idea that "argument is a dance." What does this mean? What is appealing about this metaphor? What is difficult about it?
2. Is there value in learning about and considering how ancient Greeks approached rhetoric? Why or why not?
3. Consider the "warrant" in the Toulmin schema. How does this help us analyze or consider other people's arguments in a new way? How could it help us further develop our own arguments?

Activities

1. Watch the famous video of Jon Stewart on the show Crossfire. What is Stewart's argument? How do the hosts of *Crossfire* respond to the very particular argument that Stewart makes? Why exactly are they missing the point?
2. Outline the pro and con arguments for one of the following issues: (a) free college tuition, (b) banning gas cars, (c) requiring vaccination to attend school. In a group, develop an argument that finds a compromise or middle ground between two positions.
3. For each of the following standpoints, create a deductive argument and an inductive argument. When you are finished, share in small groups and decide which logical strategy offers a more successful, believable, and/or ethical argument for the particular standpoint: (a) The arts should remain an essential part of public education. (b) The university should build an additional parking garage.
4. Imagine you have been commissioned by your school food service provider to create a presentation encouraging the consumption of healthier foods on campus. How would you present this to your friends? Consider the media you would use, how you present yourself, and how you would begin. How would you present this same material to parents of incoming students? Which appeal is most useful for each audience? Why?
5. Dissect a recent argument by creating a chart using the Toulmin schema. What are the warrants, backing, qualifiers, and other parts of the argument? You can do this with a published op-ed or one of your own papers.

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4.2: Aristotelian and Rogerian Argumentation

Aristotelian and Rogerian Argumentation

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

To a nonconfrontational person, *argument* is a dirty word. It surfaces connotations of raised voices, slammed doors, and dominance; it arouses feelings of anxiety and frustration.

But argument is not inherently bad. In fact, as a number of great thinkers have described, conflict is necessary for growth, progress, and community cohesion. Through disagreement, we challenge our commonsense assumptions and seek compromise. The negative connotations surrounding "argument" actually point to a failure in the *way* that we argue.

Now spend a few minutes reflecting on the last time you had an argument with a loved one. What was it about? What was it *really* about? What made it difficult? What made it easy?

Often, arguments hinge on the relationship between the arguers: whether written or verbal, that argument will rely on the specific language, approach, and evidence that each party deems valid. For that reason, the most important element of the rhetorical situation is audience. Making an honest, impactful, and reasonable connection with that audience is the first step to arguing better.

Unlike the argument with your loved one, it is likely that your essay will be establishing a brand-new relationship with your reader, one that is untouched by your personal history, unspoken bonds, or other assumptions about your intent. This clean slate is a double-edged sword: although you'll have a fresh start, you must more deliberately anticipate and navigate your assumptions about the audience. What can you assume your reader already knows and believes? What kind of ideas will they be most swayed by? What life experiences have they had that inform their world view?

Impartial versus Multipartial

"But I just want to write an unbiased essay." Let's address a common concern that students raise when writing about controversial issues: neutrality. It's quite likely that you've been trained, at some point in your writing career, to avoid bias, to be objective, to be impartial. However, this is a habit you need to unlearn, because *every text is biased* by virtue of being rhetorical. All rhetoric has a purpose, whether declared or secret, and therefore is partial.

Instead of being impartial, I encourage you to be *multipartial.* In other words, you should aim to inhabit many different positions in your argument—not zero, not one, but many. This is an important distinction: no longer is your goal to be unbiased; rather, it is to be balanced. You will provide your audience not with a neutral perspective but rather with a perspective conscientious of the many other perspectives out there.

Common Forms of Argumentation

In the study of argumentation, scholars and authors have developed a great variety of approaches: when it comes to convincing, there are many different paths that lead to our destination. For the sake of succinctness, we will focus on two: the Aristotelian argument and the Rogerian argument. While these two are not opposites, they are built on different values. Each will employ *rhetorical appeals* like those discussed in chapter 11, but their purposes and guiding beliefs are different.

Aristotelian Argument

In Ancient Greece, debate was a cornerstone of social life. Intellectuals and philosophers devoted hours upon hours of each day to honing their argumentative skills. For one group of thinkers, the Sophists, the focus of argumentation was to find a distinctly "right" or "wrong" position. The more convincing argument was the right one: the content mattered less than the technique by which it was delivered.

In turn, the purpose of an *Aristotelian argument* is to persuade someone (the other debater and/or the audience) that the speaker was correct. Aristotelian arguments are designed to bring the audience from one point of view to the other.

Therefore, an Aristotelian arguer tries to demonstrate the validity of their direction while addressing counterarguments: "Here's what I believe and why I'm right; here's what you believe and why it's wrong." The author seeks to persuade their audience through the sheer virtue of their truth.

ROGERIAN ARGUMENT

In contrast, *Rogerian arguments* are more invested in compromise. Based on the work of psychologist Carl Rogers, Rogerian arguments are designed to enhance the connection between both sides of an issue. This kind of argument acknowledges the value of disagreement in material communities to make moral, political, and practical decisions.

Often, a Rogerian argument will begin with a fair statement of someone else's position and consideration of how that could be true. In other words, a Rogerian arguer addresses their "opponent" more like a teammate: "What you think is not unreasonable; I disagree, but I can see how you're thinking, and I appreciate it." Notice that by taking the other ideas on their own terms, you demonstrate respect and cultivate trust and listening.

The rhetorical purpose of a Rogerian argument, then, is to come to a conclusion by negotiating common ground between moral-intellectual differences. Instead of debunking an opponent's counterargument entirely, a Rogerian arguer would say, "Here's what each of us thinks, and here's what we have in common. How can we proceed forward to honor our shared beliefs but find a new, informed position?"

Table 4.2.1. Examples of Aristotelian and Rogerian arguments regarding appropriate winter gear.

Position	Aristotelian	Rogerian
Wool sweaters are the best clothing for cold weather.	Wool sweaters are the best clothing for cold weather because they are fashionable and comfortable. Some people might think that wool sweaters are itchy, but those claims are ill-informed. Wool sweaters can be silky smooth if properly handled in the laundry.	Some people might think that wool sweaters are itchy, which can certainly be the case. I've worn plenty of itchy wool sweaters. But wool sweaters can be silky smooth if properly handled in the laundry; therefore, they are the best clothing for cold weather. If you want to

be cozy and in style, consider my laundry techniques and a fuzzy wool sweater.

Why I chose this layout This is not a comparison table in the traditional sense. The reader isn't comparing dozens of rows and columns—they're comparing two examples built from the same position. So the visual hierarchy becomes: Position (shared context) Aristotelian example Rogerian example On a desktop, the two argument styles appear side by side. On a phone, they stack vertically while keeping the shared position at the top, which preserves the logical flow without requiring horizontal scrolling. This is another reusable pattern I'd add to your growing library: Pattern 1: Term → Definition Pattern 2: Concept → Explanation → Example Pattern 3: Shared Prompt → Side-by-Side Comparison (used here) I can already see this third pattern being useful elsewhere in your handbook whenever you're contrasting two writing approaches, rhetorical strategies, or sample paragraphs.

Neither form is necessarily better, but rather both are useful in specific contexts. In what situations might you favor one approach over another?

Discussion Questions

1. What is one rhetorical situation where Aristotelian argumentation would be most effective? Why?
2. What is one rhetorical situation where Rogerian argumentation would be most effective? Why?
3. Do you personally lean more toward the Aristotelian or Rogerian model of argumentation? Why?
4. Which of these approaches is most prominent in American politics and media? How might that impact the partisan divide?
5. Do you have to choose Aristotelian or Rogerian argumentation for each paper that you write? Or can you combine the two approaches?

Activities

1. Following the wool sweater model in this chapter, write an Aristotelian and a Rogerian approach for each of the following arguments (you can choose your position):

- Students should/shouldn't be required to wear school uniforms.
- Dogs/cats are the best kind of pet.
- The internet is/isn't making us stupid.

ATTRIBUTION

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4.3: Ten Rules for Ethical Arguments Another Way to Think about Logical Fallacie

TEN RULES FOR ETHICAL ARGUMENTS

Another Way to Think about Logical Fallacies

Rebecca Jones

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Pragma-dialectics is a study of argumentation that focuses on the ethics of one's logical choices in creating an argument. While this version of argumentation deals with everything from ethics to arrangement, what this field adds to rhetorical studies is a **new approach to argument fallacies**. Fallacies are often the cause of the mystery feeling we get when we come across faulty logic or missteps in an argument.

What follows is an adaptation of Frans van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, and Francesca Snoeck Henkemans's "violations of the rules for critical engagement" from their book *Argumentation: Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation* (109). Rather than discuss rhetorical fallacies in a list (ad hominem, straw man, equivocation, etc.), they argue that there should be rules for proper argument to ensure fairness, logic, and a solution to the problem being addressed. Violating these rules causes a fallacious argument and can result in a standoff rather than a solution.

While fallacious arguments, if purposeful, pose real ethical problems, most people do not realize they are committing fallacies when they create an argument. To purposely attack someone's character rather than their argument (ad hominem) not only is unethical but demonstrates lazy argumentation. However, confusing cause and effect might simply be a misstep that needs fixing. It is important to admit that many fallacies, though making an argument somewhat unsound, can be rhetorically savvy. While we know that appeals to pity (or going overboard on the emotional appeal) can often demonstrate a lack of knowledge or evidence, they often work.

As such, these rules present argumentation as it would play out in a utopian world where everyone is calm and logical, where everyone cares about resolving the argument at hand rather than winning the battle, and where everyone plays by the rules. Despite the utopian nature of the list, it offers valuable insight into argument flaws and offers hope for better methods of deliberation.

I. THE FREEDOM RULE

> Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints.
> (van Eemeren et al. 110)

There are many ways to stop an individual from giving her own argument. This can come in the form of a physical threat but most often takes the form of a misplaced critique. Instead of focusing on the argument, the focus is shifted to the character of the writer or speaker (ad hominem) or to making the argument (or author) seem absurd (straw man) rather than addressing its actual components. In the past decade, "Bush is stupid" became a common ad hominem attack that allowed policy to go unaddressed. To steer clear of the real issues of global warming, someone might claim, "Only a fool would believe global warming is real" or "Trying to suck all of the CO2 out of the atmosphere with giant greenhouse gas machines is mere science fiction, so we should look at abandoning all this greenhouse gas nonsense."

II. THE BURDEN-OF-PROOF RULE

> A party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so.
> (van Eemeren et al. 113)

This is one of my favorites. It is clear and simple. If you make an argument, you have to provide evidence to back it up. During the 2008 presidential debates, Americans watched as all the candidates fumbled over the following question about health care: "How will this plan actually work?" If you are presenting a written argument, this requirement can be accommodated through quality, researched evidence applied to your standpoint.

III. THE STANDPOINT RULE

> A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party.
> (van Eemeren et al. 116)

Your standpoint is simply your claim, your basic argument in a nutshell. If you disagree with another person's argument or they disagree with yours, the actual standpoint and not some related but more easily attacked issue must be addressed. For example, one person might argue that the rhetoric of global warming has created a multimillion-dollar green industry benefiting from fears over climate change. This is an argument about the

effects of global warming rhetoric, not global warming itself. It would break the standpoint rule to argue that the writer/speaker does not believe in global warming. This is not the issue at hand.

IV. THE RELEVANCE RULE

> A party may defend his or her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint.
> (van Eemeren et al. 119)

Similar to #3, this rule assures that the evidence you use must actually relate to your standpoint. Let's stick with the same argument: global warming has created a green industry benefiting from fears over climate change. Under this rule, your evidence would need to offer examples of the rhetoric and the resulting businesses that have developed since the introduction of green industries. It would break the rules to simply offer attacks on businesses that sell "eco-friendly" products.

V. THE UNEXPRESSED PREMISE RULE

> A party may not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise that he or she has left implicit.< br/> (van Eemeren et al. 121)

This one sounds a bit complex, though it happens nearly every day. If you have been talking to another person and feel the need to say, "That's *not* what I meant," then you have experienced a violation of the unexpressed premise rule. Overall, the rule attempts to keep the argument on track and not let it stray into irrelevant territory. The first violation of the rule, to falsely present what has been left unexpressed, is to rephrase someone's standpoint in a way that redirects the argument. One person might argue, "I love to go to the beach," and another might respond by saying, "So you don't have any appreciation for mountain living." The other aspect of this rule is to camouflage an unpopular idea and deny that it is part of your argument. For example, you might argue, "I have nothing against my neighbors. I just think that there should be a noise ordinance in this part of town to help cut down on crime." This clearly shows that the writer does believe her neighbors to be criminals but won't admit it.

VI. THE STARTING POINT RULE

> No party may falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point. (van Eemeren et al. 128)

Part of quality argumentation is to agree on the opening standpoint. According to this theory, argument is pointless without this kind of agreement. It is well known that arguing about abortion is nearly pointless as long as one side is arguing about the rights of the unborn and the other about the rights of women. These are two different starting points.

VII. THE ARGUMENT SCHEME RULE

> A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied.
> (van Eemeren et al. 130)

This rule is about argument strategy. Argument schemes could take up another paper altogether. Suffice it to say that schemes are ways of approaching an argument, your primary strategy. For example, you might choose emotional rather than logical appeals to present your position. This rule highlights the fact that some argument strategies are simply better than others. For example, if you choose to create an argument based largely on attacking the character of your opponent rather than the issues at hand, the argument is moot.

Argument by analogy is a popular and well-worn argument strategy (or scheme). Essentially, you compare your position to a more commonly known one and make your argument through the comparison. For example, in the "Trust No One" argument in chapter 9, the author equates the Watergate and Monica Lewinsky scandals. Since it is common knowledge that Watergate was a serious scandal, including Monica Lewinsky in the list offers a strong argument by analogy: the Lewinsky scandal did as much damage as Watergate. To break this rule, you might make an analogy that does not hold up, such as comparing a minor scandal involving a local school board to Watergate. This would be an exaggeration, in most cases.

VIII. THE VALIDITY RULE

> The reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or must be capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.
> (van Eemeren et al. 132)

This rule is about traditional logic. Violating this rule means that the parts of your argument do not match up. For example, your cause and effect might be off: If you swim in the ocean today, you will get stung by a jellyfish and need medical care. Joe went to the doctor today. He must have been stung by a jellyfish. While this example is obvious (we do not know that Joe went swimming), many argument problems are caused by violating this rule.

IX. THE CLOSURE RULE

> A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retracting the standpoint, and a successful defense of a standpoint must result in the antagonist retracting his or her doubts.
> (van Eemeren et al. 134)

This seems the most obvious rule, yet it is one that most public arguments ignore. If your argument does not cut it, admit the faults and move on. If another writer/speaker offers a rebuttal and you clearly counter it, admit that the original argument is sound. Seems simple, but it's not in our public culture. This would mean that George W. Bush would have to have a press conference and say, "My apologies, I was wrong about WMD," or for someone who argued fervently that Americans want a single-payer option for health care to instead argue something like, "The polls show that Americans want to change health care, but not through the single-payer option. My argument was based on my opinion that the single-payer option is the best way and not on public opinion." Academics are more accustomed to retraction because our arguments are explicitly part of particular conversations. Rebuttals and renegotiations are the norm. That does not make them any easier to stomach in an "argument is war" culture.

X. THE USAGE RULE

> Parties must not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formulations of the other party as carefully and accurately as possible.
> (van Eemeren et al. 136)

While academics are perhaps the worst violators of this rule, it is an important one to discuss. Be clear. I notice in both student and professional academic writing that a confusing concept often means confusing prose, longer sentences, and more letters in a word. If you cannot say it / write it clearly, the concept might not yet be clear

to you. Keep working. Ethical violations of this rule happen when someone is purposefully ambiguous so as to confuse the issue. We can see this on all the "law" shows on television or through deliberate propaganda.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the ethics of argument fallacies. What's the problem with violating these rules?
2. Why is it helpful to identify and learn names for these rules? How does it impact how you may see arguments in the future?
3. Is it possible to win the debate but still "lose" by some other measure? How do the ethics of argumentation connect to this question?

Activities

1. These rules are examples of what not to do—but of course people still do them. Find an example of someone (a politician, a TikTok influencer, a journalist) willfully or unintentionally violating one of these rules. Discuss what they did and how it impacted their argument.
2. Find a print ad or short commercial on the internet that violates one of these rules. How so? Why do they do this? Is it effective? Is it manipulative?
3. Choose one of the "rules" that are established in this chapter:
    - Write a short argument (one to two sentences) about your next paper topic that clearly violates the rule. This can be a poorly framed version of your own argument, or it could be a real (but fallacious) argument that other people make about the issue.
    - Explain why this argument violates the rule. Why might someone do this in an argument? Would it be effective? (To be clear, these fallacies are examples of what not to do—but, of course, people still use them.)
    - Take the fallacious argument that you just created and correct it: write a solid argument that conforms to the rule.

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ATTRIBUTION

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4.4: Constructing the Thesis and Argument from the Ground up

Constructing the Thesis and Argument from the Ground up

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Moving Beyond The Five-Paragraph Theme

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

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

Figures 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 contrast the standard five-paragraph theme and the organic college paper. The five-paragraph theme (outlined in Figure 4.4.1) is probably what you're used to: the introductory paragraph starts broad and gradually narrows to a thesis, which readers expect to find at the very end of that paragraph. In this idealized format, the thesis invokes the magic number of three: three reasons why a statement is true. Each of those reasons is explained and justified in the three body paragraphs, and then the final paragraph restates the thesis before gradually getting broader. This format is easy for readers to follow, and it helps writers organize their points and the evidence that goes with them. That's why you learned this format.



Figure 4.4.1. The five-paragraph "theme."

In contrast, Figure 4.4.2 represents a paper on the same topic that has the more organic form expected in college. The first key difference is the thesis. Rather than simply positing a number of reasons to think that something is true, it puts forward an arguable statement: one with which a reasonable person might disagree. An arguable thesis gives the paper purpose. It surprises readers and draws them in. You hope your reader thinks, "Huh. Why would they come to that conclusion?" and then feels compelled to read on. The body paragraphs, then, build on one another to carry out this ambitious argument. In the classic five-paragraph theme (Figure 4.4.1), it hardly matters which of the three reasons you explain first or second. In the more organic structure (figure 4.4.2), each paragraph specifically leads to the next.

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

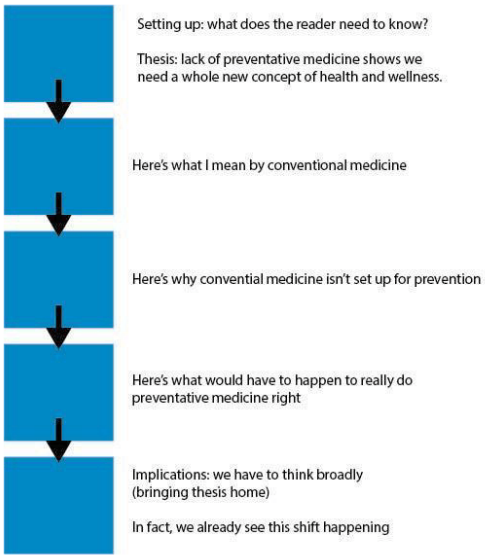


Figure 4.4.2. The organic college paper.

The substantial time you spent mastering the five-paragraph form in Figure 4.4.1 was time well spent; it's hard to imagine anyone succeeding with the more organic form without the organizational skills and habits of mind inherent in the simpler form. (And it is worth noting that there are limited moments in college where the five-paragraph structure is still useful—in-class essay exams, for example.) But if you assume that you must adhere rigidly to the simpler form, you're blunting your intellectual ambition. Your instructors will not be impressed by obvious theses, loosely related body paragraphs, and repetitive conclusions. They want you to undertake an ambitious independent analysis, one that will yield a thesis that is somewhat surprising and challenging to explain.

THE THREE-STORY THESIS

FROM THE GROUND UP

You have no doubt been drilled on the need for a thesis statement and its proper location at the end of the introduction. And you also know that all of the key points of the paper should clearly support the central driving thesis. Indeed, the whole model of the five-paragraph theme hinges on a clearly stated and consistent thesis. However, some students are surprised—and dismayed—when some of their early college papers are criticized for not having a good thesis. Their instructor might even claim that the paper doesn't have a thesis when, in the author's view, it clearly does. So what makes a good thesis in college?

1. **A good thesis is nonobvious**

   High school teachers needed to make sure that you and all your classmates mastered the basic form of the academic essay. Thus, they were mostly concerned that you had a clear and consistent thesis, even if it was something obvious like "Sustainability is important." A thesis statement like that has a wide enough scope to incorporate several supporting points and concurring evidence, enabling the writer to demonstrate his or her

mastery of the five-paragraph form. Good enough! When they can, high school teachers nudge students to develop arguments that are less obvious and more engaging. College instructors, though, fully expect you to produce something more developed.

2. **A good thesis is arguable**

In everyday life, "arguable" is often used as a synonym for "doubtful." For a thesis, though, "arguable" means that it's worth arguing: it's something with which a reasonable person might disagree. This arguability criterion dovetails with the nonobvious one: it shows that the author has deeply explored a problem and arrived at an argument that legitimately needs three, five, ten, or twenty pages to explain and justify. In that way, a good thesis sets an ambitious agenda for a paper. A thesis like "Sustainability is important" isn't at all difficult to argue for, and the reader would have little intrinsic motivation to read the rest of the paper. However, an arguable thesis like "Sustainability policies will inevitably fail if they do not incorporate social justice" brings up some healthy skepticism. Thus, the arguable thesis makes the reader want to keep reading.

3. **A good thesis is well specified**

Some student writers fear that they're giving away the game if they specify their thesis up front; they think that a purposefully vague thesis might be more intriguing to the reader. However, consider movie trailers: they always include the most exciting and poignant moments from the film to attract an audience. In academic papers, too, a clearly stated and specific thesis indicates that the author has thought rigorously about an issue and done thorough research, which makes the reader want to keep reading. Don't just say that a particular policy is effective or fair; say what makes it so. If you want to argue that a particular claim is dubious or incomplete, say why in your thesis. There is no such thing as spoilers in an academic paper.

4. **A good thesis includes implications.**

Suppose your assignment is to write a paper about some aspect of the history of linen production and trade, a topic that may seem exceedingly arcane. And suppose you have constructed a well-supported and creative argument that linen was so widely traded in the ancient Mediterranean that it actually served as a kind of currency. That's a strong, insightful, arguable, well-specified thesis. But which of these thesis statements do you find more engaging?

- **Version A:** Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade.
- **Version B:** Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade. The economic role of linen raises important questions about how shifting environmental conditions can influence economic relationships and, by extension, political conflicts.

Putting your claims in their broader context makes them more interesting to your reader and more impressive to your instructors, who, after all, assign topics that they think have enduring significance. Finding that significance for yourself makes the most of both your paper and your learning. Ask yourself, *So what?* Why does this issue or argument matter? Why is it important? Addressing these questions will go a long way toward making your paper more complex and engaging.

How do you produce a good, strong thesis? And how do you know when you've gotten there? Many instructors and writers embrace a metaphor based on this passage by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. (1809–1894). He compares a good thesis to a three-story building:

There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight. (50)

In other words,

- One-story theses state inarguable facts. What's the background?
- Two-story theses bring in an arguable (interpretive or analytical) point. What is your argument?
- Three-story theses nest that point within its larger, compelling implications. Why does it matter?

Timothée Pizarro

writing student

Thesis: that's the word that pops at me whenever I write an essay. Seeing this word in the prompt scared me and made me think to myself, "Oh great, what are they really looking for?" or "How am I going to make a thesis for a college paper?" When rehearing that I would be focusing on theses again in a class, I said to myself, "Here we go again!" But after learning about the three-story thesis, I never had a problem with writing another thesis. In fact, I look forward to being asked on a paper to create a thesis.

The biggest benefit of the three-story metaphor is that it describes a process for building a thesis. To build the first story or level, you first have to get familiar with the complex, relevant facts surrounding the problem or question. You have to be able to describe the situation thoroughly and accurately. Then with that first story built, you can layer on the second story by formulating the insightful, arguable point that animates the analysis. That's often the most effortful part: brainstorming, elaborating and comparing alternative ideas, finalizing your point. With that specified, you can frame up the third story by articulating why the point you make matters beyond its particular topic or case.

Peter Farrell

writing student

The concept of a three-story thesis framework was the most helpful piece of information I gained from the writing component of DCC 100. The first time I utilized it in a college paper, my professor included "good thesis" and "excellent introduction" in her notes and graded it significantly higher than my previous papers. You can expect similar results if you dig deeper to form three-story theses. More importantly, doing so will make the actual writing of your paper more straightforward as well. Arguing something specific makes the structure of your paper much easier to design.

For example, imagine you have been assigned a paper about the impact of online learning in higher education. You would first construct an account of the origins and multiple forms of online learning and assess research findings on its use and effectiveness. If you've done that well, you'll probably come up with a well-considered opinion that wouldn't be obvious to readers who haven't looked at the issue in depth. Maybe you'll want to argue that online learning is a threat to the academic community. Or perhaps you'll want to make the case that online learning opens up pathways to college degrees that traditional campus-based learning does not.

In the course of developing your central, argumentative point, you'll come to recognize its larger context; in this example, you may claim that online learning can serve to better integrate higher education with the rest of society, as online learners bring their educational and career experiences together. Here is an example:

First story (facts only)

Online learning is becoming more prevalent and takes many different forms.

Second story (arguable point)

While most observers see it as a transformation of higher education, online learning is better thought of as an *extension* of higher education in that it reaches learners who aren't disposed to participate in traditional campus-based education.

Third story (larger implications)

Online learning appears to be a promising way to better integrate higher education with other institutions in society, as online learners integrate their educational experiences with the other realms of their life, promoting the freer flow of ideas between the academy and the rest of society.

The final thesis would be all three of these pieces together. These stories build on one another; they don't replace the previous story.
Here's another example of a three-story thesis:

First story

Edith Wharton did not consider herself a modernist writer, and she didn't write like her modernist contemporaries.

Second story

However, in her work, we can see her grappling with both the questions and literary forms that fascinated modernist writers of her era. While not an avowed modernist, she did engage with modernist themes and questions.

Third story

Thus, it is more revealing to think of modernism as a conversation rather than a category or practice.

Here's one more example:

First story

Scientists disagree about the likely impact in the US of the light brown apple moth (LBAM), an agricultural pest native to Australia.

Second story

Research findings to date suggest that the decision to spray pheromones over the skies of several Southern Californian counties to combat the LBAM was poorly thought out.

Third story

Together, the scientific ambiguities and the controversial response strengthen the claim that industrial-style approaches to pest management are inherently unsustainable.

A thesis statement that stops at the first story *isn't usually considered a thesis*. A two-story thesis is usually considered competent, though some two-story theses are more intriguing and ambitious than others. A thoughtfully crafted and well-informed three-story thesis puts the author on a smooth path toward an excellent paper.

Three-Story Theses and the Organically Structured Argument

The three-story thesis is a beautiful thing. For one, it gives a paper authentic momentum. The first paragraph doesn't just start with some broad, vague statement; every sentence is crucial for setting up the thesis. The body paragraphs build on one another, moving through each step of the logical chain. Each paragraph leads inevitably to the next, making the transitions from paragraph to paragraph feel wholly natural. The conclusion, instead of being a mirror-image paraphrase of the introduction, builds out the third story by explaining the broader implications of the argument. It offers new insight without departing from the flow of the analysis.

I should note here that a paper with this kind of momentum often reads like it was knocked out in one inspired sitting. But in reality, just like accomplished athletes, artists, and musicians, masterful writers make the difficult thing look easy. As writer Anne Lamott notes, reading a well-written piece feels like its author sat down and typed it out, "bounding along like huskies across the snow." However, she continues,

This is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much. (21)

Experienced writers don't figure out what they want to say and then write it. *They write in order to figure out what they want to say.*

Experienced writers develop theses in dialogue with the body of the essay. An initial characterization of the problem leads to a tentative thesis, and then drafting the body of the paper reveals thorny contradictions or critical areas of ambiguity, prompting the writer to revisit or expand the body of evidence and then refine the thesis based on that fresh look. The revised thesis may require that body paragraphs be reordered and reshaped to fit the emerging three-story thesis. Throughout the process, the thesis serves as an anchor point while the author wades through the morass of facts and ideas. The dialogue between thesis and body continues until the author is satisfied or the due date arrives, whatever comes first. It's an effortful and sometimes tedious process.

Novice writers, in contrast, usually oversimplify the writing process. They formulate some first-impression thesis, produce a reasonably organized outline, and then flesh it out with text, never taking the time to reflect or truly revise their work. They assume that revision is a step backward when, in reality, it is a major step forward.

Kaethe Leonard

writing student

> *Everyone has a different way that they like to write. For instance, I like to pop my earbuds in, blast dubstep music, and write on a whiteboard. I like using the whiteboard because it is a lot easier to revise and edit while you write. After I finish writing a paragraph that I am completely satisfied with on the whiteboard, I sit in front of it with my laptop and just type it up.*

Another benefit of the three-story thesis framework is that *it demystifies what a "strong" argument is in academic culture*. In an era of political polarization, many students may think that a strong argument is based on a simple, bold, combative statement that is promoted in the most forceful way possible. "Gun control is a travesty!" "Shakespeare is the best writer who ever lived!" When students are encouraged to consider contrasting perspectives in their papers, they fear that doing so will make their own thesis seem mushy and weak.

However, in academics a "strong" argument is comprehensive and nuanced, not simple and polemical. The purpose of the argument is to explain to readers why the author—through the course of his or her in-depth study—has arrived at a somewhat surprising point. On that basis, it has to consider plausible counterarguments and contradictory information. Academic argumentation exemplifies the popular adage about all writing: show, don't tell. In crafting and carrying out the three-story thesis, you are showing your reader the work you have done.

The model of the organically structured paper and the three-story thesis framework explained here is the very foundation of the paper itself and the process that produces it. Your instructors assume that you have the self-motivation and organizational skills to pursue your analysis with both rigor and flexibility; that is, they envision you developing, testing, refining, and sometimes discarding your own ideas based on a clear-eyed

and open-minded assessment of the evidence before you.

Discussion Questions

1. What writing "rules" were you taught in the past? This might be about essay structure, style, or something else. Which of these rules seem to be true in college writing? Which ones are not true in college?
2. In what contexts is the five-paragraph essay a useful structure? Why is it not helpful in other contexts—what's the problem?

Activities

1. Put the following "stories" of a thesis in order to make a strong thesis statement:
   - Despite their appeal to patients, robotic pets should not be used widely, since they cause more problems than they solve.
   - In recent years, robotic pets have been used in medical settings to help children and elderly patients feel emotionally supported and loved.
   - Shifting affection to robotic pets rather than live animals suggests a major change in empathy and humanity and could have long-term costs that have not been fully considered.
2. Here is a list of one-story theses. Come up with three-story versions of each one.
   - Television programming includes content that some find objectionable.
   - The percentage of children and youth who are overweight or obese has risen in recent decades.
   - First-year college students must learn how to independently manage their time.
   - The things we surround ourselves with symbolize who we are.
3. Find a scholarly article or book that is interesting to you. Focusing on the abstract and introduction, outline the first, second, and third stories of its thesis.
4. Find an example of a five-paragraph theme (online essay mills, your own high school work), produce an alternative three-story thesis, and outline an organically structured paper to carry that thesis out.

Additional Resources

1. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers an excellent, readable rundown on the five-paragraph theme, why most college writing assignments want you to go beyond it, and those times when the simpler structure is actually a better choice.
2. There are many useful websites that describe good thesis statements and provide examples. Those from the writing centers at Hamilton College and Purdue University are especially helpful.

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ATTRIBUTION

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4.5: Countering Opposing Arguments

Countering Opposing Arguments

Almost anything you can argue or claim in a paper can be refuted. Opposing points of view and arguments exist in every debate, and it's important to anticipate possible objections to your arguments. In order to do that, ask yourself the following questions:

- Could someone draw a different conclusion from the facts or examples you present?
- Could a reader question any of your assumptions or claims?
- Could a reader offer a different explanation of an issue?
- Is there any evidence out there that could weaken your position?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the next set of questions can help you respond to these potential objections:

- Is it possible to concede the point of the opposition, but then challenge that point's importance/usefulness?
- Can you offer an explanation of why a reader should question a piece of evidence or consider a different point of view?
- Can you explain how your position responds to any contradicting evidence?
- Can you put forward a different interpretation of evidence?

You can use signal phrases in your paper to alert readers that you're about to present an objection. It's usually best to put phrases like these at the beginning of a paragraph:

- Researchers have challenged these claims with…
- Critics argue that this view…
- Some readers may point to…

Once you have introduced and stated the objection, you then need to explain how your original argument is still correct. Just as using signal phrases is important for introducing the objection, you should to use words and phrases that indicate that you are switching back to

your own argument again:

- However, . . .
- Despite this, ...
- While this is an important element to consider, it does not outweigh. . .

ATTRIBUTION

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4.6: Paragraphs

PARAGRAPHS

As Michael Harvey writes, paragraphs are "in essence, a form of punctuation—and like other forms of punctuation they are meant to make written material easy to read." Effective paragraphs are the fundamental units of academic writing; consequently, the thoughtful, multifaceted arguments that your professors expect depend on them. Without good paragraphs, you simply cannot clearly convey sequential points and their relationships to one another. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight strategies for constructing, ordering, and relating paragraphs in academic writing. It could just as well be titled "Organization" because whether or not readers perceive a paper to be well organized depends largely on effective paragraphing.

Many novice writers tend to make a sharp distinction between content and style, thinking that a paper can be strong in one and weak in the other, but focusing on organization shows how content and style converge in deliberative academic writing. A poorly organized paper may contain insightful kernels, but a thoughtful, satisfying argument can't take shape without paragraphs that are crafted, ordered, and connected effectively. On the other side, one can imagine a string of slick, error-free sentences that are somehow lacking in interesting ideas. However, your professors will view even the most elegant prose as rambling and tedious if there isn't a careful, coherent argument to give the text meaning. Paragraphs are the "stuff" of academic writing and, thus, worth our attention here.

KEY SENTENCES (AKA TOPIC SENTENCES)

In academic writing, readers expect each paragraph to have a sentence or two that captures its main point. They're often called "topic sentences," though many writing instructors prefer to call them "key sentences." There are at least two downsides of the phrase "topic sentence." First, it makes it seem like the paramount job of that sentence is simply to announce the topic of the paragraph. Second, it makes it seem like the topic sentence must always be a single grammatical sentence. Calling it a "key sentence" reminds us that it expresses the central idea of the paragraph. And sometimes a question or a two-sentence construction functions as the key.

Kaethe Leonard

writing student

The key to staying on topic within a paragraph is starting with a topic sentence. It doesn't even have to be perfect to work from it! Just figure out what you really want to say in that one specific paragraph and go. Then, you … EDIT (haha, made you flinch!) All joking aside, editing really is a very important step in this

process. By going back over what you wrote, you can check to see if what you wrote in that paragraph fits with what you actually intend to say as well as to make sure everything is cohesive and coherent!

Key sentences in academic writing do two things. First, they establish the main point that the rest of the paragraph supports. Second, they situate each paragraph within the sequence of the argument, a task that requires transitioning from the prior paragraph. Consider these two examples:

Version A:

Now we turn to the epidemiological evidence.

Version B:

The epidemiological evidence provides compelling support for the hypothesis emerging from etiological studies.

Both versions convey a topic; it's pretty easy to predict that the paragraph will be about epidemiological evidence, but only the second version establishes an argumentative point and puts it in context. The paragraph doesn't just describe the epidemiological evidence; it shows how epidemiology is telling the same story as etiology. Similarly, while Version A doesn't relate to anything in particular, Version B immediately suggests that the prior paragraph addresses the biological pathway (i.e. etiology) of a disease and that the new paragraph will bolster the emerging hypothesis with a different kind of evidence. As a reader, it's easy to keep track of how the paragraph about cells and chemicals and such relates to the paragraph about populations in different places.

By clearly establishing an essential point within its analytic context, a well written key sentence gives both you and your reader a firm grasp of how each point relates. For example, compare these two sets of key sentences, each introducing a sequential paragraph:

Version A:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the cause of the disease was unclear. …

The cause of AIDS is HIV. …

There are skeptics who question whether HIV is the cause. …

Version B:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the cause of the disease was unclear, leading to a broad range of scientific speculation. …

By 1986 HIV had been isolated and found to correlate almost exactly with the incidence of AIDS. …

HIV skeptics, on the other hand, sought to discredit claims based on epidemiology by emphasizing that the pathogenesis of HIV was still unknown. …

Version A isn't wrong per se; it just illustrates a lost opportunity to show the important connections among points. Both versions portray a process unfolding over time: initial uncertainty followed by a breakthrough discovery and then controversy. Even with the same substantive points, a person reading Version A would have to work harder to see how the material in the paragraphs connects. Readers experience Version B as clearer and more engaging.

Thinking of key sentences as sequential points in an argument reminds one that a key sentence doesn't have to always be a single declarative one. Sometimes you need two sentences together to achieve the work of a key sentence, and sometimes a question or quotation does a better job than a declarative sentence in clarifying a logical sequence:

Version C:

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic the cause was unclear. Virologists, bacteriologists, immunologists, and epidemiologists all pursued different leads, reflecting their particular areas of expertise...

If drug use, lifestyle, and "immune overload" didn't cause AIDS, what did?...

"I've asked questions they apparently can't answer," claimed retrovirologist Peter Duesberg, who became an oft-quoted skeptical voice in media accounts of AIDS research in the mid-1980s. ...

Version C is based on the same three sequential points as Versions A and B: (1) the cause of AIDS was initially unclear (2) HIV was accepted as the cause (3) lone dissenters questioned the claims. However, versions B and C have much more meaning and momentum, and version C, depending on the nature of the argument, features more precise and lively stylistic choices. Opening the second paragraph with a question (that then gets answered) carries forth the sense of befuddlement that researchers initially experienced and helps to convey why the discovery of HIV was a hugely important turning point. Using the self-glorifying Duesberg quote to launch the third paragraph makes the point about lingering skepticism while also introducing a portrait of a leading figure among the skeptics. While Version B is effective as well, Version C illustrates some of the more lively choices available to academic writers.

A last thing to note about key sentences is that academic readers expect them to be at the beginning of the paragraph. That helps readers comprehend your argument. To see how, try this: find an academic piece (such as a textbook or scholarly article) that strikes you as well written and go through part of it reading just the first sentence of each paragraph. You should be able to easily follow the sequence of logic. When you're writing for professors, it is especially effective to put your key sentences first because they usually convey your own original thinking, which, as you've read here, is exactly what your instructors are looking for in your work. It's a very good sign when your paragraphs are typically composed of a telling key sentence followed by evidence and explanation.

Knowing this convention of academic writing can help you both read and write more effectively. When you're reading a complicated academic piece for the first time, you might want to go through reading only the first sentence or two of each paragraph to get the overall outline of the argument. Then you can go back and read all of it with a clearer picture of how each of the details fit in. And when you're writing, you may also find it useful to write the first sentence of each paragraph (instead of a topic-based outline) to map out a thorough argument before getting immersed in sentence-level wordsmithing. For example, compare these two scaffolds. Which one would launch you into a smoother drafting process?

Version A (Outline of Topics):

I. Granovetter's "Strength of Weak Ties"
   a. Definition
   b. Example—getting jobs
II. Creativity in Social Networks
   a. Explanation
   b. Richard Florida's argument
III. Implications
   a. For urban planners
   b. For institutions of higher education

Version B (Key-Sentence Sketch):

The importance of networking for both career development and social change is well known. Granovetter (1973) explains that weak ties—that is, ties among acquaintances—are often more useful in job hunting

because they connect job-seekers to a broader range of people and workplaces. …

Subsequent research in network analysis has shown that weak ties can promote creativity by bringing ideas together from different social realms. …

Richard Florida (2002) argues that cities would do well to facilitate weak ties in order to recruit members of the "creative class" and spur economic development. …

Florida's argument can inspire a powerful new approach to strategic planning within colleges and universities as well. …

As you can see, emphasizing key sentences in both the process and product of academic writing is one way to ensure that your efforts stay focused on developing your argument and communicating your own original thinking in a clear, logical way.

Aly Button

writing student

A good paper has cohesion. I love outlines, so I really like the idea of writing my first sentence of each paragraph as my plan. This way, you know what to write about and you know that your paper will flow easily. As a reader, this is an important characteristic to me. If the paragraphs are just jumping around in all different directions, I quickly lose interest in trying to follow along. The reader should not have to struggle to follow your paper. Flow can make the difference between an okay paper and a scholarly product.

Cohesion and Coherence

With a key sentence established, the next task is to shape the body of your paragraph to be both cohesive and coherent. As Williams and Bizup explain, cohesion is about the "sense of flow" (how each sentence fits with the next), while coherence is about the "sense of the whole." 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 the 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). 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."*

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 the 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 it makes some kind of generalization about a person, thing, or population. Defensible generalizations about society can be either probabilities (i.e., statistics) or patterns (often from qualitative analysis). Such probabilities and patterns can be temporal, spatial, or simultaneous.*

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

The Wind-Up

Some guides advise you to end each paragraph with a specific concluding sentence—in a sense, to treat each paragraph as a kind of mini-essay. But that's not a widely held convention. Most well-written academic pieces don't adhere to that structure. The last sentence of the paragraph should certainly be in your own words (as in, not a quote), but as long as the paragraph succeeds in carrying out the task that it has been assigned by its key sentence, you don't need to worry about whether that last sentence has an air of conclusiveness. For example, consider these paragraphs about the cold fusion controversy of the 1980s that appeared in a best-selling textbook:

> *The experiment seemed straightforward and there were plenty of scientists willing to try it. Many did. It was wonderful to have a simple laboratory experiment on fusion to try after decades of embarrassing attempts to control hot fusion. This effort required multi-billion dollar machines whose every success seemed to be capped with an unanticipated failure. "Cold fusion" seemed to provide, as Martin Fleischmann said during the course of that famous Utah press conference, "another route"—the route of little science.*

In that example, the first and last sentences in the paragraph are somewhat symmetrical: the authors introduce the idea of accessible science, contrast it with big science, and bring it back to the phrase "little science." Here's an example from the same chapter of the same book that does not have any particular symmetry:

> *The struggle between proponents and critics in a scientific controversy is always a struggle for credibility. When scientists make claims which are literally "incredible," as in the cold fusion case, they face an uphill struggle. The problem Pons and Fleischmann had to overcome was that they had credibility as*

> *electrochemists but not as nuclear physicists. And it was nuclear physics where their work was likely to have its main impact.*

The last sentence of the paragraph doesn't mirror the first, but the paragraph still works just fine. In general, every sentence of academic writing should add some unique content. Don't trouble yourself with having the last sentence in every paragraph serve as a mini-conclusion. Instead, worry about developing each point sufficiently and making your logical sequence clear.

Conclusion: Paragraphs as Punctuation

To reiterate the initial point, it is useful to think of paragraphs as punctuation that organize your ideas in a readable way. Each paragraph should be an irreplaceable node within a coherent sequence of logic. Thinking of paragraphs as "building blocks" evokes the "five-paragraph theme" structure: if you have identical stone blocks, it hardly matters what order they're in. In the successful organically structured college paper, the structure and tone of each paragraph reflects its indispensable role within the overall piece. These goals—making every bit count and having each part situated within the whole—also anchor the discussion later in this chapter: how to write introductions and conclusions that frame—rather than simply book-end—your analysis.

Breaking, Combining, or Beginning New Paragraphs

Like sentence length, paragraph length varies. There is no single ideal length for "the perfect paragraph." There are some general guidelines, however. Some writing handbooks or resources suggest that a paragraph should be at least three or four sentences; others suggest that 100 to 200 words is a good target to shoot for. In academic writing, paragraphs tend to be longer, while in less formal or less complex writing, such as in a newspaper, paragraphs tend to be much shorter. Two-thirds to three-fourths of a page is usually a good target length for paragraphs at your current level of college writing. If your readers can't see a paragraph break on the page, they might wonder if the paragraph is ever going to end or they might lose interest.

The most important thing to keep in mind here is that the amount of space needed to develop one idea will likely be different than the amount of space needed to develop another. So when is a paragraph complete? The answer is, when it's fully developed. The guidelines above for providing good support should help.

Some signals that it's time to end a paragraph and start a new one include the following:

You're ready to begin developing a new idea.
You want to emphasize a point by setting it apart.
You're getting ready to continue discussing the same idea but in a different way (e.g. shifting from comparison to contrast).
You notice that your current paragraph is getting too long (more than three-fourths of a page or so), and you think

your writers will need a visual break.

Some signals that you may want to combine paragraphs include the following:

You notice that some of your paragraphs appear to be short and choppy.
You have multiple paragraphs on the same topic.
You have undeveloped material that needs to be united under a clear topic.

Finally, paragraph number is a lot like paragraph length. You may have been asked in the past to write a five-paragraph essay. There's nothing inherently wrong with a five-paragraph essay, but just like sentence length and paragraph length, the number of paragraphs in an essay depends upon what's needed to get the job done. There's really no way to know that until you start writing. So try not to worry too much about the proper length and number of things. Just start writing and see where the essay and the paragraphs take you. There will be plenty of time to sort out the organization in the revision process. You're not trying to fit pegs into holes here. You're letting your ideas unfold. Give yourself—and them—the space to let that happen.

ATTRIBUTION

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4.7: Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions and Conclusions

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

In Today's World…

Those opening words—so common in student papers—represent the most prevalent misconception about introductions: that they shouldn't really say anything substantive. As you know by now, the five-paragraph format that most students mastered before coming to college suggests that introductory paragraphs should start very general and gradually narrow down to the thesis. (See chapter 33, "Constructing the Thesis and Argument from the Ground Up," for more on the five-paragraph theme.) As a result, students frequently write introductions for college papers in which the first two or three (or more) sentences are patently obvious or overly broad.

Aly Button

writing student

I started laughing when I first read this chapter because my go-to introduction for every paper was always "Throughout history…" In high school it was true—my first few sentences did not have any meaning. Now I understand it should be the exact opposite. Introductions should scream to your readers, HEY GUYS, READ THIS! I don't want my readers' eyes to glaze over before they even finish the first paragraph, do you? And how annoying is it to read a bunch of useless sentences anyways, right? Every sentence should be necessary, and you should set your papers with a good start.

Charitable and well-rested instructors just skim over that text and start reading closely when they arrive at something substantive. Frustrated and overtired instructors emit a dramatic self-pitying sigh, assuming that the whole paper will be as lifeless and gassy as those first few sentences. If you've gotten into the habit of beginning opening sentences with the following phrases, firmly resolve to strike them from your repertoire right now:

In today's world…
Throughout human history…
Since the dawn of time…
Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines [CONCEPT] as…

For one thing, sentences that begin with the first three phrases are often wrong. For example, someone may write, "Since the dawn of time, people have tried to increase crop yields." In reality, people have not been trying to increase crop yields throughout human history—agriculture is only about 23,000 years old, after all—and certainly not since the dawn of time (whenever that was). For another, sentences that start so broadly, even when factually correct, could not possibly end with anything interesting.

INTRODUCTIONS

AIM FOR SPECIFIC AND LIVELY

So what should you do? Well, start at the beginning. By that I mean, start explaining what the reader needs to know to comprehend your thesis and its importance. For example, compare the following two paragraphs:

FIVE-PARAGRAPH THEME VERSION:

> *Throughout time, human societies have had religion. Major world religions since the dawn of civilization include Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Animism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These and all other religions provide a set of moral principles, a leadership structure, and an explanation for unknown questions such as what happens after people die. Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason. However, the notion of embodied cognition is a place where physical phenomena connect with religious ones. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an embodied cognition that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state toward spiritual transcendence.*

ORGANICALLY STRUCTURED VERSION:

> *Religion is an endeavor to cultivate freedom from bodily constraints to reach a higher state of being beyond the physical constraints of reality. But how is it possible to employ a system, the human body, to transcend its own limitations? Religion and science have always had an uneasy relationship, as empiricism is stretched to explain religious phenomena, but psychology has recently added a new perspective to the discussion. Embodiment describes the interaction between humans and the environment that lays a foundation for cognition and can help explain the mechanisms that underlie*

> *religion's influence on believers. This is a rare moment where science and religion are able to coexist without the familiar controversy. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an embodied cognition that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions, in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state toward spiritual transcendence.*

In the first version, the first three sentences state well-known facts that do not directly relate to the thesis. The fourth sentence is where the action starts, though that sentence ("Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason") is still overstated: When was this the dawn of religion? And was there "science," as we now understand it, at that time? The reader has to slog through to the fifth sentence before the intro starts to develop some momentum.

Training in the five-paragraph theme format seems to have convinced some student writers that beginning with substantive material will be too abrupt for the reader. But the second example shows that a meatier beginning isn't jarring; it is actually much more engaging. The first sentence of the organic example is somewhat general, but it specifies the particular aspect of religion (transcending physical experience) that is germane to the thesis. The next six sentences lay out the ideas and concepts that explain the thesis, which is provided in the last two sentences. Overall, every sentence is needed to thoroughly frame the thesis. It is a lively paragraph in itself, and it piques the reader's interest in the author's original thinking about religion.

Sometimes a vague introductory paragraph reflects a simple, obvious thesis and a poorly thought-out paper. More often, though, a shallow introduction represents a missed opportunity to convey the writer's depth of thought from the get-go. Students adhering to the five-paragraph theme format sometimes assume that such vagueness is needed to bookend an otherwise pithy paper. As you can see from these examples, that is simply untrue. I've seen some student writers begin with a vague, high school–style intro (thinking it obligatory) and then write a wonderfully vivid and engaging introduction as their second paragraph. Other papers I've seen have an interesting, original thesis embedded in late body paragraphs that should be articulated up front and used to shape the whole body. If you must write a vague "Since the dawn of time" intro to get the writing process going, then go ahead. Just budget the time to rewrite the intro around your well-developed, arguable thesis and ensure that the body paragraphs are organized explicitly by your analytical thread.

Here are two more examples of excellent introductory paragraphs written by undergraduate students in different fields. Note how, in both cases, (1) the first sentence has real substance, (2) every sentence is indispensable to setting up the thesis, and (3) the thesis is complex and somewhat surprising. Both of these introductory paragraphs set an ambitious agenda for the paper. As a reader, it's pretty easy to imagine how the body paragraphs that follow will progress through the nuanced analysis needed to carry out the thesis.

From Davis O'Connell's "Abelard":

> *He rebelled against his teacher, formed his own rival school, engaged in a passionate affair with a teenager, was castrated, and became a monk. All in a day's work. Perhaps it's no surprise that Peter Abelard gained the title of "heretic" along the way. A twelfth-century philosopher and theologian, Abelard tended to alienate nearly everyone he met with his extremely arrogant and egotistical*

> *personality. This very flaw is what led him to start preaching to students that he had stolen from his former master, which further deteriorated his reputation. Yet despite all of the senseless things that he did, his teachings did not differ much from Christian doctrine. Although the church claimed to have branded Abelard a heretic purely because of his religious views, the other underlying reasons for these accusations involve his conceited personality, his relationship with the fourteen-year-old Heloise, and the political forces of the twelfth century.*

From Logan Skelly's "Staphylococcus aureus":

> *Bacterial resistance to antibiotics is causing a crisis in modern health care. The evolution of multidrug-resistant Staphylococcus aureus is of particular concern because of the morbidity and mortality it causes, the limited treatment options it poses, and the difficulty in implementing containment measures for its control. In order to appreciate the virulence of S. aureus and to help alleviate the problems its resistance is causing, it is important to study the evolution of antibiotic resistance in this pathogen, the mechanisms of its resistance, and the factors that may limit or counteract its evolution. It is especially important to examine how human actions are causing evolutionary changes in this bacterial species. This review will examine the historical sequence of causation that has led to antibiotic resistance in this microorganism and why natural selection favors the resistant trait. It is the goal of this review to illuminate the scope of the problem produced by antibiotic resistance in S. aureus and to illustrate the need for judicious antibiotic usage to prevent this pathogen from evolving further pathogenicity and virulence.*

If vague introductory paragraphs are bad, why were you taught them? In essence, you were taught the form so that you could later use it to deepen your thinking. By producing the five-paragraph theme over and over, it has probably become second nature for you to find a clear thesis and shape the intro paragraph around it, tasks you absolutely must accomplish in academic writing. However, you've probably been taught to proceed from "general" to "specific" in your intro and encouraged to think of "general" as "vague." At the college level, think of "general" as context: begin by explaining the conceptual, historical, or factual context that the reader needs in order to grasp the significance of the argument to come. It's not so much a structure of general-to-specific; instead, it's context-to-argument.

Conclusions

Wrap Up and Address the Implications

I confess that I still find conclusions hard to write. By the time I'm finalizing a conclusion, I'm often fatigued with the project and struggling to find something new to say that isn't a departure into a whole different realm. I also find that I have become so immersed in the subject that it seems like anything I have to say is absurdly obvious. A good conclusion is a real challenge, one that takes persistent work and some finesse.

Strong conclusions do two things: they bring the argument to a satisfying close, and they explain some of the most important implications. You've probably been taught to restate your thesis using different words, and it is true that your reader will likely appreciate a brief summary of your overall argument: say, two or three sentences for papers with fewer than twenty pages. It's perfectly fine to use what they call "metadiscourse" in this summary; metadiscourse is text like, "I have argued that…" or "This analysis reveals that…" Go ahead and use language like that if it seems useful to signal that you're restating the main points of your argument.

In shorter papers, you can usually simply reiterate the main point without that metadiscourse—for example, "What began as a protest about pollution turned into a movement for civil rights." If that's the crux of the argument, your reader will recognize a summary like that. Most of the student papers I see close the argument effectively in the concluding paragraph.

The second task of a conclusion—situating the argument within broader implications—is a lot trickier. A lot of instructors describe it as the "So what?" challenge. You've proven your point about the role of agriculture in deepening the Great Depression; so what? I don't like the "So what?" phrasing because putting writers on the defensive seems more likely to inhibit the flow of ideas than to draw them out. Instead, I suggest you imagine a friendly reader thinking, "OK, you've convinced me of your argument. I'm interested to know what you make of this conclusion. What is or should be different now that your thesis is proven?" In that sense, your reader is asking you to take your analysis one step further. That's why a good conclusion is challenging to write. You're not just coasting over the finish line.

So how do you do that? Remember that the third story of a three-story thesis situates an arguable claim within broader implications. If you've already articulated a thesis statement that does that, then you've already mapped the terrain of the conclusion. Your task then is to explain the implications you mentioned: If environmental justice really is the new civil rights movement, then how should scholars and/or activists approach it? If agricultural trends really did worsen the Great Depression, what does that mean for agricultural policy today? If your thesis, as written, is a two-story one, then you may want to revisit it after you've developed a conclusion you're satisfied with and consider including the key implication in that thesis statement. Doing so will give your paper even more momentum.

Let's look at an example to illustrate how a writer can accomplish the two goals of a conclusion:

From Logan Skelly:

> *Considering the hundreds of millions of years that S. aureus has been evolving and adapting to hostile environments, it is likely that the past seventy years of human antibiotic usage represents little more than a minor nuisance to these bacteria. Antibiotic resistance for humans, however, contributes to worldwide health, economic, and environmental problems. Multidrug-resistant S. aureus has proven itself to be a versatile and persistent pathogen that will likely continue to evolve as long as selective pressures, such as antibiotics, are introduced into the environment. While the problems associated with S. aureus have received ample attention in scientific literature, there has been little resolution of the problems this pathogen poses. If these problems are to be resolved, it is essential that infection control measures and effective treatment strategies be developed, adopted, and implemented in the future on a worldwide scale—so that the evolution of this pathogen's virulence can be curtailed and its pathogenicity can be controlled.*

Skelly's thesis is about the need to regulate antibiotic usage to mitigate antibiotic resistance. The concluding paragraph characterizes the pathogen's evolutionary history (without recapping the specifics) and then calls for an informed, well-planned, and comprehensive response.

All conclusions should achieve both tasks—closing the argument and addressing the implications—but the author can place a different emphasis on the two tasks and frame the broader implications in different ways. Writing, like any craft, challenges the creator to make these kinds of independent choices. There isn't a standard recipe for a good conclusion.

Form And Function

As I've explained, some students mistakenly believe that they should avoid detail and substance in the introductions and conclusions of academic papers. Having practiced the five-paragraph form repeatedly, that belief sometimes gets built into the writing process; students sometimes just throw together those paragraphs thinking that they don't really count as part of the analysis. Sometimes, though, student writers know that more precise and vivid intros and outros are ideal but still settle on the vague language that seems familiar, safe, and doable. Knowing the general form of academic writing (simplified in the five-paragraph theme) helps writers organize their thoughts; however, it leads some student writers to approach papers as mere fill-in-the-blank exercises.

I hope you will instead envision paper writing as a task of working through an unscripted and nuanced thought process and then sharing your work with readers. When you're engaged with the writing process, you'll find yourself deciding which substantive points belong in those introductory and concluding paragraphs rather than simply filling those paragraphs out with fluff. They should be sort of hard to write; they're the parts of the paper that express your most important ideas in the most precise ways. If you're struggling with intros and conclusions, it might be because you're approaching them in exactly the right way. Having a clear, communicative purpose will help you figure out what your reader needs to know to really understand your thinking.

Discussion Questions

1. The University of North Carolina (UNC) Writing Center recommends opening your introduction with an intriguing example, a puzzling scenario, a surprising and/or vivid anecdote, or a provocative question or quote. Which of these approaches have you used? Which would you like to try?
2. Do you write your introduction first? Or last? Or somewhere else in your process? What do you like about that approach?

Activities

1. Look at the introduction and conclusion of this chapter. Does the chapter follow its own advice? Mark the key "moves" that the author makes in both paragraphs.
2. Find some essays on plagiarism websites such as termpaperwarehouse.com, allfreeessays.com, or free-college-essays.com and evaluate the quality of their introductions and conclusions based on the principles explained in this chapter.

3. Revisit the introduction and conclusion for three of your sources from a paper you're currently writing (or from a previous paper). Do the articles follow the guidelines of this chapter? How so? How do you account for any differences?

Additional Resources

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina also offers excellent advice on writing introductions and conclusions.

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4.8: Organization and Development

Organization and Development

Patterns of organization can help your readers follow the ideas within your essay and your paragraphs, but they can also work as methods of development to help you recognize and further develop ideas and relationships in your writing. Here are some strategies that can help you with both organization and development in your essays.

Major Patterns of Organization

Read the following sentences:

1. Now take the pie out of the oven and let it cool on the stovetop.
2. Mix the dry ingredients with the liquid ingredients.
3. Set the pie crust aside while you make the filling.

How did it feel to read the above list? A bit confusing, I would guess. That's because the steps for making a pie were not well organized, and the steps don't include enough detail for us to know exactly what we should do. (Like what are the dry and liquid ingredients?) We all know that starting instructions from the beginning and giving each detailed step in the order it should happen is vital to having a good outcome, in this case a yummy pie! But it's not always so simple to know how to organize or develop ideas, and sometimes there's more than one way, which complicates things even further.

First, let's take a look at a couple of ways to think about organization.

General to Specific or Specific to General

It might be useful to think about organizing your topic like a triangle:

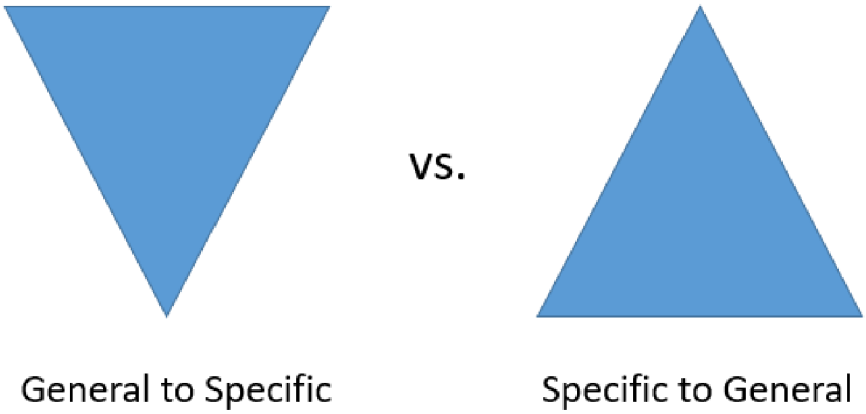


Figure 4.8.1. General to Specific and Specific to General Organization

The first triangle represents starting with the most general, big picture information first, moving then to more detailed and often more personal information later in the paper. The second triangle represents an organizational structure that starts with the specific, small scale information first and then moves to the more global, big picture stuff.

For example, if your topic is air pollution in Portland, Oregon, an essay that uses the general-to-specific organizational structure might begin this way:

> Many people consider Portland, Oregon, to be an environmentally friendly, pollution-free place to live. They would be shocked to know how many pollutants are in the air causing a multitude of health problems in Portland's citizens.

An essay that uses the specific-to-general structure might start like this:

> When Nancy moved to Portland, Oregon, with her husband and two kids, she expected to find a clean, pollution-free city. She was shocked and angered when her daughter was diagnosed with asthma caused by air pollution.

What's the difference between these two introductions? And how might they appeal to the intended audience for this essay (Portland voters) in different ways? The first introduction is looking at the big picture of the problem and mentions pollution's impact on all citizens in Portland, while the second introduction focuses on one specific family. The first helps readers see how vast the problem really is, and the second helps connect readers to a real family, making an emotional appeal from the very beginning. Neither introduction is necessarily better. You'll choose one over the other based on the kind of tone you'd like to create and how you'd like to affect your audience. It's completely up to you to make this decision.

Does the Triangle Mean the Essay Keeps Getting More Specific or More Broad until the Very End?

The triangle is kind of a general guide, meaning you're allowed to move around within it all you want.

For example, it's possible that each of your paragraphs will be its own triangle, starting with the general or specific and moving out or in. However, if you begin very broadly, it might be effective to end your essay in a more specific, personal way. And if you begin with a personal story, consider ending your essay by touching on the global impact and importance of your topic.

Are There Other Ways to Think about Organizing My Ideas?

Yes! Rather than thinking about which of your ideas are most specific or personal or which are more broad or universal, you might consider one of the following ways of organizing your ideas:

- Most important information first (consider what you want readers to focus on first)
- Chronological order (the order in time that events take place)
- Compare and contrast (ideas are organized together because of their relationship to each other)

The section on Methods of Development, below, offers more detail about some of these organizational patterns, along with some others.

Methods of Development

The methods of development covered here are best used as ways to look at what's already happening in your draft and to consider how you might emphasize or expand on any existing patterns. You might already be familiar with some of these patterns because teachers will sometimes assign them as the purpose for writing an essay. For example, you might have been asked to write a cause-and-effect essay or a comparison-and-contrast essay.

It's important to emphasize here that patterns of organization or methods of developing content usually happen naturally as a consequence of the way the writer engages with and organizes information while writing. That is to say, most writers don't sit down and say, "I think I'll write a cause-and-effect essay today." Instead, a writer might be more likely to be interested in a topic, say, the state of drinking water in the local community, and as the writer begins to explore the topic, certain cause-and-effect relationships between environmental pollutants and the community water supply may begin to emerge.

So if these patterns just occur naturally in writing, what's the use in knowing about them? Well, sometimes you might be revising a draft and notice that some of your paragraphs are a bit underdeveloped. Maybe they lack a clear topic, or maybe they lack support. In either case, you can look to these common methods of development to find ways to sharpen those vague topics or to add support where needed. Do you have a clear cause statement somewhere but you haven't explored the effects? Are you lacking detail somewhere where a narrative story or historical chronology can help build reader interest and add support? Are you struggling to define an idea that might benefit from some comparison or contrast? Read on to consider some of the ways that these strategies can help you in revision. And if you want to learn more, check out what the *New York Times* has to say in their learning blog article "Compare-Contrast, Cause-Effect, Problem Solution: Common 'Text Types' in The Times"

Cause and Effect (or Effect and Cause)

Do you see a potential cause-and-effect relationship developing in your draft? The cause-and-effect pattern may be used to identify one or more causes followed by one or more effects or results. Or you may reverse this sequence and describe effects first and then the cause or causes. For example, the causes of water pollution might be followed by its effects on both humans and animals. You may use obvious transitions to clarify cause and effect, such as "What are the results? Here are some of them…," or you might simply use the words *cause*, *effect*, and *result* to cue the reader about the relationships that you're establishing.

Here's an example article from the *New York Times*, "Rough Times Take Bloom Off a New Year's Rite, the Rose Parade", that explores the cause and effect relationship between Pasadena's budgetary challenges and the ability of their Rose Parade floats to deck themselves out in full bloom.

Problem-Solution

At some point does your essay explore a problem or suggest a solution? The problem-solution pattern is commonly used in identifying something that's wrong and in contemplating what might be done to remedy the situation. There are probably more ways to organize a problem-solution approach, but here are three possibilities:

- Describe the problem, followed by the solution.
- Propose the solution first and then describe the problems that motivated it.
- Or a problem may be followed by several solutions, one of which is selected as the best.

When the solution is stated at the end of the paper, the pattern is sometimes called the delayed proposal. For a hostile audience, it may be effective to describe the problem, show why other solutions do not work, and finally suggest the favored solution. You can emphasize the words problem and solution to signal these sections of your paper for your reader.

Here's an example article from the *New York Times*, "Monks Embrace Web to Reach Recruits", that highlights an unexpected approach by a group of Benedictine monks in Rhode Island; they've turned to social media to grow their dwindling membership. Monks on Facebook? Who knew?

Chronology or Narrative

Do you need to develop support for a topic where telling a story can illustrate some important concept for your readers? Material arranged chronologically is explained as it occurs in time. A chronological or narrative method of development might help you find a way to add both interest and content to your essay. Material arranged chronologically is explained as it occurs in time. This pattern may be used to establish what has happened. Chronology or narrative can be a great way to introduce your essay by providing a background or

history behind your topic. Or you may want to tell a story to develop one or more points in the body of your essay. You can use transitional words like then, next, and finally to make the parts of the chronology clear.

Here's an example article from the Center for Media Literacy (originally published in the journal *Media & Values*): "From Savers to Spenders: How Children Became a Consumer Market". To encourage his readers to think about why and how children are being marketed to by advertisers, the author uses a historical chronology of how the spending habits of children changed over a number of decades.

Comparison and Contrast

Are you trying to define something? Do you need your readers to understand what something is and what it is not? The comparison-and-contrast method of development is particularly useful in extending a definition, or anywhere you need to show how a subject is like or unlike another subject. For example, the statement is often made that drug abuse is a medical problem instead of a criminal justice issue. An author might attempt to prove this point by comparing drug addiction to AIDS, cancer, or heart disease to redefine the term "addiction" as a medical problem. A statement in opposition to this idea could just as easily establish contrast by explaining all the ways that addiction is different from what we traditionally understand as an illness. In seeking to establish comparison or contrast in your writing, some words or terms that might be useful are by contrast, in comparison, while, some, and others.

Here's an example article from the *New York Times'* India Ink blog: "Who Wants to Shop in a Big Box Store, Anyway?". The author explores some interesting differences between the average American and average Indian consumer to contemplate the potential success of big box stores in India and also to contemplate why these giant big box corporations, like Walmart or Target, might have to rethink their business model.

These four methods of development—cause and effect, problem-solution, chronology or narrative, and comparison and contrast—are just a few ways to organize and develop ideas and content in your essays. It's important to note that they should not be a starting point for writers who want to write something authentic—something that they care deeply about. Instead, they can be a great way to help you look for what's already happening with your topic or in a draft, to help you to write more, or to help you reorganize some parts of an essay that seem to lack connection or feel disjointed. Look for organizational patterns when you're reading work by professional writers. Notice where they combine strategies (e.g., a problem-solution pattern that uses cause-and-effect organization, or a comparison-contrast pattern that uses narrative or chronology to develop similarities or differences). Pay attention to how different writers emphasize and develop their main ideas, and use what you find to inspire you in your own writing. Better yet, work on developing completely new patterns of your own.

Activities

Choose one of the following topics, and practice writing a few opening sentences using the general-to-specific format and once using the specific-to-general.

- Which do you like better? What audience would be attracted to which one?

- Share with peers to see how others tackled this challenge.
- How would you rewrite their sentences? Why?
- Discuss your changes and listen to how your peers have revised your sentences.

Taking in other people's ideas will help you see new ways to approach your own writing and thinking.

Topics:

- Facing fears
- Safety in sports
- Community policing
- Educating prisoners
- Sex education
- A book or movie that impacted you
- One thing you would change about your community
- Beauty standards
- Toxic masculinity
- How the media affects identity formation
- Gender roles
- Race in America
- The value of art in society
- Travel as part of a well-rounded education
- Drugs and alcohol
- Advice to new parents
- Advice to teachers
- The value of making mistakes
- How you'd spend a million dollars
- What a tough day at work taught you about yourself or others

ATTRIBUTION

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4.9: Transitions

Transitions

So you have a main idea, and you have supporting ideas, but how can you be sure that your readers will understand the relationships between them? How are the ideas tied to each other? One way to emphasize these relationships is through the use of clear transitions between ideas. Like every other part of your essay, transitions have a job to do. They form logical connections between the ideas presented in an essay or paragraph, and they give readers clues that reveal how you want them to think about (process, organize, or use) the topics presented.

Why Are Transitions Important?

Transitions signal the order of ideas, highlight relationships, unify concepts, and let readers know what's coming next or remind them about what's already been covered. When instructors or peers comment that your writing is choppy, abrupt, or needs to "flow better," those are some signals that you might need to work on building some better transitions into your writing. If a reader comments that she's not sure how something relates to your thesis or main idea, a transition is probably the right tool for the job.

When Is the Right Time to Build In Transitions?

There's no right answer to this question. Sometimes transitions occur spontaneously, but just as often (or maybe even more often) good transitions are developed in revision. While drafting, we often write what we think, sometimes without much reflection about how the ideas fit together or relate to one another. If your thought process jumps around a lot (and that's okay), it's more likely that you will need to pay careful attention to reorganization and to providing solid transitions as you revise.

When you're working on building transitions into an essay, consider the essay's overall organization. Consider using reverse outlining and other organizational strategies presented in this text to identify key ideas in your essay and to get a clearer look at how the ideas can be best organized. See the "Reverse Outlining" section in the "Revision" portion of this text, for a great strategy to help you assess what's going on in your essay and to help you see what topics and organization are developing. This can help you determine where transitions are needed.

Let's take some time to consider the importance of transitions at the sentence level and transitions between paragraphs.

Sentence-Level Transitions

Transitions between sentences often use “connecting words” to emphasize relationships between one sentence and another. A friend and coworker suggests the “something old something new” approach, meaning that the idea behind a transition is to introduce something new while connecting it to something old from an earlier point in the essay or paragraph. Here are some examples of ways that writers use connecting words (indicated by **bolded text**) to show connections between ideas in adjacent sentences:

To Show Similarity

When I was growing up, my mother taught me to say “please” and “thank you” as one small way that I could show appreciation and respect for others. **In the same way**, I have tried to impress the importance of manners on my own children.

Other connecting words that show similarity include **also**, **similarly**, and **likewise**.

To Show Contrast

Some scientists take the existence of black holes for granted; **however**, in 2014, a physicist at the University of North Carolina claimed to have mathematically proven that they do not exist.

Other connecting words that show contrast include **in spite of**, **on the other hand**, **in contrast**, and **yet**.

To Exemplify

The cost of college tuition is higher than ever, so students are becoming increasingly motivated to keep costs as low as possible. **For example**, a rising number of students are signing up to spend their first two years at a less costly community college before transferring to a more expensive four-year school to finish their degrees.

Other connecting words that show examples include **for instance**, **specifically**, and **to illustrate**.

To Show Cause and Effect

Where previously painters had to grind and mix their own dry pigments with linseed oil inside their studios, in the 1840s, new innovations in pigments allowed paints to be premixed in tubes. **Consequently**, this new technology facilitated the practice of painting outdoors and was a crucial tool for impressionist painters, such as Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, and Cassatt.

Other connecting words that show cause and effect include **therefore**, **so**, and **thus**.

To Show Additional Support

When choosing a good trail bike, experts recommend 120–140 millimeters of suspension travel; that's the amount that the frame or fork is able to flex or compress. **Additionally**, they recommend a 67–69 degree head-tube angle, as a steeper head-tube angle allows for faster turning and climbing.

Other connecting words that show additional support include **also**, **besides**, **equally important**, and **in addition**.

A Word of Caution

Single-word or short-phrase transitions can be helpful to signal a shift in ideas within a paragraph, rather than between paragraphs (see the discussion below about transitions between paragraphs). But it's also important to understand that these types of transitions shouldn't be frequent within a paragraph. As with anything else that happens in your writing, they should be used when they feel natural and feel like the right choice. Here are some examples to help you see the difference between transitions that feel like they occur naturally and transitions that seem forced and make the paragraph awkward to read:

Too Many Transitions:

The Impressionist painters of the late 19th century are well known for their visible brush strokes, for their ability to convey a realistic sense of light, and for their everyday subjects portrayed in 106 The Word on College Reading and Writing outdoor settings. **In spite of this fact**, many casual admirers of their work are unaware of the scientific innovations that made it possible for this movement in art to take place. **Then**, in 1841, an American painter named John Rand invented the collapsible paint tube. **To illustrate the importance of this invention**, pigments previously had to be ground and mixed in a fairly complex process that made it difficult for artists to travel with them. **For example**, the mixtures were commonly stored in pieces of pig bladder to keep the paint from drying out. **In addition**, when working with their palettes, painters had to puncture the bladder, squeeze out some paint, and then mend the bladder again to keep the rest of the paint mixture from drying out. **Thus**, Rand's collapsible tube freed the painters from these cumbersome and messy processes, allowing artists to be more mobile and to paint in the open air.

Subtle Transitions that Aid Reader Understanding:

The Impressionist painters of the late 19th century are well known for their visible brush strokes, for their ability to convey a realistic sense of light, for their everyday subjects portrayed in outdoor settings. **However**, many casual admirers of their work are unaware of the scientific innovations that made it possible for this movement in art to take place. In 1841, an American painter named John Rand invented the collapsible paint tube. **Before this invention**, pigments had to be ground and mixed in a fairly complex process that made it difficult for artists to travel with them. The mixtures were commonly stored in pieces of pig bladder to keep the paint from drying out. When working with their palettes, painters had to puncture the bladder, squeeze

out some paint, and then mend the bladder again to keep the rest of the paint mixture from drying out. Rand's collapsible tube freed the painters from these cumbersome and messy processes, allowing artists to be more mobile and to paint in the open air.

Transitions between Paragraphs and Sections

It's important to consider how to emphasize the relationships not just between sentences but also between paragraphs in your essay. Here are a few strategies to help you show your readers how the main ideas of your paragraphs relate to each other and also to your thesis.

Use Signposts

Signposts are words or phrases that indicate where you are in the process of organizing an idea; for example, signposts might indicate that you are introducing a new concept, that you are summarizing an idea, or that you are concluding your thoughts. Some of the most common signposts include words and phrases like first, then, next, finally, in sum, and in conclusion. Be careful not to overuse these types of transitions in your writing. Your readers will quickly find them tiring or too obvious. Instead, think of more creative ways to let your readers know where they are situated within the ideas presented in your essay. You might say, "The first problem with this practice is…" Or you might say, "The next thing to consider is…" Or you might say, "Some final thoughts about this topic are…"

Use Forward-Looking Sentences at the Ends of Paragraphs

Sometimes, as you conclude a paragraph, you might want to give your readers a hint about what's coming next. For example, imagine that you're writing an essay about the benefits of trees to the environment and you've just wrapped up a paragraph about how trees absorb pollutants and provide oxygen. You might conclude with a forward-looking sentence like this: "Trees' benefits to local air quality are important, but surely they have more to offer our communities than clean air." This might conclude a paragraph (or series of paragraphs) and then prepare your readers for additional paragraphs to come that cover the topics of trees' shade value and ability to slow water evaporation on hot summer days. This transitional strategy can be tricky to employ smoothly. Make sure that the conclusion of your paragraph doesn't sound like you're leaving your readers hanging with the introduction of a completely new or unrelated topic.

Use Backward-Looking Sentences at the Beginnings of Paragr

Rather than concluding a paragraph by looking forward, you might instead begin a paragraph by looking back. Continuing with the example above of an essay about the value of trees, let's think about how we might begin a new paragraph or section by first taking a moment to look back. Maybe you just concluded a paragraph on the topic of trees' ability to decrease soil erosion and you're getting ready to talk about how they provide habitats for urban wildlife. Beginning the opening of a new paragraph

or section of the essay with a backward-looking transition might look something like this: “While their benefits to soil and water conservation are great, the value that trees provide to our urban wildlife also cannot be overlooked.”

Evaluating Transitions for Predictability or Conspicuousness

Finally, the most important thing about transitions is that you don’t want them to become repetitive or too obvious. Reading your draft aloud is a great revision strategy for so many reasons, and revising your essay for transitions is no exception to this rule. If you read your essay aloud, you’re likely to hear the areas that sound choppy or abrupt. This can help you make note of areas where transitions need to be added. Repetition is another problem that can be easier to spot if you read your essay aloud. If you notice yourself using the same transitions over and over again, take time to find some alternatives. And if the transitions frequently stand out as you read aloud, you may want to see if you can find some subtler strategies.

Activities

Choose an essay or piece of writing, either that you’re currently working on, or that you’ve written in the past.

1. Identify your major topics or main ideas.
2. Then, using this chapter, develop at least three examples of sentence-level transitions and at least two examples of paragraph-level transitions.
3. Share and discuss with your classmates in small groups, and choose one example of each type from your group to share with the whole class. If you like the results, you might use them to revise your writing. If not, try some other strategies.

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CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH AND INFORMATION LITERACY

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5.1: Research Should Start with Questions, not Answers

Research Should Start with Questions, not Answers

Emily A. Wierszewski

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Our collective belief in the importance of definite answers impacts many areas of our lives, including how we understand the process and purpose of research. Specifically, it leads to a thesis-first research model in which research is only used to verify our existing ideas or theses. In this model, there is no room for doubt or ambiguity. We assume we need to know the answers to our problems or questions before the process gets underway before we consult and evaluate what others have said.

Research can be productively used in this way to verify assumptions and arguments. Sometimes what we need is just a little support for an idea, a confirmation of the best approach to a problem, or the answer to simple questions. For example, we might believe the new iPhone is the best smartphone on the market and use research on the phone's specs to prove we're right. This kind of thesis-first approach to research becomes harmful, however, when we assume that it is the only or the most valuable way to conduct research.

Evidence of this widespread assumption is easy to find. A simple search for the research process on Google will yield multiple hits hosted by academic institutions that suggest a researcher needs a thesis early in the research process. For instance, the University of Maryland University College's Online Guide to Writing and Research suggests that a thesis should be developed as soon as source collection gets underway, though that thesis may change over time. This strategy is endorsed by multiple research library websites, such as the University of Minnesota.

And yet genuine inquiry—the kind of research that often leads to new ideas and important choices—tends to begin with unsettled problems and questions rather than with thesis statements and predetermined answers. Wernher von Braun, an engineer whose inventions advanced the US space program in the mid-twenty-first century, famously describes research as "What I'm doing when I don't know what I'm doing" (qtd. in Pfeiffer 238).

The understanding of research as discovery is echoed in the recent "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," a document authored by the Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL). They write that research often begins with open-ended questions that are "based on information gaps or reexamination of existing, possibly conflicting, information" (7). In other words, research isn't just for

backing up our hunches. It can, and should, also be used as a method of investigating areas of uncertainty, curiosity, conflict, and multiple perspectives.

As the ACRL's framework also emphasizes, when researchers review published source material around their topic, points of disagreement will be discovered; these points are expected as scholars propose ideas to address complicated issues. When we are open to selecting and engaging with these multiple published perspectives in our research, we're also forced to consider how they extend or challenge our beliefs and ideas about a topic. Considering all sides, we can then make a more informed decision about our questions or topics.

Another potential harm of the thesis-first model of research is the attendant assumption that the research process is linear. In a thesis-guided research process, a question is posed, an answer is generated, and sources are found that match up with that answer. Truthfully, research rarely progresses on an uncluttered path toward a clear solution. Instead, research is a recursive process that involves many diversions, bumps, and missteps.

Research is sometimes described as cyclical and fluid. As we research, we may find ourselves returning to and changing our question, or we may near the end of a project and think we're done but discover we need to go back to find more or better sources. The messiness of research requires us to be flexible, often modifying our approaches along the way. When we enter the research process with a narrow and rigid focus on our thesis, we can become discouraged and inclined to abandon our ideas when the research process does not unfold neatly.

In place of a thesis-first model, we would be better served to begin research with a question or a statement of a problem. We should conduct research not just to back up our preexisting assumptions and prove we're right about something but also when we feel curious or confused and do not have answers. Why is something the way it is? Why doesn't the data quite add up? How could something be changed for the better?

When we understand research as a process of discovery rather than a process of proof, we open ourselves up to be changed by our research—to better our lives, our decisions, and our world. We acknowledge that we do not have the only or the best answer to every question and that we might learn something from considering the ideas of others. While research definitely has the power to impact our lives and beliefs, research doesn't always have to be life altering. But in a thesis-first model where our only goal is just to prove we're right, there is no possibility of being changed by our research.

Here's a practical example of the difference. Just imagine the results of a research process beginning with a thesis like "Human trafficking should have harsher legal penalties" versus one that starts with an open-ended question like "Why does human trafficking persist in the democratic nation of the United States?" In the thesis-first model, a researcher would likely only encounter sources that argue for their preexisting belief: that harsher penalties are needed. They would probably never be exposed to multiple perspectives on this complex issue, and the result would just be confirmation of their earlier beliefs.

However, a researcher who begins with an open-ended question motivated by curiosity, whose goal is not to prove anything but to discover salient ideas about a human rights issue, has the chance to explore different thoughts about human trafficking and come to her own conclusions as she researches why it's a problem and what ought to be done to stop it, not just create stronger consequences for it.

Viewing research as a process of discovery allows us to accept that not every question is answerable and that questions sometimes lead only to more questions. For instance, the researcher in the previous paragraph

exploring the issue of human trafficking might find that there is no clear, single explanation for the prevalence of this human rights violation and that she's interested to know more about the role of immigration laws and human trafficking—something she never even thought of before she did her research.

When researchers do discover answers, they may find those answers are fluid and debatable. What we have at any time is only a consensus between informed parties, and at any time, new research or insights can cause that agreement to shift. As we read in chapter 17, the philosopher and literary critic Kenneth Burke (1897–1993) explains the constructed nature of knowledge as an unending conversation. According to Burke, the moment in which a researcher reads and participates in scholarship around the research topic or problem is just a speck on a continuum of conversation that has been ongoing well before the researcher thought of the question and will continue long after the researcher has walked away from it. As Burke writes, "The discussion is interminable" (110).

So how can we move toward embracing uncertainty? In his book A More Beautiful Question, Warren Berger suggests that parents and those who work with young children can foster curiosity by welcoming questions. Parents also need to learn to be comfortable with saying "I don't know" in response rather than searching for a simple answer. Berger also recommends that as children go through school, parents and educators can work together to support children's questioning nature rather than always privileging definite answers. When students graduate and move into the working world, employers can encourage them to ask questions about policies, practices, and workplace content; employees should be given the freedom to explore those questions with research, which can potentially lead to more sustainable and current policies, practices, and content. The same goes for civic and community life, where any form of questioning or inquiry is often misconstrued as a challenge to authority. To value questions more than answers in our personal and professional lives requires a cultural shift.

Although our culture would tell us that we have to know everything and that we should even begin a research project by knowing the answer to our question, there is obvious value in using research as a tool to engage our curiosity and sense of wonder as human beings—perhaps even to improve our lives or the lives of others. If all researchers started the process with preconceived answers, no new findings would ever come to be. In order to truly learn about a topic or issue, especially when it involves important decision-making, we need to learn to embrace uncertainty and feel comfortable knowing we might not always have an answer when we begin a research project.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe your typical research process for previous classes or papers. Was this thesis-first or inquiry-based research? What were the benefits or drawbacks of this approach? What led you to that method?
2. Imagine you had all the time in the world to research a topic that you were personally passionate about. How might your approach to research be different than in a class?
3. What does Werner von Braun mean when he says that research is "what I'm doing when I don't know what I'm doing"? Have you experienced this version of research, either in writing a paper or in another context?

Activities

1. Go down a “rabbit hole” with your research. Use your curiosity to guide you in this inquiry-based research activity.
2. Start at a Wikipedia page related to your topic. (If you don’t have a topic, try “organic farming,” “Israel,” “CRISPR,” “American Sign Language,” or something else.)
3. Read the page, but follow your interest, and click through to other pages as you go. Spend ten to fifteen minutes following your interest from one topic to the next. Sometimes you might backtrack or search other terms—that’s OK too.
4. Reflect on the process. Where did you start? Where did you end up? How did you feel as you were reading, and how did it compare with your typical research experience for a class project? What did this process suggest about inquiry-based learning?
5. Individually or as a class, brainstorm potential research questions for a topic of your choice. Discuss the range of options you came up with. How did this approach lead you in new directions?

Additional Resources

- For additional information about the power and purpose of inquiry in our everyday lives, consult Warren Berger’s book *A More Beautiful Question* (Bloomsbury), which provides an overview of how to engage in authentic inquiry in a variety of settings. Berger offers practical advice for learning to develop research questions that are driven by discovery and innovation. Robert Davis and Mark Shadle also provide a defense of inquiry in their article “‘Building a Mystery’: Alternative Research Writing and the Academic Art of Seeking” (*College Composition and Communication*).
- For more specific information about all of the stages of the research process, including formulating a question, Bruce Ballenger’s classic guide to research, *The Curious Researcher* (Longman), and Ken Macrorie’s canonical text *I Search* (Boynton/Cook), which focuses on research with personal value, may be useful. Clark College Libraries’ website also provides a quick reference chart outlining the research process entitled “The Research Process Daisy.”
- Wendy Bishop and Pavel Zemliansky’s edited collection, *The Subject Is Research: Processes and Practices* (Boynton/Cook), provides perspectives from multiple authors about various research techniques such as interviewing and observation that can be used to engage in the inquiry process.

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ATTRIBUTION

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5.2: Finding a Research Question

Finding a Research Question

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

We live in an age of immediate answers. Although we have not achieved parity in access to technology worldwide, information has never been easier to uncover. This is, of course, a double-edged sword: the proliferation of ideas due to the technological revolution enables new kinds of learning but also has fundamentally changed the way we think and interact.

One of my friends refers to his iPhone as the "Wonder Killer": because he has such quick access to answers through the miniature computer he carries everywhere, the experience of sustained curiosity is now very rare in his life. All kinds of questions are easily answered by googling "Who was that guy in *Back to the Future Part II*?" or "Do spiders hibernate?" or by taking a brief crawl through Wikipedia: "How has globalization impacted Bhutan's economy?" "What life experiences influenced Frida Kahlo's painting?" But the answers to these questions, though easily discovered, paint a very one-dimensional portrait of human knowledge.

For scientists and writers alike, the spirit of curiosity motivates at once individual learning and also the growth and progress of our collective knowledge. Your innate ability to be curious puts you in the league of the most brilliant and prolific scholars—people who were driven by questions, seeking to interrogate the world around them.

In this section, I add my voice to the chorus of writing teachers whose rallying cry is a renewed investment in curiosity. Hopefully, you too will embrace inquisitive fascination by rejecting easy answers and using writing as a means of discovery.

Inquiry-Based Research

It's possible that you've already written research papers by this point in your academic career. If your experience has been like mine, writing these papers went one of two ways:

1. The teacher assigns a specific topic for you to research, and sometimes even a specific thesis for you to prove.
2. The teacher provides more freedom, allowing students to choose a topic at their own discretion or from a set of options.

In both situations, my teacher expected me to figure out what I wanted to argue, then find research to back me up. I was expected to have a fully formed stance on an issue, then use my sources to explain and support that stance. Not until graduate school did I encounter inquiry-based research, which inverts this sequence.

Put simply, inquiry-based research refers to research and research writing that is motivated by curiosity rather than a teacher's requirement.

A Comparison of Research Styles

Table 5.2.1. Inquiry-Based and Non-Inquiry-Based Research

Non-inquiry-based research	Inquiry-based research
Your research begins with an answer and seeks out evidence that confirms that answer.	Your research begins with a question, reviews all the evidence available, and then develops that answer.
For example, a murder occurs, and I get a bad vibe from the butler. I look for all the clues that confirm that the butler did it; assuming I find what I need, I can declare that the butler did it.	For example, a murder occurs. I look for as many clues as I can, then determine the most likely culprit based on that evidence.

It's quite possible that the butler did do it, and both logical processes might lead me to the same conclusion. However, an inquiry-based investigation allows more consideration for the possibility that the butler is innocent.

Consider the difference this can make: if research is about **learning**, then an inquiry-based perspective is essential. If you only seek out the ideas that agree with you, you will never learn.

Even in the event that the investigation yields the same answers, their differences are crucial. When we only look for answers that agree with our preexisting ideas, we are more likely to ignore other important ideas, voices, and possibilities. Most importantly, **confirmation bias** inhibits genuine learning, which relies on challenging, expanding, and complicating our current knowledge and world views.

Consequently, inquiry-based research is time-consuming and intensive: instead of only dealing with evidence that supports a certain answer or perspective, it requires the reasoner to encounter a great diversity of evidence and answers, which can be difficult to sift through.

This distinction has important implications for the kind of research and research writing for which this book advocates.

- You don't have to—shouldn't, in fact—have a thesis set in stone before starting your thesis, but you

must be tremendously flexible: be prepared to pivot, qualify, nuance, or entirely change your answer as you proceed.

- In order to pursue your research question, you will need to encounter *a lot* of sources. Not all of the sources you encounter will make it into your paper, which is a new practice for some students. This is a time-consuming process, but it leads to more significant learning, more complex thinking, and more interesting and effective rhetoric.

Developing A Research Question

Finding a conversation that you're excited about and genuinely interested in is the first and most important step. As you develop a topic, keep in mind that pursuing your curiosities and passions will make your research process less arduous, more relevant, and more pleasant. Such an approach will also naturally improve the quality of your writing: the interest you have for a topic will come across in the construction of your sentences and your willingness to pursue multiple lines of thought about a topic. An author's boredom results in a boring paper, and an author's enthusiasm translates to enthusiastic writing.

Depending on the parameters your teacher has set, your research topic might need to (1) present a specific viewpoint, (2) focus on a specific topic, or (3) focus on a certain theme or set of ideas. It's also possible that your teacher will allow complete autonomy for one or all of your research assignments. Be sure you review any materials your instructor provides and ask clarifying questions to make sure your topic fits the guidelines of their assignment.

To generate ideas, identify areas of interest, then develop questions of all sizes and types. Eventually, you will zero in on a question or combination of questions as your path of inquiry.

What makes for a good research question or path of inquiry? Of course, the answer to this question will depend on your rhetorical situation. However, there are some common characteristics of a good research question in any situation:

1. **It is answerable but not easily answerable.**

   Engaging and fruitful research questions require complex, informed answers. However, they shouldn't be so subjective, intricate, or expansive that they simply cannot be answered in the scope of your rhetorical situation.

2. **It is specific.**

   By establishing parameters on your scope, you can be sure your research is directed and relevant.

3. **It matters to someone.**

   Research questions and the rhetoric they inform are valuable only because they have stakes: even if it's a small demographic, the answers to your research question should impact someone.

4. **It allows you to say something new or unique.**

   As discussed earlier in this chapter, inquiry-based research should encourage you to articulate a unique standpoint by synthesizing many different voices, interpreted from your individual perspective, with your life experiences and ideas. What you say doesn't have to be groundbreaking, but it shouldn't just

reiterate ideas, arguments, histories, or perspectives.

It is difficult to find a question that hits all these marks on your first try. As you proceed through research, prewriting, drafting, and revising, you should refine and adjust your question(s). Just like any other part of writing, developing a path of inquiry is iterative: you've got to take a lot of chances and work your way toward different results.

Working Questions

In order to find the best version of your research question, you should develop "working questions"—questions of all sizes and types that are pertinent to your subject. As you can see below, you can start with a handful of simple working questions that will eventually lead to a viable research question.

Revising Simple Questions into Research Questions

Table 5.2.2. Chart showing the steps of revising a research question from working question to research question.

Beginning interest	Working question	Working research question	Revised research question
Vietnamese food and culture	What do people eat in Vietnam? *Too easy to answer; low stakes; not specific enough.*	What does Vietnamese food reflect about Vietnamese culture? *Higher stakes, more specific.*	How does Vietnamese cuisine reflect a history of colonialism? *More complex answers, higher stakes, very specific.*
Health	Are people in the United States more obese than they used to be? *Too straightforward, not specific enough.*	Have obesity rates increased in the United States over the last one hundred years? *More specific.*	Is there a correlation between obesity rates and economic instability in the United States over the last one hundred years? *More complex answers, higher stakes, very specific.*

Beginning interest	Working question	Working research question	Revised research question
World religion	What is the role of religion in the Middle East? *Not specific enough; difficult to answer in depth.*	How has religion influenced politics in the Middle East in the last fifty years? *More specific, easier to answer.*	How has religion's influence on government impacted the day-to-day lives of Qatari citizens? *Very specific, higher stakes, more complex answers.*

As you hone your path of inquiry, you may need to zoom in or out in terms of scope: depending on your rhetorical situation, you will need different degrees of focus. Just like narration, research writing benefits from a careful consideration of scope. Often, a narrower scope is easier to work with than a broader scope—you will be able to write more and write better if your question asks for more complex thinking.

It's important to be flexible throughout your research project. Be prepared to pivot topics, adjust your research question, change your opinions, and confront unanticipated challenges.

As you build a working knowledge of your topic, you might complicate or narrow your working questions. Gradually, try to articulate a research question (or combination of questions). Remember to be flexible as you research though: you might need to pivot, adjust, refocus, or replace your research question as you learn more.

Consider this imaginary case study as an example of this process:

Ahmed began his project by identifying the following areas of interest: racism in the US, technology in medicine and health care, and independent filmmaking. After doing some freewriting and preliminary research on each, he decided he wanted to learn more about racially motivated police violence. He developed working questions:

- Are police officers likely to make judgments about citizens based on their race?
- Have police forces instituted policies to avoid racism?
- Who is most vulnerable to police violence?
- Why does it seem like police officers target people of color? Who is responsible for overseeing the police?

He realized that he needed to narrow his focus to develop a more viable path of inquiry, eventually ending up with the following research question:

- Over the last thirty years, what populations are most likely to experience police violence in the US?

However, after completing more research, Ahmed discovered that his answers came pretty

readily: young Black men are significantly more vulnerable to be victims of police violence. He realized that he was not really saying anything new, so he had to tweak his path of inquiry.

Ahmed did some more freewriting and dug around to find a source that disagreed with him or added a new layer to his answers. He discovered eventually that there are a handful of police organizations that have made genuine efforts to confront racism in their practices. Despite the widespread and normalized violence enacted against people of color, these groups were working against racial violence. He reoriented his research question to be the following:

- Have antiracist police training and strategies been effective in reducing individual or institutional racism over the last thirty years?

Discussion Questions

1. What was the last thing you were truly curious about? How did you find more information about it? What was the last thing that pulled you down an internet rabbit hole?
2. How would you adapt the following question so that it leads to further inquiry and analysis rather than the straightforward reporting of facts? "How can the average consumer reduce their carbon emissions?"

Activities

1. Brainstorming. Create a catalog of topics you are personally curious about—things that you want to learn more about. These don't have to be revolutionary things right away; it's more important that they're meaningful to you.
   a. First, choose three of the following broad topic headings: politics, science and technology, food, sports, music and art, other cultures and nations, social justice, the environment and sustainability, health and disease, business and economy, education. On your first sheet of a three-column paper, write those three topic headings.
   b. Next, underneath each topic heading, write bulleted lists of as many subtopics or related ideas that come to mind that interest you. (Try not to censor yourself here—the idea is to generate a large number of bullet points. To some extent, this is an exercise in free association: What are the first things that come to mind when you think of each topic?) Spend ten to fifteen minutes on your lists.
   c. Read over your lists, making note especially of items that surprised you. Choose the three items from the full page that most interest you. You can choose one from each column, three from the same, or any combination of lists, so long as you have three items that you care about.
2. Idea generation: Internet stumbling. In addition to its status as an ever-expanding repository of knowledge and in addition to its contributions to global human connection, the internet is also an exceptional free-association machine. Through the magic of hyperlinks and social media, random chance can set us in the right direction to develop a research topic.

   Spend fifteen to twenty minutes clicking around on the internet, using one of the following media for guidance, and jot down every potential topic that piques your interest.

   a. **Wikipedia:** Go to the Wikipedia homepage and check out the "featured article" of the day, or choose "Random Article" from the sidebar on the far left. Click any of the hyperlinks in the article to redirect to a different page. Bounce from article to article, keeping track of the titles of pages and sections that catch your eye.
   b. **An Instagram, BlueSky, Reddit, or TikTok feed:** Flow through one or more social media feeds, using links, geotags, user handles, and hashtags to encounter a variety of posts.
   c. After stumbling, review the list you've made of potentially interesting topics. Are you already familiar with any of them? Which surprised you? Are there any relationships or intersections worth exploring

further? From these topics and subtopics, try to articulate a viable and interesting research question that speaks to your curiosity.

3. Moving from topics to questions: Small group activity. Begin to develop working and research questions by collaborating with your classmates to explore different curiosities.
   a. Divide your paper into three columns. Write three potential topics as headings, one in each column.
   b. Sit in a circle with your groupmates; each student should pass their three-column paper one position clockwise. For five minutes, each student will freewrite questions about each topic. No question is too big or small, too simple or complex. Try to generate as many questions as you possibly can. Then rotate your papers another step—repeat until you have your original sheet of paper back.
   c. Review the questions your groupmates compiled on your sheet. Have they offered anything that surprises you—issues you haven't thought of, relationships between questions, recurring themes or patterns of interest, or foci that might yield interesting answers?
4. Moving from topics to questions: Whole class gallery walk. Begin to develop working and research questions by collaborating with your classmates to explore different curiosities.
   a. Write your three favorite topic ideas in the headings of a three-column paper. Every student should tape their papers to the classroom wall, just below eye level, so that it forms a circular shape around the perimeter of the room.
   b. Each student in the class should stand in front of their paper, then rotate one position clockwise.
   c. At each new page, you will have two minutes to review the headings and freewrite questions about each topic. No question is too big or small, too simple or complex. Try to generate as many questions as you possibly can. Then rotate through clockwise until you've returned to your original position.
   d. Review the questions your classmates compiled on your sheet. Have they offered anything that surprises you—issues you haven't thought of, relationships between questions, recurring themes or patterns of interest, or foci that might yield interesting answers?
5. Focus and scope. At this point, you have hopefully identified some topic or path of inquiry for your research project. In order to experiment with scope, try complicating your research question(s) along the different dimensions in the following table. A completed table is included as an example after the blank one.

→ Blank Worksheet

Your current topic or research question(s):

Notes:

Worksheet 5.2.1. A blank worksheet for scope experiments.

► Downloadable copy

→ Model

Your current topic or research question(s):
Should marijuana be legalized nationally?

Table 5.2.3. A model of the scope worksheet.

Scope dimension	More narrow	More broad
Time (When?)	**Notes:** What do trends in marijuana consumption in the last twenty years indicate about legislation?	**Notes:** How has marijuana been treated legally over the last one hundred years?
Place (Where?)	**Notes:** Should marijuana be legal in our state?	**Notes:** Should marijuana be legalized internationally?
Population (For whom?)	**Notes:** Should marijuana be legalized for medical users?	**Notes:** How does marijuana compare with legal pharmaceutical drugs?
Connections (Intersections with other issues)	**Notes:** Does marijuana legalization correlate to addiction, economy, or crime?	**Notes:** How does marijuana compare with legal pharmaceutical drugs?
Other... (Topic-specific adjustments)	**Notes:** Should marijuana sales be organized by the government?	**Notes:** Should all drugs be legalized nationally?

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5.3: The Research Process

The Research Process

A good research process should go through these steps:

1. Decide on the topic, or carefully consider the topic that has been assigned.
2. **Narrow the topic** in order to narrow search parameters.

   If you are studying the Battle of Gettysburg, for example, you might decide to look into any number of topics related to the battle: medical practices on the field, social differences between soldiers, or military maneuvers. If your topic is medical practices in battle, a search for "Battle of Gettysburg" would return far too many general results. You would also not want to search for a single instance of surgery, because you might not be able to find enough information on it. Find a happy medium between very broad and too specific.
3. **Do background research**, or pre-research, using broad search tools like Google search, Wikipedia, textbooks, or encyclopedias.

   You can also talk about your research with friends, co-workers, and family for more ideas.
4. **Create a question** that your research will address and generate sub-questions from your main question.

   By determining your research question, you can **develop a working thesis statement**, or the main point you hope to make in your paper. Plan to revise your thesis statement several times as you learn more about your topic. It will help you concentrate on what you want and ignore information that is irrelevant.
5. **Determine what kind of sources are best** for your argument.

   How many sources will you need? How long should your paper be? Will you need primary or secondary sources? Where will you find the best information?
6. **Create a bibliography** as you gather and reference sources. Make sure you are using credible and relevant sources.
7. **Write and edit your paper!** Incorporate the research into your own writing and properly cite your sources.



Figure 5.3.1. Mapping the Research Process

For example, in step one, you might decide that your topic will be the Flint Water Crisis that began in 2014. Then in step two you may consider narrowing it down to either how the lead poisoning got into the water in the first place, government corruption, the impact of the crisis, or environmental racism. You might decide on government corruption and decide to investigate the specific state and local officials involved in the events leading up to the crisis.

After some initial research, you would come up with a research question. A good research question for this example might be, "How did the behavior and actions of state and local officials lead to the Flint Water Crisis?" Next, you generate sub-questions from your main question. For instance, "Who were the public officials during the Flint Water Crisis?" "How did officials react when they first learned of the polluted water?" "In what ways did public officials ignore/exacerbate the water problem?" These questions enable you to create a working thesis statement that can help organize and shape your paper. A working thesis statement for this paper might be "The actions and corruption of state and local officials in Flint led to the Flint Water Crisis." As you get further into the research, you might modify your thesis statement to be more specific about the types of action and corruption, or what officials were most responsible.

Next, you'll decide on what type of sources you want to use. Because this is a current event, you may choose a good mix of both primary and secondary sources, as well as popular news articles and scholarly reports on government actions. As you accumulate sources, make sure you create a bibliography, or a list of sources that you've used in your research and writing process. It's always a good idea to keep track of your sources and take notes on where you find information so you can easily include the information you need into your final paper. And finally, have fun doing the research!

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5.4: Information Literacy

INFORMATION LITERACY

"Information literacy" is a term you'll hear a lot during your college years. It means that all students (and all people, really) should be able to find and use reliable information and source materials and that they should be able to find the right material for whatever it is they're doing or whatever questions they have.

Finding dependable information is especially important in the digital/internet age, where millions of ideas can be discovered in half a second but where much of that information is outdated or worthless.

Handling the materials correctly is important, too; this includes giving full credit when using materials created by others.

Here are a few of the questions we'll explore:

Why is information literacy important and necessary?
How can I learn to find reliable, high-quality information and texts?
How can I build my reading skills?
How can I read, understand, and use texts effectively?
How can I use my reading skills as a springboard to writing?
What is plagiarism, and how do I avoid it?
How can I cite source materials correctly in my college work?

As a college student, it's important that you can find reliable sources for your class work and assignments. It's also essential that you know how to correctly use and handle the sources when you make them part of your own work. Outside of school, most of us also feel it's important to be informed about current issues and ideas. Knowing what's going on in the world is, arguably, a citizen's responsibility. Plus, it feels good to join in a conversation and know the facts, or to be sure we're sharing a meme, social media post, or news article that's accurate and trustworthy.

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5.5: Research Strategies

Research Strategies

Popular search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing enable you to find lots of information quickly and, when used cautiously, can be fabulous research tools. Because the information you find is not necessarily academic, credible, or pertinent to your topic, generic search engines are best used in the preliminary stages of the research process. As you use these search engines, make sure you are using them most effectively so you can speed up your search process and find the best information.

Google Search Tips

Practice these Google search techniques to narrow down your search results.

Table 5.5.1. Search Tips

Search tool	How to Use It
“ ”	Use quotes to search for exact phrases. This search tool looks for the words in the same order they appear, so be careful not to be too specific, or risk excluding helpful information. For example, “medicinal practices at Gettysburg” returns just one result. **Example:** “The Battle of Gettysburg” or “Medicinal practices” Gettysburg
-	Use a hyphen immediately before a word or site to exclude it from your search. **Example:** cricket -insect or Civil War -Gettysburg or Civil War -site:wikipedia.org
*****	Put an asterisk in place of an unknown search term. **Example:** “an * a day”
site:	Search specific websites or domains. This is helpful in academic research if you want to find articles only from .edu, .gov, or .org websites. **Examples:** Gettysburg site:history.com or Gettysburg site:.mil
related:	Find websites that are similar to a web address you already know.

	Example: related:genealogy.com
OR	Use OR to search for information that may use a different word. **Example:** medicine OR surgery in “Battle of Gettysburg”
filetype:	Find specific types of files. **Example:** Gettysburg Address filetype:ppt
allintitle:	Find pages that have the keywords in the title of the page. **Example:** allintitle: medicine gettysburg battle

Google Advanced Search

You can avoid having to memorize many of the search tools by simply using Google Advanced Search and typing in the specific information you seek. There you can sort for exact words, phrases, websites, filetype, and even usage rights.

Google Scholar

A popular article database is Google Scholar. It looks like a regular Google search, and it aims to include the vast majority of scholarly resources available. While it has some limitations and is not as valuable as searching within library databases, it’s a useful tool if you want to cast a wide net. It’s also a large step above general Google searches for finding academic content. Google Scholar starts with a basic search blank. Because researchers are more likely to need the results of more specific searches, the advanced search link is accessed via a down-arrow in the search blank.

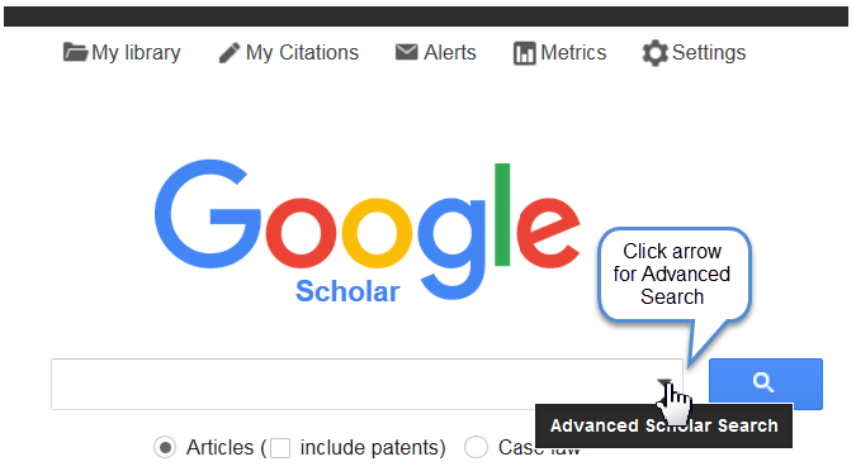


Figure 5.5.1. Google Scholar

Here are a few things to consider when using Google Scholar:

Keep in mind that Google is not transparent about the journals or time ranges it indexes, and publishers occasionally request that Google Scholar not index their publications. Non-scholarly and/or non-peer reviewed material may also appear in Google Scholar, so it is best used in conjunction with other search tools.
Unless your Google Scholar account is already connected to your school library account (check with your library for setting that up), you will likely see that many articles will cost you $20 or $30 just to look at. **Don't pay for them!** You probably have access to virtually all the published academic literature through your library resources. Write down the key information (authors' names, title, journal title, volume, issue number, year, page numbers), and go find the article through your library website. If you don't have immediate full-text access, you may be able to get it through an interlibrary loan.
A neat Google Scholar feature is the "cited by" link. If you get one great hit on Google Scholar, you can quickly see a list of other papers that cited it.

LIBRARY DATABASES

If you want reliable sources, head to your library (or the library website!) and check out the library databases.
Here's why:

Library resources go through a review process. Librarians select books, magazines, journals, databases, and other media sources. This selection process allows the library to collect sources considered reliable, historically relevant, and valuable.
Library resources are free for your use. Libraries purchase subscriptions to journals, databases, and other resources so they are available for your research. These subscriptions are not cheap but your library considers them a good investment, because the information is valuable, relevant, and reliable.
Library resources are organized so you can easily find all the sources on a topic.
Library resources are meant to be kept permanently. One of the primary functions of a library is to be an organized storehouse of in-depth information published throughout time. Current and historical information can be found in the library, giving a picture of how information on a topic developed.
Library resources come with personal assistance. Unlike the Internet which is primarily do-it-yourself, libraries have staff who are trained to assist you in sorting through all these information sources. They can help you learn to use new tools and can answer any questions you have. Some libraries even provide help through their websites.
Libraries have large collections of information on a variety of topics which have been carefully selected and

organized. The key idea when using the library is that you are getting QUALITY over QUANTITY. Print or electronic library resources are the best sources to use when starting your research. You can efficiently find quality information from a variety of credible resources in the library.

TAKING RESEARCH NOTES

Writers sometimes get caught up in taking extensive notes, so much so that they lose sight of how their sources help them to answer their research questions. The challenge is to stay focused and organized as you gather information from sources. Before you begin taking notes, take a moment to step back and remind yourself of your goal as a researcher: to find information that will help you answer your research questions. That goal will determine what information you record and how you organize it. When you write your paper, you will present your conclusions about the topic supported by research. Therefore, you do not need to write down every detail of your sources; some of the information in relevant sources will be irrelevant to your research questions.

There are several formats you can use to take notes. No technique is necessarily better than the others—it is more important to choose a format you are comfortable using. Choose a note-taking method from among those listed below that works best for you, and use it as you gather sources. Using the techniques discussed in this section will prepare you for the next step in writing your research paper: organizing and synthesizing the information you find.

Use index cards. This traditional format involves writing each note on a separate index card. It takes more time than copying and pasting into an electronic document, which encourages you to be selective in choosing which ideas to record. Recording notes on separate cards makes it easy to later organize your notes according to major topics. Some writers color-code their cards to make them still more organized.

Maintain a research notebook. Instead of using index cards or electronic note cards, you may wish to keep a notebook or electronic folder, allotting a few pages (or one file) for each of your sources. This method makes it easy to create a separate column or section of the document where you add your responses to the information you encounter in your research.

Annotate your sources. This method involves making handwritten notes in the margins of sources that you have printed or photocopied. If using electronic sources, you can make comments within the source document. For example, you might add comment boxes to a PDF version of an article. This method works best for experienced researchers who have already thought a great deal about the topic because it can be difficult to organize your notes later when starting your draft.

Use note-taking software. There are many options for taking and organizing notes electronically. These include word-processing software that you can use offline on a computer. They also include tools like Diigo, Evernote, and Mindomo, available on the Web for free or reduced prices if you will use the tool for educational purposes. Although you may need to set aside time to learn how to use them, digital tools offer you possibilities that handwritten note cards do not, such as searching your notes, copying and pasting your notes into your paper, and saving and sharing your notes online.

Whether you use old-fashioned index cards or organize your notes digitally, you should keep all your notes in one place, and use topic headings to group related details. Doing so will help you identify connections among different sources. It will also help you make connections between your notes and the research questions and subtopics you identified earlier. Throughout the process of taking notes, be scrupulous about making sure you have correctly attributed each idea or piece of information to its source. Always include source information or use a code system (e.g., numbers, letters, symbols, or colors) so you know exactly which claims or evidence came from which sources. Effective researchers make choices about which types of notes are most appropriate for their purpose. Your notes may fall into three categories:

1. **Summary notes** sum up the main ideas in a source in a few sentences or a short paragraph. A summary is considerably shorter than the original text and captures only the major ideas. Use summary notes when you do not need to record specific details but you intend to refer to broad concepts the author discusses.
2. **Paraphrased notes** restate a fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure.
3. **Direct quotations** use the exact wording used by the original source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. It is a good strategy to copy direct quotations when an author expresses an idea in an especially lively or memorable way. However, do not rely exclusively on direct quotations in your note taking.

Summarizing and **paraphrasing** as you take notes is usually a better strategy than copying direct quotations because it forces you to think through the claims and evidence in your source and to understand it well enough to restate it. In short, these methods of note-taking help you to stay engaged with your topic instead of simply copying and pasting text from sources. Using them will help you when you draft your paper.

Paraphrase ideas carefully, and check your paraphrased notes against the original text to make sure you have restated the author's ideas accurately.

Use quotation marks to set off any words for phrases taken directly from the source. With direct quotations, again, make sure your notes accurately reflect the content of the original text: check that quoted material is copied verbatim. If you omit words from a quotation, use ellipses to show the omission, and make sure the omission does not change the author's meaning. If you add your own responses and ideas to your notes, mark them as such so that your own thinking about the topic stands out from ideas you summarized or paraphrased.

ATTRIBUTION

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5.6: Four Tiers of Sources and How to Tell the Difference

Four Tiers of Sources and How to Tell the Difference

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Ah, the Research Paper

Such exhilaration! Such consternation! Educators are fond of research papers because they require you to find your own sources, confront conflicting evidence, and synthesize diverse information and ideas—all skills required in any professional leadership role. Research papers also allow students to pursue their own topic of interest; your professors have to assume that you are genuinely interested in at least some major part of the course. The open-endedness of research papers sets you up to do your best work as a self-motivated scholar.

This chapter is about secondary sources: what they are, where to find them, and how to choose them. For example, let's think about the distinction between primary and secondary sources. **Primary sources** are original documents, data, or images: the law code of the Le Dynasty in Vietnam, the letters of Kurt Vonnegut, data gathered from an experiment on color perception, an interview, or Farm Service Administration photographs from the 1930s. **Secondary sources** are produced by analyzing primary sources. They include news articles, scholarly articles, reviews of films or art exhibitions, documentary films, and other pieces that have some descriptive or analytical purpose. Some things may be primary sources in one context but secondary sources in another. For example, if you're using news articles to inform an analysis of a historical event, they're serving as secondary sources. If you're counting the number of times a particular newspaper reported on different types of events, then the news articles are serving as primary sources because they're more akin to raw data.

Some Sources Are Better Than Other

You've probably heard by now that if you cite Wikipedia as an authoritative source, the wrath of your instructor shall be visited upon you. Why is it that even the most informative Wikipedia articles are still often considered illegitimate? And what are good sources to use? The table below summarizes the types of secondary sources in four tiers. All sources have their legitimate uses, but the top-tier ones are preferable for

citation in an academic context.

Table 5.6.1. Analyzing the quality of secondary sources

Tier	Type	Content	Uses	How to find them
Tier I	Peer-reviewed academic publications	Rigorous research and analysis	Provide strong evidence for claims and references to other high-quality sources	Google Scholar, library catalogs, and academic article databases
Tier II	Reports, articles, and books from credible nonacademic sources	Well-researched and even-handed descriptions of an event or state of the world	Initial research on events or trends not yet analyzed in the academic literature; may reference important Tier 1 sources	Websites of relevant agencies, Google searches using *.gov or *.org sites, academic article databases
Tier III	Short pieces from newspapers or credible websites	Simple reporting of events, research findings, or policy changes	Often point to useful Tier 2 or Tier 1 sources; may provide a factoid or two not found anywhere else	Strategic Google searches or article databases, including newspapers and magazines
Tier IV	Agenda-driven or uncertain pieces	Mostly opinion, varying in thoughtfulness and credibility	May represent a particular position within a debate; more often provide keywords and clues about higher-quality sources	Nonspecific Google searches

TIER 1

PEER-REVIEWED ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

These are sources from academic literature: books and scholarly articles. Academic books generally fall into three categories: (1) textbooks written with students in mind, (2) monographs (books) that give an extended report on a large research project, and (3) edited volumes in which each chapter is authored by different people. Scholarly articles appear in academic journals, which are published multiple times a year in order to share the latest research findings with scholars in the field. They're usually sponsored by some academic society. To get published, these articles and books had to earn favorable anonymous evaluations by qualified scholars. Who are the experts writing, reviewing, and editing these scholarly publications? Your professors. Learning how to read and use these sources is a fundamental part of being a college student.

TIER 2

REPORTS, ARTICLES, AND BOOKS FROM CREDIBLE NONACADEMIC SOURCES

Some events and trends are too recent to appear in Tier 1 sources. Also, Tier 1 sources tend to be highly specific, and sometimes you need a more general per spective on a topic. Thus, Tier 2 sources can provide quality information that is more accessible to nonacademics. There are three main categories:

1. These are official reports from government agencies or major international institutions like the World Bank or the United Nations; these institutions generally have research departments staffed with qualified experts who seek to provide rigorous, even-handed information to decision-makers.
2. Feature articles from major newspapers and magazines like the *New York Time*s, *Wall Street Journal*, *London Time*s, or the *Economist* are based on original reporting by experienced journalists (not press releases) and are typically fifteen hundred–plus words in length.
3. There are some great books from nonacademic presses that cite their sources; they're often written by journalists.

All three of these sources are generally well-researched descriptions of an event or state of the world, undertaken by credentialed experts who generally seek to be evenhanded. It is still up to you to judge their credibility. Your instructors and campus librarians can advise you on which sources in this category have the most credibility.

Tier 3

Short Pieces from Periodicals or Credible Websites

A step below the well-developed reports and feature articles that make up Tier 2 are the short tidbits that one finds in newspapers and magazines or credible websites. How short is a short news article? Usually, they're just a couple paragraphs or less, and they're often reporting on just one thing: an event, an interesting research finding, or a policy change. They don't take extensive research and analysis to write, and many just summarize a press release written and distributed by an organization or business. They may describe things like corporate mergers, newly discovered diet-health links, or important school-funding legislation.

You may want to cite Tier 3 sources in your paper if they provide an important factoid or two that isn't provided by a higher-tier piece, but if the Tier 3 article describes a particular study or academic expert, your best bet is to find the journal article or book it is reporting on and use that Tier 1 source instead. The original sources are usually linked; if not, you can find the original journal article by putting the scholar's name and some keywords into Google Scholar or your library website.

What counts as a credible website in this tier? You may need some guidance from instructors or librarians, but you can learn a lot by examining the person or organization providing the information (look for an "About" link). For example, if the organization is clearly agenda driven or not up-front about its aims and/or funding sources, then it definitely isn't something you want to cite as a neutral authority. Also look for signs of expertise. A tidbit about a medical research finding written by someone with a science background carries more weight than the same topic written by a policy analyst. These sources are sometimes uncertain, which is all the more reason to follow the trail to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 source whenever possible.

Tier 4

Agenda Driven or Pieces from Unknown Sources

This tier is essentially everything else, including Wikipedia. These types of sources—especially Wikipedia—can be hugely helpful in identifying interesting topics, positions within a debate, keywords to search, and, sometimes, higher-tier sources on the topic. They often play a critically important role in the early part of the research process, but they generally aren't (and shouldn't be) cited in the final paper. Throwing some keywords into Google and seeing what you get is a fine way to get started, but don't stop there. Start a list of the people, organizations, sources, and keywords that seem most relevant to your topic.

For example, suppose you've been assigned a research paper about the impact of linen production and trade on the ancient world. A quick Google search reveals that (1) linen comes from the flax plant, (2) the scientific name for flax is *Linum usitatissimum*, (3) Egypt dominated linen production at the height of its empire, and (4) Alex J. Warden published a book about ancient linen trade in 1867. Similarly, you found some useful search terms to try instead of "ancient world" (antiquity, Egyptian empire, ancient Egypt, ancient Mediterranean) and some generalizations for linen (fabric, textiles, or weaving). Now you've got a lot to work with as you

tap into the library catalog and academic article databases.

Origins and Anatomy of a Journal Article

Most of the Tier 1 sources available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic periodical after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Their origin explains both their basic structure and the high esteem they have in the eyes of your professors.

Many journals are sponsored by academic associations. Most academics belong to a big, general one (such as the Modern Language Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the International Association for Statistical Computing, or the Slavic and East European Folklore Association). There are also generalist organizations organized by region of the country or state, such as the Eastern Sociological Society or the Southern Management Association. Each of these associations exists to promote the exchange of research findings and collaboration in their disciplines. Toward this end, they organize conferences, sponsor working groups, and publish one or more academic journals. These journals are meant to both publicize and archive the most interesting and important findings in the field.

Association for Sport and Physical Education, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the International Association for Statistical Computing, or the Slavic and East European Folklore Association). There are also generalist organizations organized by region of the country or state, such as the Eastern Sociological Society or the Southern Management Association. Each of these associations exists to promote the exchange of research findings and collaboration in their disciplines. Toward this end, they organize conferences, sponsor working groups, and publish one or more academic journals. These journals are meant to both publicize and archive the most interesting and important findings in the field.

Academic papers are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Thus, in a lot of fields, they often have a structure reminiscent of the lab reports you've written for science classes:

1. ***Abstract:*** A one-paragraph summary of the article: its purpose, methods, findings, and significance.
2. ***Introduction:*** An overview of the key question or problem that the paper addresses, why it is important, and the key conclusion(s) (i.e., thesis or theses) of the paper.
3. ***Literature review:*** A synthesis of all the relevant prior research (the so-called academic literature on the subject) that explains why the paper makes an original and important contribution to the body of knowledge.
4. ***Data and methods:*** An explanation of what data or information the author(s) used and what they did with it.
5. ***Results:*** A full explanation of the key findings of the study.
6. ***Conclusion/discussion****:* Puts the key findings or insights from the paper into their broader context; explains why they matter.

Not all papers are so "science." For example, a historical or literary analysis doesn't necessarily have a "data and methods" section, but it does explain and justify the research question, describe how the authors' own points relate to those made in other relevant articles and books, develop the key insights yielded by the analysis, and conclude by explaining their significance. Some academic papers are review articles in which the "data" are published papers and the "findings" are key insights, enduring lines of debate, and/or remaining unanswered questions.

Scholarly journals use a peer-review process to decide which articles merit publication. First, hopeful authors send their article manuscript to the journal editor, a role filled by a prominent scholar in the field. The editor reads over the manuscript and decides whether it seems worthy of peer review. If it's outside the interests of the journal or is clearly inadequate, the editor will reject it outright. If it looks appropriate and sufficiently high quality, the editor will recruit a few other experts in the field to act as anonymous peer reviewers. The editor will send the manuscript (scrubbed of identifying information) to the reviewers who will read it closely and provide a thorough critique.

Is the research question driving the paper timely and important?
Does the paper sufficiently and accurately review all of the relevant prior research?
Are the information sources believable and the research methods rigorous?
Are the stated results fully justified by the findings?
Is the significance of the research clear?
Is it well written?
Overall, does the paper add new, trustworthy, and important knowledge to the field?

Reviewers send their comments to the editor, who then decides whether to (1) reject the manuscript, (2) ask the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript, or (3) accept it for publication. Editors send the reviewers' comments (again, with no identifying information) to authors along with their decisions. A manuscript that has been revised and resubmitted usually goes out for peer review again; editors often try to get reviews from one or two first-round reviewers as well as a new reviewer. The whole process, from start to finish, can easily take a year, and it is often another year before the paper appears in print.

Understanding the academic publication process and the structure of scholarly articles tells you a lot about how to find, read, and use these sources:

1. **Find them quickly**

   Instead of paging through mountains of dubious web content, go right to the relevant scholarly article databases in order to quickly find the highest-quality sources.

2. **Use the abstracts**

   Abstracts tell you immediately whether the article you're holding is relevant or useful to the paper you're assigned to write. You shouldn't ever have the experience of reading the whole paper just to discover it's not useful.

3. **Read strategically**

   Knowing the anatomy of a scholarly article tells you what you should be reading for in each section. For example, you don't necessarily need to understand every nuance of the literature review. You can just focus on why the authors claim that their own study is distinct from the ones that came before.

4. **Don't sweat the technical stuff**

Not every social scientist understands the intricacies of log-linear modeling of quantitative survey data; however, the reviewers definitely do, and they found the analysis to be well constructed. Thus, you can accept the findings as legitimate and just focus on the passages that explain the findings and their significance in plainer language.

5. **Use one article to find others**

   If you have a really good article that's a few years old, you can use article databases to find newer articles that cited it in their own literature reviews. That immediately tells you which ones are on the same topic and offer newer findings. On the other hand, if your first source is recent, the literature review section will describe the other papers in the same line of research. You can look them up directly.

Students sometimes grumble when they're ordered to use scholarly articles in their research. It seems a lot easier to just Google some terms and find stuff that way. However, academic articles are the most efficient resource out there. They are vetted by experts and structured specifically to help readers zero in on the most important passages.

FINDING TIER 1 SOURCES

ARTICLE DATABASES

Your campus library pays big money to subscribe to databases for Tier 1 articles. Some are general purpose databases that include the most prominent journals across disciplines, and some are specific to a particular discipline. Often they have the full text of the articles right there for you to save or print. We won't go over particular databases here because every campus has different offerings. If you haven't already attended a workshop on using the resources provided by your library, you should. A one-hour workshop will save you many, many hours in the future. If there aren't any workshops, you can always seek advice from librarians and other library staff on the best databases for your topic. Many libraries also have online research guides that point you to the best databases for the specific discipline and, perhaps, the specific course. Librarians are eager to help you succeed with your research—it's their job and they love it!—so don't be shy about asking.

Another popular article database is Google Scholar. It looks like a regular Google search, and it aspires to include the vast majority of published scholarship. Google doesn't share a list of which journals they include or how Google Scholar works, which limits its utility for scholars. Also, because it's so wide ranging, it can be harder to find the most appropriate sources. However, if you want to cast a wide net, it's a very useful tool.

Here are three tips for using Google Scholar effectively:

1. **Add your field (economics, psychology, French, etc.) as one of your keywords**

   If you just put in "crime," for example, Google Scholar will return all sorts of stuff from sociology, psychology, geography, and history. If your paper is on crime in French literature, your best sources may be buried under thousands of papers from other disciplines. A set of search terms like "crime French literature modern" will get you to relevant sources much faster.

2. **Don't ever pay for an article**

When you click on links to articles in Google Scholar, you may end up on a publisher's site that tells you that you can download the article for $20 or $30. Don't do it! You probably have access to virtually all the published academic literature through your library resources. Write down the key information (authors' names, title, journal title, volume, issue number, year, page numbers) and go find the article through your library website. If you don't have immediate full-text access, you may be able to get it through an interlibrary loan.

3. **Use the "cited by" feature**

If you get one great hit on Google Scholar, you can quickly see a list of other papers that cited it. For example, the search terms "crime economics" yielded this hit for a 1988 paper that appeared in a journal called Kyklos:

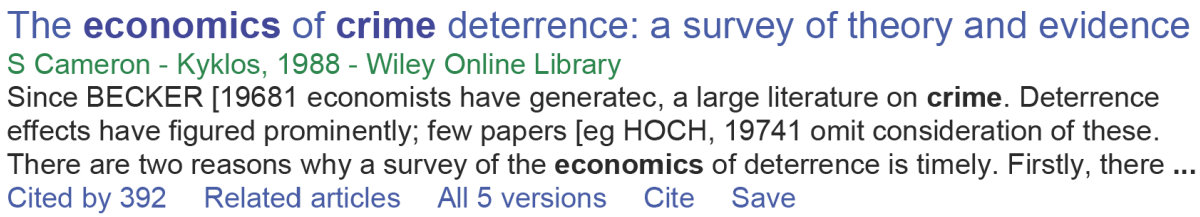


Figure 5.6.1. Google Scholar

The year 1988 is quite a while ago; for a social science paper, you probably want more recent sources. You can see that, according to Google, this paper was cited by 392 other sources. You can click on the "Cited by 392" to see that list. You can even search within that list of 392 if you're trying to narrow down the topic. For example, you could search the term "cities" to see which of those 392 articles are most likely to be about the economic impact of crime on cities.

Library Research as Problem-Solving

You'll probably engage the subscription article databases at different points in the process. For example, imagine you've been assigned a research paper that can focus on any topic relevant to the course. Imagine further that you don't have a clue about where to start and aren't entirely sure what counts as an appropriate topic in this discipline. A great approach is to find the top journals in the specific field of your course and browse through recent issues to see what people are publishing on. For example, when I assign an open-topic research paper in my Introduction to Sociology course, I suggest that students looking for a topic browse recent issues of *Social Problems* or the *American Journal of Sociology* and find an article that looks interesting. They'll have a topic and—booyah!—their first source. An instructor of a class on kinesiology might recommend browsing *Human Movement Science, the Journal of Strength* and *Conditioning Research, or Perceptual and Motor Skills.*

When you have a topic and are looking for a set of sources, your biggest challenge is finding the right keywords. You'll never find the right sources without them. You'll obviously start with words and phrases from the assignment prompt, but you can't stop there. As explained above, lower-tier sources (such as Wikipedia) or the top-tier sources you already have are great for identifying alternative keywords, and librarians and other library staff are also well practiced at finding new approaches to try. Librarians can also

point you to the best databases for your topic as well.

As you assess your evidence and further develop your thesis through the writing process, you may need to seek additional sources. For example, imagine you're writing a paper about the added risks adolescents face when they have experienced their parents' divorce. As you synthesize the evidence about negative impacts, you begin to wonder if scholars have documented some positive impacts as well. Thus you delve back into the literature to look for more articles, find some more concepts and keywords (such as "resiliency"), assess new evidence, and revise your thinking to account for these broader perspectives. Your instructor may have asked you to turn in a bibliography weeks before the final paper draft. You can check with your professor, but he or she is probably perfectly fine with you seeking additional sources as your thinking evolves. That's how scholars write.

Finding good sources is a much more creative task than it seems on the face of it. It's an extended problem-solving exercise, an iterative cycle of questions and answers. Go ahead and use Wikipedia to get broadly informed if you want. It won't corrupt your brain. But use it, and all other sources, strategically. You should eventually arrive at a core set of Tier 1 sources that will enable you to make a well-informed and thoughtful argument in support of your thesis. It's also a good sign when you find yourself deciding that some of the first sources you found are no longer relevant to your thesis; that likely means that you have revised and specified your thinking and are well on your way to constructing the kind of self-driven in-depth analysis that your professor is looking for.

Discussion Questions

1. Tier 1 sources are the most credible source for an academic audience. Are there situations where Tier 2, 3, or 4 sources would work as evidence for an argument?
2. This chapter gives Wikipedia as an example of a Tier 4 source because its information is from an unknown source. What sources—or types of sources—could be considered "agenda-driven" Tier 4 sources?
3. If you are unfamiliar with a source or author, how can you determine if it is agenda driven or otherwise not credible?
4. Is there ever a case where a Tier 4 source could be useful in an academic paper?
5. Which tiers of sources are the easiest to find? Which ones are the hardest? Why?

Activities

1. Choose a research topic, enter it into Google and then into Google Scholar, and compare your results. Some topics you could try: college athletes and academics, antibiotic resistance, Ptolemaic dynasty.
2. Using various databases, find one source in each of the four tiers for a particular topic.
3. Find a Tier 3 article that summarizes and cites a Tier 1 academic paper. Click through to the original article. How is the same information presented differently in the two sources?
4. Enter a topic into a general subscription database that has both scholarly and nonscholarly sources (such as Academic Search Complete or Academic OneFile); browse the first few hits and classify each one as scholarly or not scholarly. Look at the structure of the piece to make your determination.

Additional Resources

1. Google provides some great tips for getting the most out of Google Scholar.
2. This resource from Bowling Green State University explains how searching subject headings in a database (compared to keywords) can more quickly bring you to relevant sources.
3. Explore your university's library website! They may have tutorials, workshops, major-specific librarians, course guides, and more to help you in your research process

Attribution

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5.7: How to Find Sources

How to Find Sources

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Less than one generation ago, the biggest challenge facing research writers like you was tracking down relevant, credible, and useful information. Even the most basic projects required sifting through card catalogs, scrolling through endless microfiche and microfilm slides, and dedicating hours to scouring the stacks of different libraries. But now, there is no dearth of information; indeed, the internet has connected us to more information than any single person could process in an entire lifetime.

Once you have determined which conversation you want to join, it's time to begin finding sources. Inquiry-based research requires many encounters with a diversity of sources, so the internet serves us well by enabling faster, more expansive access. But while the internet makes it much easier to find those sources, it comes with its own host of challenges. The biggest problems with primarily internet-based research can be boiled down to two issues:

1. There is too much out there to sift through everything that might be relevant.
2. There is an increased prominence of unreliable, biased, or simply untrue information.

This chapter focuses on developing strategies and techniques to make your research and research writing processes more efficient, reliable, and meaningful, especially when considering the unique difficulties presented by research writing in the digital age. Specifically, you will learn strategies for discovering, evaluating, and integrating sources.

TECHNIQUES

Research Methods: Discovering Sources

Let's bust a myth before going any further: there is no such thing as a "good" source.

What makes a source "good" is actually determined by your purpose: *how* you use the source in your text is most important to determining its value. If you plan to present something as truth—like a fact or statistic—it is wise to use a peer-reviewed journal article (one that has been evaluated by a community of scholars). But if you're trying to demonstrate a perspective or give evidence, you may not find what you need in a journal.

Table 5.7.1. An example of a position that might need more than scholarly resources.

Your position	**A supporting fact (something you present as *factual*)**
An example that demonstrates your position (something that you present as a *perspective*)	
Women are unfairly criticized on social media.	A peer-reviewed scholarly article: Sills, Sophie, et al. "Rape Culture and Social Media: Young Critics and a Feminist Counterpublic." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2016, pp. 935–951.
A popular but clickbaity news site: Tamplin, Harley. "How You Use Instagram Confirms a Sad Truth about Your Personality, Study Says." *Elite Daily*, April 3, 2017.	

If you want to showcase a diversity of perspectives, you will want to weave together a diversity of sources.

As you discover useful sources, try to expand your usual research process by experimenting with the techniques and resources included in this chapter.

The first and most important determining factor of your research is where you choose to begin. Although there are a great number of credible and useful texts available across different search platforms, I generally encourage my students to begin with two resources:

1. Their college or university's library and its website
2. Google Scholar

These resources are not bulletproof, and you can't always find what you need through them. However, their general search functionality and the databases from which they draw tend to be more reliable, specific, and professional. It is quite likely that your argument will be better received if it relies on the kind of sources you discover with these tools.

YOUR LIBRARY

Although the following information primarily focuses on making good use of your library's online tools, one of the most valuable and underutilized resources at your disposal is the librarians themselves. Do you know if your school has research librarians on staff? Research librarians (or reference librarians) are not only well versed in the research process but also passionate about supporting students in their inquiry.

It's also possible that your library offers research support that you can access remotely: many colleges and universities provide librarian support via instant message/chat or email. Some libraries even make video tutorials and do-it-yourself research tips and tricks.

The first step in learning how your library will support you is to investigate their website. Although I can't provide specific instruction for the use of your library website—they are all slightly different—I encourage you to spend ten minutes familiarizing yourself with the site, considering the following questions especially:

Does the site have an FAQ section, student support, a librarian chat service, or a DIY link in case you have questions?
Does the site have an integrated search bar (i.e., a search engine that allows you to search some or all databases and the library catalog simultaneously)?
How do you access the "advanced search" function of the library's search bar?
Does your account have a folder or reading list to save sources you find?
Is your library a member of a resource-sharing network, like ILLiad or Summit? How do you request a source through this network?
Does your library subscribe to multimedia or digital resource services, like video streaming or e-book libraries?
Does the site offer any citation management support software, like Mendeley or Zotero?

Most schools pay subscriptions to databases filled with academic works in addition to owning a body of physical texts (books, DVDs, magazines, etc.). Some schools are members of exchange services for physical texts as well (such as Summit or ILLiad), in which case a network of libraries can provide resources to students at your school.

It is worth noting that most library websites use an older form of search technology. You have likely realized that day-to-day search engines like Google will predict what you're searching for, correct your spelling, and automatically return results that your search terms might not have exactly aligned with. For example, I could Google *How many baksetbal players on Jazzz roster*, and I would still likely get the results I needed. Most library search engines don't do this, so you need to be very deliberate with your search terms. Here are some tips:

Consider synonyms and jargon that might be more likely to yield results. As you research, you will become more fluent in the language of your subject. Keep track of vocabulary that other scholars use, and revise your search terms based on this context-specific language.
Use the Boolean operators ? and * for expanded results:

wom?n yields results for *woman*, *women*, *womyn*, and so on
*medic** yields results for *medic*, *medicine*, *medication*, *medicinal*, *medical*, and so on

Use the advanced search feature to combine search terms, exclude certain results, limit the search terms' applicability, and so on.
Use the filters (usually on the left or right side of the page) to sort for the kinds of sources you want. For example, if you are looking for academic sources, you can filter for "peer-reviewed articles."

Other Resources

As we will continue to discuss, the most useful sources for your research project are not always proper academic, peer-reviewed articles. For instance, if I were writing a paper on the experience of working for United Airlines, a compelling blog post by a flight attendant that speaks to the actual working conditions they experienced might be more appropriate than a data-driven scholarly investigation of the United Airlines consumer trends. You might find that a TED Talk, a published interview, an advertisement, or some other nonacademic source would be useful for your writing. Therefore, it's important that you evaluate all the texts you encounter, being especially careful with texts that some people might see as unreliable. (See "The CRAAP Test: Evaluating Traditional Sources" and "Four Moves and a Habit: Evaluating Web Sources" for more on evaluating sources.)

Additional Techniques for Discovering Sources

All it takes is one or two really good sources to get you started. You should keep your perspective wide to catch as much as you can—but if you've found a handful of good sources, the following are tools that can help you find even more:

The author of that perfect article probably got some of their information from somewhere else, just like you. Citation mining is the process of using a text's citations, bibliography, or notes to track down other similar or related sources. Plug the author's citations into your school's library search engine or Google Scholar to see if you have access.
Web of Science is like reverse citation mining: instead of using a text's bibliography to find more sources, you find other sources that cite your text in *their* bibliographies. Web of Science is a digital archive that shows you connections between different authors and their writing—and not only for science! If you find a good source that is documented in this database, you can see other texts that cite that source.
Bootstrapping is a technique that works best with search engines that have detailed features, such as your library search engine. Search engines tag each text with certain subject keywords. By clicking on those keywords, you can link to other texts tagged with the same keywords, typically according to Library of Congress standards.

The first and most important piece of advice I can offer you as you begin to dig into these sources: stay organized. By taking notes and keeping a record of where each idea is coming from, you save yourself a lot of time—and avoid the risk of unintentional plagiarism.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your typical research process? Where and how do you find articles? Which new ideas in this chapter would you like to try?
2. What is typically the easiest part of research for you, and what is the hardest? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Library Exploration**

   Spend ten to fifteen minutes exploring your school's library website, using the questions in the "Your Library" section of this chapter as a guide. What did you discover that you didn't know before about the resources available?

2. **Research Scavenger Hunt**

   To practice using a variety of research tools and finding a diversity of sources, try to discover resources according to the following constraints. Once you find a source, you should make sure you can access it later—save it to your computer; copy a live, stable URL; request it from the library; and/or save it to your Library eShelf, if you have one. For this assignment, you can copy a URL or DOI for digital resources or a library call number for physical ones.

   If you're already working on a project, use your topic for this activity. If you don't have a topic in mind, choose one by picking up a book, paper, or other written text near you: close your eyes and point to a random part of the page. Use the noun closest to your finger that you find vaguely interesting as a topic or search term for this exercise.

   Be sure to list enough information in your assignment so that you can find the source again! The author's name, the article title, and the DOI or URL will all be helpful.

RESEARCH SCAVENGER HUNT

1. A peer-reviewed journal article through a database
2. A source you bootstrapped using subject tags
3. An article from a reputable journalism source
4. A source through Google Scholar
5. A source originally cited in a Wikipedia article
6. A source that provides supporting facts
7. A source that provides a perspective or argument
8. A source you citation-mined from another source's bibliography
9. A text that is not credible
10. A text published within the last two years

ATTRIBUTION

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5.8: The Craap Test

The Craap Test

Evaluating Traditional Sources

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

If there's no such thing as an inherently "good" or "bad" source, how do we determine if a source is right for our purposes? As you sift through sources, you should consider credibility and use value to determine whether a source is right for you. Credibility refers to the reliability and accuracy of the author, their writing, and the publisher. *Use value* is a broad term that includes whether you should use a text in your research paper as well as how you will use that text.

The Craap Test

The CRAAP Test will help you explore both credibility and use value, and it's especially useful when evaluating sources that you are carefully considering for use in a paper.

Table 5.8.1. Explaining the initialism CRAAP.

Feature	Explanation
Currency (C)	How recently was the text created? Does that impact the accuracy or value of its contents, either positively or negatively? Generally, a text that is current is more credible and useful: data will be more accurate, the content will reflect

more up-to-date ideas, and so on. However, there are some exceptions.

- A text that is not current might be useful because it reflects attitudes of its publication era. For instance, if I were writing a paper on sexism in the office environment, it might be convincing to include a memo on dress codes from 1973.
- A text that is current might not be useful because the phenomena it discusses might not have existed long enough to have substantial evidence or study. For instance, if you were writing a paper on nanorobotics, it would be difficult to evaluate long-term impacts of this emergent technology because it simply hasn't been around long enough.

Relevance (R)

Is the text closely related to your topic? Does it illuminate your topic, or is it only tangentially connected?

A text that is relevant is generally more useful, as you probably already realize. Exceptions to this might include the following:

- A text that is too relevant might not be useful because it might create overlap or redundancy in your argument. You should use texts like this to pivot, complicate, or challenge your topic so you are not just repeating someone else's ideas.
- A text that is only slightly relevant might be useful in providing background knowledge, drawing out an analogy, or gesturing to important questions or ideas you don't have room to discuss in the scope of your paper.

Accuracy (A)

Is there any reason to doubt the validity of the text? Is it possible that the information and ideas included are simply untrue?

You might start out by relying on your instincts to answer these questions, but your evaluation of accuracy should also be informed more objectively by the other elements of the CRAAP Test (e.g., if a text is outdated, it might no longer be accurate).

Of course, the importance of this element depends on your use of the source; for instance, if you were writing a paper on conservative responses to Planned Parenthood, you might find it useful to discuss the inaccurate videos released by a pro-choice group several years ago.

Authority (A)

Who is the author? Who is the publisher? Do either or both demonstrate ethos through their experience, credentials, or public perception?

This element also depends on your use of the source; for instance, if you were writing a paper on cyberbullying,

you might find it useful to bring in posts from anonymous teenagers. Often, though, academic presses (e.g., Oxford University Press) and government publishers (e.g., hhs.gov) are assumed to have an increased degree of authority when compared with popular presses (e.g., Routledge), popular periodicals (e.g., *Time*), or self-published texts (e.g., blogs). It may be difficult to ascertain an author's and a publisher's authority without further research, but here are some red flags if you're evaluating a source with questionable authority:

- There is no author listed.
- The website hosting the web page or article is incomplete, outdated, or broken.
- The author seems to use little factual evidence.
- The author is known for extreme or one-dimensional views.
- The source has a sponsoring organization with an agenda that might undermine the validity of the information.

Purpose (P)

What is the author trying to achieve with their text? What are their motivations or reasons for publication and writing? Does that purpose influence the credibility of the text?

As we've discussed, every piece of rhetoric has a purpose. It's important that you identify and evaluate the implied and/or declared purposes of a text before you put too much faith in it.

Even though you're making efforts to keep an open mind to different positions, it is likely that you've already formed some opinions about your topic. As you review each source, try to read both with and against the grain; in other words, try to position yourself at least once as a doubter and at least once as a believer.

Regardless of what the source actually has to say, you should (1) try to take the argument on its own terms and try to appreciate or understand it *and* (2) be critical of it, looking for its blind spots and problems. This is especially important when we encounter texts we really like or really dislike—we need to challenge our early perceptions to interrupt projection.

Discussion Questions

1. When would the CRAAP Test be most useful, and when would it not? Can you imagine yourself using it to, say, evaluate a video online? Why or why not? Is it still a useful set of guidelines, even if we wouldn't use it in all cases?
2. What other rules have you been taught for evaluating sources? Talk about these with a peer or instructor. Which rules hold up, and which are myths?

Activities

Use the CRAAP Test to evaluate a source, step by step. What did this process help you notice?

ATTRIBUTION

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5.9: Four Moves and a Habit

Four Moves and a Habit

Evaluating Web Sources

Mike Caulfield

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

The web is a unique terrain, substantially different from print materials. Too often, attempts at teaching information literacy for the web do not take into account both the web's unique challenges and its unique affordances.

Much web literacy I've seen either asks students to look at web pages and think about them or teaches them to publish and produce things on the web. While both of these activities are valuable, neither addresses a set of real problems students confront daily: evaluating the information that reaches them through their social media streams. For these daily tasks, students need concrete strategies and tactics for tracing claims to sources and for analyzing the nature and reliability of those sources.

The web gives us many such strategies, tactics, and tools, which, properly used, can get students closer to the truth of a statement or image within seconds. Unfortunately, we do not teach students these specific techniques. As many people have noted, the web is both the largest propaganda machine ever created and the most amazing fact-checking tool ever invented. But if we haven't taught our students those fact-checking capabilities, is it any surprise that propaganda is winning?

This chapter is an unabashedly practical quick-start guide for the student fact-checker. It supplements generic information literacy with the specific web-based techniques that can get you closer to the truth on the web more quickly.

INTRODUCING SIFT



Figure 5.9.1. The steps of SIFT: stop; investigate the source; find trusted coverage; and trace claims, quotes, and media to the original conte

STOP

The first move is the simplest. **Stop** reminds you of two things.

First, when you first hit a page and start to read it—stop. Ask yourself whether you know and trust the website or source of the information. If you don't, use the other moves to get a sense of what you're looking at. Don't read it or share it until you know what it is.

Second, after you begin the process and use the moves, it can be too easy to go down a rabbit hole, chasing after more and more obscure facts or getting lost in a "click cycle." If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed in your fact-checking efforts, stop and take a second to remind yourself what your goal is. Adjust your strategy if it isn't working. Make sure you approach the problem at the right amount of depth for your purpose.

INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE

We'll go more into this move in the next lesson. The key idea is to know what you're reading *before* you read it.

This doesn't mean you have to do a Pulitzer Prize–winning investigation into a source before you engage with it. But if you're reading a piece on economics by a Nobel Prize–winning economist, you should know that before you read it. Conversely, if you're watching a video on the many benefits of milk consumption that was put out by the dairy industry, you probably want to know that as well.

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 source is crucial to your interpretation of what they say. Taking sixty seconds to figure out where it is from before reading will help you decide if it is worth your time and, if

it is, help you better understand its significance and trustworthiness.

Find Trusted Coverage

Sometimes you don't care about the particular article that reaches you. You care about the claim the article 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.

In this case, your best strategy is to ignore the source that reached you and look for other trusted reporting or analysis on the claim. In other words, if you receive an article that says koalas have just been declared extinct from the Save the Koalas Foundation, the winning strategy may be to open up a new tab and find the best source you can that covers this or, just as importantly, scan multiple sources to see what the consensus seems to be. In these cases, we encourage you to "find trusted coverage" that better suits your needs—more trusted, more in-depth, or maybe just more varied. We'll show you some techniques to do this sort of thing quickly.

Do you have to agree with the consensus? Absolutely not! But understanding the context and history of a claim will help you better evaluate it.

Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media Back to the Original Context

A lot of things you find on the internet have been stripped of context. Maybe there's a video of a fight between two people. But what happened before that? Who started it? What was clipped out of the video and what stayed in? Maybe there's a picture that seems real, but the caption is dubious at best. Maybe a claim is made about a new medical treatment supposedly based on a research paper—but you're not certain if the paper supports it.

In these cases we'll have you trace the claim, quote, or media back to the source, so you can see it in its original context and get a sense if the version you saw was accurately presented.

It's About Recontextualizing

There's a theme that runs through all of these moves: it's about getting the necessary context to read, view, or listen effectively. And doing that *first*.

One piece of context is who the speaker or publisher is. What's their expertise? What's their agenda? What's their record of fairness or accuracy? So we investigate the source. When you hear a rumor, you should know who the source of it is before reacting to it; similarly, when you encounter something on the web, you need the same sort of context.

When it comes to claims, a key piece of context includes whether they are broadly accepted or rejected or something in between. By scanning for other coverage, you can see the expert consensus on a claim, learn the history around it, and ultimately land on a better source.

Finally, when evidence is presented with a certain frame—whether a quote or a video or a scientific finding—sometimes it helps to reconstruct the original context in which the photo was taken or research claim made. It can look quite different in context!

In some cases, these techniques will show you claims are outright wrong or that sources are legitimately "bad actors" who are trying to deceive you. But even when the material is not intentionally deceptive, the moves do something just as important: they reestablish the context that the web so often strips away, allowing for more fruitful engagement with all digital information.

Building a Fact-Checking Habit By Checking Your Emotions

In addition to the moves, I'll introduce one more word of advice: *Check your emotions.*

This isn't quite a strategy (like "go upstream") or a tactic (like using date filters to find the origin of a fact). For lack of a better word, I am calling this advice a habit.

The habit is simple. When you feel a strong emotion—happiness, anger, pride, vindication—and that emotion pushes you to share a "fact" with others, *stop.* Above all, these are the claims that you must fact-check.

Why? Because you're already likely to check things you know are important to get right, and you're predisposed to analyze things that put you in an intellectual frame of mind. But things that make you angry or overjoyed, well…our record as humans is not good with these things.

As an example, I'll cite this tweet that crossed my Twitter feed:



Figure 5.9.2 A tweet from Twitter user @RonHogan that reads, "The Nazis murdered Senator Schumer's grandmother and most of her children. Trump's father was arrested at a Ku Klux Klan rally." It is in response to a Donald Trump tweet. It has been retweeted over 55,000 times.

You don't need to know much of the background of this tweet to see its emotionally charged nature. President Trump had insulted Chuck Schumer, a Democratic senator from New York, and characterized the tears that Schumer shed during a statement about refugees as "fake tears." This tweet reminds us that Senator Schumer's great-grandmother died at the hands of the Nazis, which could explain Schumer's emotional connection to the issue of refugees.

Or does it? Do we actually know that Schumer's great-grandmother died at the hands of the Nazis? And if we are not sure this is true, should we really be retweeting it?

Our normal inclination is to ignore verification needs when we react strongly to content, and researchers have found that content that causes strong emotions (both positive and negative) spreads the fastest through our social networks. Savvy activists and advocates take advantage of this flaw of ours, getting past our filters by posting material that goes straight to our hearts.

Use your emotions as a reminder. Strong emotions should become a trigger for your new fact-checking habit. Every time content you want to share makes you feel rage, laughter, ridicule, or even a heartwarming buzz, spend thirty seconds fact-checking. It will do you well.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the SIFT method compare with the CRAAP Test? In what situations might one be more useful than the other?
2. Do you fact-check things you read on the internet? If so, what triggers you to do so, and what is your process? If not, why not?
3. Do you think that some people are more likely to trust internet content than others? What do you think makes us skeptical or trusting in that way?

4. What's the risk of people believing what they read on the internet? Is it harmless, or could it be damaging?
5. How might the algorithm of a given site (YouTube, Google, Facebook, etc.) reinforce misinformation? Think and discuss it, and then do a little research to learn more. How does this make you feel? What questions or concerns does it raise for you?

Activities

1. Use SIFT to evaluate a social media post of your choice. It could be a TikTok video, a Facebook post, an Instagram story, a tweet, or something else. Write a paragraph reflecting on the process. What did you learn? Which fact-checking steps were most useful for you? What will you carry forward or continue thinking about in this process?
2. Research the terms *misinformation* and *disinformation*. What's the difference? What can we do to be wary of both?

Additional Resources

1. Caulfield's open educational resource (OER) textbook Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers goes into more depth about the practical strategies you can use to check the accuracy of web content.
2. Caulfield has also created a fully interactive course to learn these skills in a more active, hands-on way. Highly recommended—you can complete one activity or the whole course, no account needed! Check it out here: Check, Please! Starter Course.

Attribution

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5.10: Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources

Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources

Amy Guptill

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Theses And Sources

Everyone knows that a thorough analysis and persuasive argument need strong evidence. The credibility of sources is one key element of strong evidence, but it also matters how sources are used in the text of the paper. Many students are accustomed to thinking of sources simply as expert corroboration for their own points. As a result, they tend to comb texts to find statements that closely parallel what they want to say and then incorporate quotes as evidence that a published author agrees with them. That's one way to use sources, but there is a lot more to it.

Recall from prior chapters that writing academic papers is about joining a conversation. You're contributing your own original thinking to some complex problem, be it interpretive, theoretical, or practical. Citing sources helps situate your ideas within that ongoing conversation. Sometimes you're citing a research finding that provides strong evidence for your point; at other times, you're summarizing someone else's ideas in order to explain how your own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein encourage you to think about writing with sources as a "they say / I say" process. You first report what "they" say—"they" being published authors, prevalent ideas in society at large, or maybe participants in some kind of political or social debate. Then you respond by explaining what you think: Do you agree? Disagree? A little of both?

This "they say / I say" approach can help student writers find balance in their use of sources. On one extreme, some students think that they aren't allowed to make any claims without citing one or more expert authors saying the same thing. When their instructors encourage them to bring more original thinking into their writing, they're confused about how to do it. On the other extreme, some students tend to describe, more or less accurately, what sources say about a topic but then go on to state opinions that seem unrelated to the claims they just summarized. For example, a student writer may draw on expert sources to explain how the prevention and early detection of cancer have saved lives but then argue for more funding for curing advanced

cancer without making any explicit link to the points about prevention and screening. On one extreme, the sources are allowed to crowd out original thinking; on the other, they have seemingly no impact on the author's conclusions.

How can you know when you're avoiding both of these extremes? In other words, what kinds of theses ("I say") can count as an original claim and still be grounded in the sources ("they say")? Here are five common strategies:

1. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a larger summary argument**

   You might find that none of the sources you're working with specifically claim that early twentieth-century British literature was preoccupied with changing gender roles but that, together, their findings all point to that broader conclusion.

2. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a claim about their implications**

   You might review papers that explore various factors shaping voting behavior to argue that a particular voting-reform proposal will likely have positive impacts.

3. **Identify underlying areas of agreement**

   You may argue that the literature on cancer and the literature on violence both describe the unrecognized importance of prevention and early intervention in order to claim that insights about one set of problems may be useful for the other.

4. **Identify underlying areas of disagreement**

   You may find that the controversies surrounding educational reform—and its debates about accountability, curricula, and school funding—ultimately stem from different assumptions about the role of schools in society.

5. **Identify unanswered questions**

   Perhaps you review studies of the genetic and behavioral contributors to diabetes in order to highlight unknown factors and argue for more in-depth research on the role of the environment.

There are certainly other ways authors use sources to build theses, but these examples illustrate how original thinking in academic writing involves making connections with and between a strategically chosen set of sources.

INCORPORATING SOURCES

Here's a passage of academic writing (an excerpt, not a complete paper) that illustrates several ways that sources can figure into a "they say / I say" approach:

Willingham draws on cognitive science to explain that students must be able to regulate their emotions in order to learn (22–23). Emotional self-regulation enables students to ignore distractions and channel their attention and behaviors in appropriate ways. Other research findings confirm that anxiety interferes with learning and academic performance because it makes distractions harder to resist (Perkins and Graham-Bermann 95; Putwain and Best 580).

Other cognitive scientists point out that deep learning is itself stressful because it requires people to think hard about complex, unfamiliar material instead of relying on cognitive shortcuts.

Kahneman describes this difference in terms of two systems for thinking: one fast and one slow. Fast thinking is based on assumptions and habits and doesn't require a lot of effort. For example, driving a familiar route or a routine grocery-shopping trip is not usually an intellectually taxing activity. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is what we do when we encounter novel problems and situations. It's effortful, and it usually feels tedious and confusing. It is emotionally challenging as well because we are, by definition, incompetent while we're doing it, which provokes some anxiety. Solving a tough problem is rewarding, but the path itself is often unpleasant.

These insights from cognitive science enable us to critically assess the claims made on both sides of the education reform debate. On one hand, they cast doubt on the claims of education reformers that measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education. For example, the Center for Education Reform promotes "the implementation of strong, data-driven, performance-based accountability systems that ensure teachers are rewarded, retained and advanced based on how they perform in adding value to the students who they teach, measured predominantly by student achievement" ("Teacher Quality"). The research that Willingham and Kahneman describe suggests that frequent high-stakes testing may actually work against learning by introducing greater anxiety into the school environment.

At the same time, opponents of education reform should acknowledge that these research findings should prompt us to take a fresh look at how we educate our children. While Stan Karp of Rethinking Schools is correct when he argues that "data-driven formulas [based on standardized testing] lack both statistical credibility and a basic understanding of the human motivations and relationships that make good schooling possible," it doesn't necessarily follow that all education reform proposals lack merit. Challenging standards, together with specific training in emotional self-regulation, will likely enable more students to succeed.

In that example, the ideas of Willingham and Kahneman are summarized approvingly, bolstered with additional research findings, and then applied to a new realm: the current debate surrounding education reform. Voices in that debate were portrayed as accurately as possible, sometimes with representative quotes. Most importantly, all references were tied directly to the author's own interpretative point, which relies on the quoted claims.

As you can see, there are times when you should quote or paraphrase sources that you don't agree with or do not find particularly compelling. They may convey ideas and opinions that help explain and justify your own argument. Similarly, when you cite sources that you agree with, you should choose quotes or paraphrases that serve as building blocks within your own argument. Regardless of the role each source plays in your writing, you certainly don't need to find whole sentences or passages that express your thinking. Rather, focus on what each of those sources is claiming, why, and how exactly their claims relate to your own points.

The remainder of this chapter explains some key principles for incorporating sources, principles that follow from the general point that academic writing is about entering an ongoing conversation.

PRINCIPLE 1

LISTEN TO YOUR SOURCES

Have you ever had the maddening experience of arguing with someone who twisted your words to make it seem like you were saying something you weren't? Novice writers sometimes inadvertently misrepresent their sources when they quote very minor points from an article or even positions that the authors of an article disagree with. It often happens when students approach their sources with the goal of finding snippets that align with their own opinion. For example, the passage above contains the phrase "measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education." An inexperienced writer might include that quote in a paper without making it clear that the author(s) of the source actually disputes that very claim. Doing so is not intentionally fraudulent, but it reveals that the paper writer isn't really thinking about and responding to claims and arguments made by others. In that way, it harms his or her credibility.

Academic journal articles are especially likely to be misrepresented by student writers because their literature review sections often summarize a number of contrasting viewpoints. For example, sociologists Jennifer C. Lee and Jeremy Staff wrote a paper in which they note that high schoolers who spend more hours at a job are more likely to drop out of school (158–178). However, Lee and Staff's analysis finds that working more hours doesn't actually make a student more likely to drop out. Instead, the students who express less interest in school are both more likely to work a lot of hours *and* more likely to drop out. In short, Lee and Staff argue that disaffection with school causes students to drop out, not working at a job. In reviewing prior research about the impact of work on dropping out, Lee and Staff write, "Paid work, especially when it is considered intensive, reduces grade point averages, time spent on homework, educational aspirations, and the likelihood of completing high school." If you included that quote without explaining how it fits into Lee and Staff's actual argument, you would be misrepresenting that source.

PRINCIPLE 2

PROVIDE CONTEXT

Another error beginners often make is to drop in a quote without any context. If you simply quote, "Students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham 24), your reader is left wondering who Willingham is, why he is included here, and where this statement fits into his larger work. The whole point of incorporating sources is to situate your own insights into the conversation. As part of that, you should provide some kind of context the first time you use that source. Here are some examples:

Willingham, a cognitive scientist, claims that…

Research in cognitive science has found that…(Willingham 22).

Willingham argues that "students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham 24). Drawing on findings in cognitive science,

he explains…

As the second example above shows, providing a context doesn't mean writing a brief biography of every author in your bibliography—it just means including some signal about why that source is included in your text.

Even more baffling to your reader is when quoted material does not fit into the flow of the text. For example, a novice student might write,

Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. "We conclude that intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (Lee and Staff 171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

The reader is thinking, "Who is this sudden, ghostly 'we'?" Why should this source be believed? If you find that passages with quotes in your draft are awkward to read out loud, that's a sign that you need to contextualize the quote more effectively. Here's a version that puts the quote in context:

Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. Lee and Staff's carefully designed study found that "intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

In this latter example, it's now clear that Lee and Staff are scholars and that their empirical study is being used as evidence for this argumentative point. Using a source in this way invites the reader to check out Lee and Staff's work for themselves if they doubt this claim.

Many writing instructors encourage their students to contextualize their use of sources by making a "quotation sandwich"—that is, introduce the quote in some way and then follow it up with your own words. If you've made a bad habit of dropping in unintroduced quotes, the quotation sandwich idea may help you improve your skills, but in general, you don't need to approach every quote or paraphrase as a three-part structure to have well-integrated sources. You should, however, avoid ending a paragraph with a quotation. If you're struggling to figure out what to write after a quote or close paraphrase, it may be that you haven't yet figured out what role the quote is playing in your own analysis. If that happens to you a lot, try writing the whole first draft in your own words and then incorporate material from sources as you revise with "they say / I say" in mind.

PRINCIPLE 3

USE SOURCES EFFICIENTLY

Some student writers are in a rut of only quoting whole sentences. Some others, like myself as a student, get overly enamored of extended block quotes and the scholarly look they give to the page. These aren't the worst sins of academic writing, but they get in the way of one of the key principles of writing with sources: shaping quotes and paraphrases efficiently. Efficiency follows from the second principle because when you fully incorporate sources into your own explicit argument, you zero in on the phrases, passages, and ideas that are relevant to your points.

It's a very good sign for your paper when most quotes are short (key terms, phrases, or parts of sentences) and the longer quotes (whole sentences and passages) are clearly justified by the discussion in which they're embedded. Every bit of every quote should feel indispensable to the paper. An overabundance of long quotes usually means that your own argument is undeveloped. The most incandescent quotes will not hide that fact from your professor.

Also, some student writers forget that quoting is not the only way to incorporate sources. Paraphrasing and summarizing are sophisticated skills that are often more appropriate to use than direct quoting. The first two paragraphs of the example passage above do not include any quotations, even though they are both clearly focused on presenting the work of others. Student writers may avoid paraphrasing out of fear of plagiarizing, and it's true that a poorly executed paraphrase will make it seem like the student writer is fraudulently claiming the wordsmithing work of others as their own. Sticking to direct quotes seems safer. However, it is worth your time to master paraphrasing because it often helps you be more clear and concise, drawing out only those elements that are relevant to the thread of your analysis. You can learn more about how to avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing in the chapter on plagiarism in this text.

For example, here's a passage from a hypothetical paper with a block quote that is fully relevant to the argument but, nevertheless, inefficient:

Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman concludes our brains are prone to error:

System 1 registers the cognitive ease with which it processes information, but it does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable. Intuitive answers come to mind quickly and confidently, whether they originate from skills or from heuristics. There is no simple way for System 2 to distinguish between a skilled and a heuristic response. Its only recourse is to slow down and attempt to construct an answer on its own, which it is reluctant to do because it is indolent. Many suggestions of System 1 are casually endorsed with minimal checking, as in the bat-and-ball problem. (417)

While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Even a passage that is important to reference and is well contextualized in the flow of the paper will be inefficient if it introduces terms and ideas that aren't central to the analysis within the paper. Imagine, for example, that other parts of this hypothetical paper use Kahneman's other terms for System 1 (fast thinking) and System 2 (slow thinking); the sudden encounter of "System 1" and "System 2" would be confusing and tedious for your reader. Similarly, the terms "heuristics" and "bat-and-ball problem" might be unfamiliar to your reader. Their presence in the block quote just muddies the waters. In this case, a paraphrase is a much better choice. Here's an example passage that uses a paraphrase to establish the same points more clearly and efficiently:

Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments.9 We have the capacity to stop and examine our assumptions, Kahneman points out, but we often want to avoid that hard work. As a result, we tend to accept our quick, intuitive responses. While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests that the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Not only is the paraphrased version shorter (97 words versus 151), but it is also clearer and more efficient because it highlights the key ideas, avoiding specific terms and examples that aren't used in the rest of the paper. If other parts of your paper did refer to Kahneman's System 1 and System 2, then you might choose to include some quoted phrases to make use of some of Kahneman's great language. Perhaps something like this:

Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments. System 1, Kahneman explains, "does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable" (416). System 2 can stop and examine these assumptions, but it usually wants to avoid that hard work. As a result, our quick, intuitive responses are "casually endorsed with minimal checking" (417). While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Whether you choose a long quote, short quote, paraphrase, or summary depends on the role that the source is playing in your analysis. The trick is to make deliberate, thoughtful decisions about how to incorporate ideas and words from others.

Paraphrasing, summarizing, and the mechanical conventions of quoting take a lot of practice to master. Numerous other resources (like those listed at the end of this chapter) explain these practices clearly and succinctly. Bookmark some good sources and refer to them as needed. If you suspect that you're in a quoting rut, try out some new ways of incorporating sources.

PRINCIPLE 4

CHOOSE PRECISE VERBS OF ATTRIBUTION

It's time to get beyond the all-purpose "says." And please don't look up "says" in the thesaurus and substitute verbs like "proclaims" (unless there was actually a proclamation) or "pronounces" (unless there was actually a pronouncement). Here's a list of useful alternatives:

Claims
Asserts
Relates
Recounts
Complains
Reasons
Proposes
Suggests (if the author is speculating or hypothesizing)
Contests (disagrees)
Concludes
Shows
Argues
Explains
Indicates
Points out
Offers

More precise choices like these carry a lot more information than "says," enabling you to relate more with

fewer words. For one thing, they can quickly convey what kind of idea you're citing: a speculative one ("postulates"), a conclusive one ("determines"), a controversial one ("counters"). You can further show how you're incorporating these sources into your own narrative. For example, if you write that an author "claims" something, you're presenting yourself as fairly neutral about that claim. If you instead write that the author "shows" something, then you signal to your reader that you find that evidence more convincing. "Suggests," on the other hand, is a much weaker endorsement. Saying more with less makes your writing much more engaging.

Conclusion

Like so many things in adult life, writing in college is often both more liberating and more burdensome than writing in high school and before. On the one hand, I've had students tell me that their high school experiences made it seem that their own opinions didn't matter in academic writing and that they can't make any claims that aren't exactly paralleled by a pedigreed quotation. Writing papers based on their own insights and opinions can seem freeing in contrast. At the same time, a college student attending full time may be expected to have original and well-considered ideas about pre-Columbian Latin American history, congressional redistricting, sports in society, postcolonial literatures, and nanotechnology, all in about two weeks. Under these conditions, it's easy to see why some would long for the days when simple, competent reporting did the job. You probably won't have an authentic intellectual engagement with every college writing assignment, but approaching your written work as an opportunity to dialogue with the material can help you find the momentum you need to succeed with this work.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to "listen to your sources"? Why is this important?
2. Why are students especially likely to misrepresent scholarly articles? How can this be avoided?
3. What is the impact of providing context for a source? Why does this matter?

Activities

1. Here is a passage from a world history textbook:

   Like so many things desired by Europeans and supplied by Asians—at first luxury items for the elite such as silk or porcelain, but increasingly products like tea from China for the mass market—cotton textiles were produced well and cheaply in India. The British textile manufacturers focused on the "cheap" part and complained that with relatively higher wages, British manufacturers could not compete. India had a competitive advantage in the eighteenth century, being able to undersell in the world market virtually any other producer of textiles. Some thought the reason for cheap Indian textiles was because of a low living standard, or a large population earning depressed wages, but all of those have been shown to not be true: Indian textile workers in the eighteenth century had just as high a standard of living as British workers. So, if it was not a low standard of living that gave India its competitive advantage, what did?

   In a word: agriculture. Indian agriculture was so productive that the amount of food produced, and hence its cost, was significantly lower than in Europe. In the preindustrial age, when working families spent 60–80 percent of their earnings on food, the cost of food was the primary determinant of their real wages (i.e., how much a pound, dollar, a real, or a pagoda could buy). In India (and China and Japan as well), the amount of grain harvested from a given amount of

> seed was in the ratio of 20:1 (e.g., twenty bushels of rice harvested for every one planted), whereas in England it was at best 8:1. Asian agriculture thus was more than twice as efficient as British (and by extension European) agriculture, and food—the major component in the cost of living—cost less in Asia. (Marks 95)

Drawing on this passage, try out different quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing options:

1. Quote a key phrase or part of a sentence, naming the source and incorporating the quote within your own logic.
2. Quote an entire sentence or two, providing context and incorporating the quote within your own logic.
3. Construct an unacceptable paraphrase of part of the passage, copying a couple of sentences and changing just a few of the keywords.
4. Construct a successful paraphrase of part of the passage, describing it in your own words.
5. Write a sentence, with a citation, that summarizes the general point of the passage.
6. Rewrite your responses to 1 and 2 above, changing the verbs of attribution. How do the new verbs change the meaning or tone of your sentence?

Additional Resources

1. Graff and Birkenstein's book, *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, is a gem and well worth reading. They offer a series of templates that can help you visualize new ways of relating to sources and constructing arguments.
2. Another excellent resource is Gordon Harvey's *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*. In it, he discusses the key principles for incorporating sources, the stylistic conventions for quoting and paraphrasing, and the basics of common citation styles. That's information you want to have at the ready.
3. Many university writing centers have nicely concise online guides to summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. There are especially good ones at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington, and, as always, the Purdue OWL.

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ATTRIBUTION

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5.11: Quoting, Summarizing, and Paraphrasing

Quoting, Summarizing, and Paraphrasing

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Finding Your Position, Posture, And Perspective

As you begin drafting your research essay, remember the conversation analogy: by using other voices, you are entering into a discussion that is much bigger than just you, even bigger than the authors you cite. However, what you have to say is important, so you are bringing together your ideas with others' ideas from a unique interpretive standpoint. Although it may take you a while to find it, you should be searching for your unique position in a complex network of discourse.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you consider this:

How would I introduce this topic to someone who is completely unfamiliar?
What are the major viewpoints on this topic? Remember that very few issues have only two sides.
With which viewpoints do I align? With which viewpoints do I disagree? Consider agreement ("Yes"), disagreement ("No"), and qualification ("Yes, but…").
What did I know about this issue before I began researching? What have I learned so far?
What is my rhetorical purpose for this project? If your purpose is to argue a position, be sure that you feel comfortable with the terms and ideas discussed in the previous section on argumentation.

Situating Yourself Using Your Research

While you're drafting, be diligent and deliberate with your use of other people's words, ideas, and perspectives. Foreground your thesis (even if it's still in progress), and use paraphrases, direct quotes, and summary in the background to explain, support, complicate, or contrast your perspective.

Depending on the work you've done to this point, you may have a reasonable body of quotes, summaries, and paraphrases that you can draw from. Whether or not you've been collecting evidence throughout your research process, be sure to return to the original sources to ensure the accuracy and efficacy of your quotes, summaries, and paraphrases.

QUOTING

A direct quote uses quotation marks (" ") to indicate where you're borrowing an author's words verbatim in your own writing. Use a direct quote if someone else wrote or said something in a distinctive or particular way and you want to capture their words exactly.

Direct quotes are good for establishing *ethos* and providing evidence. Quoting is a good choice when *how* something is said matters; it gives readers a sense of the tone, style, and perspective of the original source.

In a humanities essay, you will be expected to use some direct quotes; however, too many direct quotes can overwhelm your thesis and actually undermine your sense of *ethos.* Your research paper should strike a balance between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing—and articulating your own perspective!

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing refers to the action of boiling down an author's ideas into a shorter version in your own words. Summary demonstrates your understanding of a text, but it also can be useful in giving background information or making a complex idea more accessible.

PARAPHRASING

When we paraphrase, we are processing information or ideas from another person's text and putting them in our own words. The main difference between paraphrase and summary is scope: if summarizing means rewording and condensing, then paraphrasing means rewording without drastically altering length. However, paraphrasing is also generally more faithful to the spirit of the original; whereas a summary requires you to process and invites your own perspective, a paraphrase ought to mirror back the original idea using your own language.

Paraphrasing is helpful for establishing background knowledge or general consensus, simplifying a complicated idea, or reminding your reader of a certain part of another text. It is also valuable when relaying statistics or historical information, both of which are usually more fluidly woven into your writing when spoken with your own voice.

Whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing, you must always include an appropriate citation; see chapters 51, "Deconstructing Plagiarism," and 30, "Giving Credit Where It's Due: Why and How to Cite Your Sources," for more on how to do this ethically.

Each of these three tactics should support your argument: you should integrate quotes,

paraphrases, and summary with your own writing. Below, you can see three examples of these tools. Consider how the direct quote, paraphrase, and summary could each be used to achieve different purposes:

> It has been suggested (again rather anecdotally) that giraffes do communicate using infrasonic vocalizations (the signals are verbally described to be similar—in structure and function—to the low-frequency, infrasonic "rumbles" of elephants). It was further speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production. Moreover, particular neck movements (e.g. the neck stretch) are suggested to be associated with the production of infrasonic vocalizations. (Baotic et al. 3)

Table 5.11.1 Illustrating different ways of referencing sources within a text

Style of Reference
Example
Quote
Some zoological experts have pointed out that the evidence for giraffe hums has been "rather anecdotally" reported (Baotic et al. 3). However, some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production" (3).
Paraphrase
Giraffes emit a low-pitch noise; some scientists believe that this hum can be used for communication with other members of the social group, but others are skeptical because of the dearth of research on giraffe noises. According to Baotic et al., the anatomy of the animal suggests that they may be making deliberate and specific noises (3).
Summary
Baotic et al. conducted a study on giraffe hums in response to speculation that these noises are used deliberately for communication.

There are infinite ways to bring evidence into your discussion. For now, let's revisit a formula that many students find productive as they find their footing in research writing:

FRONT-LOAD + QUOTE/PARAPHRASE/ SUMMARIZE + (CITE) + EXPLAIN/ELABORATE/

ANALYZE

Table 5.11.2 Illustrating different ways of referencing sources within a text

Variable
Elaboration
Front-load + **(1–2 sentences)**
Set your reader up for the quote using a signpost (also known as a "signal phrase"). Don't drop quotes in abruptly; by front-loading, you can guide your reader's interpretation.
Quote/paraphrase/summarize +
Use whichever technique is relevant to your rhetorical purpose at that exact point.
(Cite) +
Use an in-text citation appropriate to your discipline. It doesn't matter if you quote, paraphrase, or summarize—all three require a citation.
Explain, elaborate, analyze ***(2–3 sentences)***
Perhaps most importantly, you need to make the value of this evidence clear to the reader. What does it mean? How does it further your thesis?

This might feel formulaic and forced at first, but following these steps will ensure that you give each piece of evidence thorough attention.

What might this look like in practice?

> **[1]** Humans and dolphins are not the only mammals with complex systems of communication. As a matter of fact, **[2]** some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production" (**[3]** Baotic et al. 3). **[4]** Even though no definitive answer has been found, it's possible that the structure of a giraffe's head allows it to create sounds that humans may not be able to hear. This

hypothesis supports the notion that different species of animals develop a sort of “language” that corresponds to their anatomy.

1. **Front-load**

   Humans and dolphins are not the only mammals with complex systems of communication. As a matter of fact,

2. **Quote**

   some scientists have “speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production”

3. **Cite**

   (Baotic et al. 3).

4. **Explain/elaborate/analyze**

   Even though no definitive answer has been found, it’s possible that the structure of a giraffe’s head allows it to create sounds that humans may not be able to hear. This hypothesis supports the notion that different species of animals develop a sort of “language” that corresponds to their anatomy.

Extended Quotes

A quick note on block quotes: sometimes you may find it necessary to use a long direct quote from a source. For instance, if there is a passage that you plan to analyze in-depth or throughout the course of the entire paper, you may need to reproduce the whole thing. You may have seen other authors use block quotes in the course of your research. In the middle of a sentence or paragraph, the text will break into a long direct quote that is indented and separated from the rest of the paragraph.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for you to use block quotes too, but they are rare. Even though long quotes can be useful, quotes long enough to block are often too long. Using too much of one source all at once can overwhelm your own voice and analysis, distract the reader, undermine your *ethos*, and prevent you from digging into a quote. It’s typically a better choice to

> abridge (omit words from the beginning or end of the quote or from the middle using an ellipsis […]), break up (split one long quote into two or three shorter quotes that you can attend to more specifically), or paraphrase a long quote, especially because that gives you more space for the last step of the formula above.

If, in the rare event that you must use a long direct quote, one that runs more than four lines on a properly formatted page, follow the guidelines from the appropriate style guide. In MLA format, block quotes (1) are indented one inch from the margin, (2) are double-spaced, (3) are not in quotation marks, and (4) use original end punctuation and an in-text citation after the last sentence. The paragraph will continue after the block quote without any indentation.

Readerly Signposts

Signposts are phrases and sentences that guide a reader's interpretation of the evidence you are about to introduce. Readerly signposts are also known as "signal phrases" because they give the reader a warning of your next move. In addition to foreshadowing a paraphrase, quote, or summary, though, your signposts can be active agents in your argumentation.

Before using a paraphrase, quote, or summary, you can prime your reader to understand that evidence in a certain way. For example, let's take the imaginary quote "The moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."

> [X] insists, "The moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> Some people believe, naïvely, that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> Common knowledge suggests that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> [X] posits that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> Although some people believe otherwise, the truth is that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> Although some people believe that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick," it is more likely that…
> Whenever conspiracy theories come up, people like to joke that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
> The government has conducted many covert operations in the last century: "The moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."

What does each signpost do to us, as readers, encountering the same quote?

Discussion Questions

1. What is the value of bringing in sources that you disagree with?
2. Paraphrasing can be a difficult point for student writers. What makes it challenging?

Activities

1. Find an example of a scholarly article in your major. Skim through and count how many quotes and paraphrases/summaries it contains (they should all have citations, which makes them easy to find). What did you learn? Share in class. Why might there be variation across the disciplines?
2. Using the table below, create a signpost for each of the quotes in the left column that reflects the posture in the top row.

Table 5.11.3 A fill-in-the-blank worksheet to help structure citations.

The position	**Complete faith**	**Uncertainty**
Cautious disbelief		**"Duh"**
"Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are a nutritious part of a child's lunch."	**Complete Faith:**	**Uncertainty:** Most parents have wondered if "peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are a nutritious part of a child's lunch."
Cautious disbelief:		**"Duh:"**
"The bees are dying rapidly."	**Complete Faith:**	**Uncertainty:**
Cautious disbelief: Even though some people argue that "the bees are dying rapidly," it may be more complicated than that.		**"Duh:"**
"Jennifer Lopez is still relevant."	**Complete Faith:** We can all agree that "Jennifer Lopez is still relevant."	**Uncertainty:**
Cautious disbelief:		**"Duh:"**
"Morality cannot be learned."	**Complete Faith:**	**Uncertainty:**
Cautious disbelief:		**"Duh:"** It should be obvious that "morality cannot be learned."

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ATTRIBUTION

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5.12: Summary vs. Paraphrase

Summary vs. Paraphrase

When you summarize material from a source, you zero in on the main points and restate them concisely in your own words. This technique is appropriate when only the major ideas are relevant to your paper or when you need to simplify complex information into a few key points for your readers.

Be sure to review the source material as you summarize it. Identify the main idea and restate it as concisely as you can—preferably in one sentence. Depending on your purpose, you may also add another sentence or two condensing any important details or examples. Check your summary to make sure it is accurate and complete.

In his draft, Jorge summarized research materials that presented scientists' findings about low-carbohydrate diets. Read the following passage from a trade magazine article and Jorge's summary of the article.

Assessing the Efficacy of Low-Carbohydrate Diet

Adrienne Howell, PhD

> *Over the past few years, a number of clinical studies have explored whether high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets are more effective for weight loss than other frequently recommended diet plans, such as diets that drastically curtail fat intake (Pritikin) or that emphasize consuming lean meats, grains, vegetables, and a moderate amount of unsaturated fats (the Mediterranean diet). A 2009 study found that obese teenagers who followed a low-carbohydrate diet lost an average of 15.6 kilograms over a six-month period, whereas teenagers following a low-fat diet or a Mediterranean diet lost an average of 11.1 kilograms and 9.3 kilograms respectively. Two 2010 studies that measured weight loss for obese adults following these same three diet plans found similar results. Over three months, subjects on the low-carbohydrate diet plan lost anywhere from four to six kilograms more than subjects who followed other diet plans.*

Jorge's Summary

> *In three recent studies, researchers compared outcomes for obese subjects who followed either a low-carbohydrate diet, a low-fat diet, or a Mediterranean diet and found that subjects following a low-carbohydrate diet lost more weight in the same time (Howell, 2010).*

Word Choice

A summary restates ideas in your own words—but for specialized or clinical terms, you may need to use terms that appear in the original source. For instance, Jorge used the term obese in his summary because related words such as heavy or overweight have a different clinical meaning.

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

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

In his draft, Jorge frequently paraphrased details from sources. At times, he needed to rewrite a sentence more than once to ensure he was paraphrasing ideas correctly. Read the passage from a website. Then read Jorge's initial attempt at paraphrasing it, followed by the final version of his paraphrase.

Source

Dieters nearly always get great results soon after they begin following a low-carbohydrate diet, but these results tend to taper off after the first few months, particularly because many dieters find it difficult to follow a low-carbohydrate diet plan consistently.

Paraphrase

People usually see encouraging outcomes shortly after they go on a low-carbohydrate diet, but their progress slows down after a short while, especially because most discover that it is a challenge to adhere to the diet strictly (Heinz).

After reviewing the paraphrased sentence, Jorge realized he was following the original source too closely. He did not want to quote the full passage verbatim, so he again attempted to restate the idea in his own style.

Paraphrase

Because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short-lived (Heinz).

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is another way of presenting ideas from source material in your own words, but without the condensing that happens in a summary. Instead, paraphrases stay approximately the same length as the original source material being paraphrased.

WHY PARAPHRASE?

To Demonstrate Understanding

Paraphrasing can demonstrate your understanding of a text, including its more complex details and connections between its main points, and can also help you double-check the depth of your understanding of a text.

To Provide Support

You might paraphrase a section from a source (unlike summary, it is unlikely that you will ever need to paraphrase an entire source) when an idea or point in that source is important to an assignment you are working on and you feel it needs to be included, but you can rephrase it in a way that fits your work without losing any key information.

Prefer Paraphrase

Use paraphrase instead of direct quotes unless you have compelling reasons to preserve the exact language of the original text. Often, the reason to preserve the original text in a direct quote is because that text uses specialized language that you can't easily rephrase. As much of your work as possible should be in your own voice.

For example, let's look at the last paragraph of the *Scientific American* article "Are You a Magnet for Mosquitoes?", about why mosquitoes are more attracted to some humans than others. The sentence "Scientists that study human odors and genetics have previously suggested scent cues associated with genetics are likely controlled via the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes" could be a good candidate for a direct quote because I wouldn't know how to paraphrase the part about MHC genes.

The sentence that follows, though, says this:

Those genes appear to play a role in odor production and also in mammals' mating choices—because humans and mice alike appear to prefer mates that smell less similar to themselves, which scientists have theorized

may be a natural control against inbreeding.

Since there isn't a particularly specialized or original language in here that must be preserved, this second sentence is a good candidate for paraphrase. One way (of many possibilities!) this might look is like this:

These same genes that might be attracting mosquitoes more to some of us than to others could also be helping us choose partners that we aren't likely to be related to.

What Makes Something a Paraphrase?

A PARAPHRASE

is in your own words;
is not condensed;
avoids personal opinion; and
is completely rephrased from the original.

Like summary, a paraphrase is someone else's ideas rewritten in your own words. Unlike summary, though, paraphrases should not be condensed—the ideas as you write them should take up about the same amount of space as they do in the original text. A paraphrase should not include your own opinions about the topic, what the author of the text is saying about it, or how that author is presenting their point.

It can be easy, when writing a paraphrase, to rely on some of the original author's phrasing or direct synonyms for the author's original words. Remember that a paraphrase must be entirely your own writing, not just phrases or words substituted in the same sentence structure, length, etc. used by the original text. Write paraphrases in sentence structures that are natural to you and true to your own writing voice. The only job of a paraphrase is to accurately and completely represent the relevant idea presented in the text you are paraphrasing.

How Should I Organize a Paraphrase?

It is not likely that you will encounter an assignment that solely requires you to paraphrase a text. Instead, you will use paraphrasing to support your own points and ideas in work with a wide range of goals. That said, there are still some guidelines for incorporating paraphrase into your work:

Introduce the author and original text, just as you would for a summary.
If there is relevant context, mention that as well.
Then, restate the part of the original text that you want to use into your own original language and sentence structures.
Include a parenthetical citation (if appropriate) at the end of the paraphrased material. (To learn how to do this correctly, see the discussion of in-text citation in Chapter 8 of this text.)
After delivering and citing the paraphrased material, reconnect that information to your own topic and point

Quoting Sources Directly

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase source material instead of quoting directly. Doing so

shows that you understand your research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. However, direct quotes can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose.

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colorful way. If an author's words are especially vivid, memorable, or well phrased, quoting them may help hold your reader's interest. Direct quotations from an interviewee or an eyewitness may help you personalize an issue for readers. And when you analyze primary sources, such as a historical speech or a work of literature, quoting extensively is often necessary to illustrate your points. These are valid reasons to use quotations.

Less experienced writers, however, sometimes overuse direct quotations in a research paper because it seems easier than paraphrasing. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact.

When you do choose to quote directly from a source, follow these guidelines:

Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
Represent the author's ideas honestly. Quote enough of the original text to reflect the author's point accurately.
Never use a standalone quotation. Always integrate the quoted material into your own sentence.
Use ellipses (…) if you need to omit a word or phrase. Use brackets [ ] if you need to replace a word or phrase.
Make sure any omissions or changed words do not alter the meaning of the original text. Omit or replace words only when absolutely necessary to shorten the text or to make it grammatically correct within your sentence.
Remember to include correctly formatted citations that follow the assigned style guide.

Jorge interviewed a dietician as part of his research, and he decided to quote her words in his paper. Read an excerpt from the interview and Jorge's use of it, which follows.

Source

Personally, I don't really buy into all of the hype about low-carbohydrate miracle diets like Atkins and so on. Sure, for some people, they are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well.

Summary

Registered dietician Dana Kwon (2010) admits, "Personally, I don't really buy into all of the hype.…Sure, for some people, [low-carbohydrate diets] are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well."

Notice how Jorge smoothly integrated the quoted material by starting the sentence with an introductory phrase. His use of ellipses and brackets did not change the source's meaning.

ACTIVITIES

1. On a separate sheet of paper, follow these steps to practice paraphrasing.

Choose an important idea or detail from your notes.
Without looking at the original source, restate the idea in your own words.
Check your paraphrase against the original text in the source. Make sure both your language and your sentence structure are original.
Revise your paraphrase if necessary.

2. Here is a brief passage from Sarah Boxer's article in *The Atlantic* titled "An Artist for the Instagram Age":

   The fact that some folks have managed to make the scene while others get left out in the cold is integral to the excitement of participatory art. The thrill is akin to exotic travel, or getting to see Hamilton. Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience, these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs.

Which of the following is an appropriate paraphrase of this passage? Why is that one "good" and the other one less functional as a paraphrase?

1. The truth that many people have been able to attend these events as others have been shut out of them is key to what makes this kind of art appealing. The excitement is similar to visiting foreign countries or attending a showing of a sold-out musical. Since some people who wish to attend can't do so, these art forms, despite not necessarily wanting to, often end up denying access to many would-be attendees.
2. Boxer notes that this kind of art only maintains its appeal as long as there are more people clamoring to view it than can possibly actually view it. This reliance on scarcity means these artists are ultimately relying on elitist principles to find their success and remain in demand.

ATTRIBUTION

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5.13: Deconstructing Plagiarism

Deconstructing Plagiarism

Kristy Kelly

Plagiarism Is Complicated Stuff

We all know we're not supposed to plagiarize, but what exactly does that mean? Taking ideas from someone else? Copying their words directly? Quoting someone else's language without citing it? As with most things in writing classes, it turns out that plagiarism is contextual. The expectations for attribution and originality shift along with culture, academic discipline, and medium. We'll talk more about all of that later in this chapter.

But just because plagiarism is a contextual, slippery concept *doesn't* mean that it's unimportant or impossible to track what counts as plagiarism. In fact, as an author, it lies exclusively with you to track where the ideas you're working with come from, to attribute them properly, and to understand exactly what constitutes plagiarism in the first place so that you can steer clear of it. One of our favorite sources for understanding citation practices, the Purdue OWL, defines plagiarism as "using someone else's ideas or words without giving them proper credit" ("Plagiarism Overview"). It can certainly be difficult to trace where someone else's ideas start and where yours begin or where your paraphrasing of a source starts and the original language you're building from ends. But even accounting for those blurry lines, it's still never OK to pass someone else's work off as your own.

In this chapter, we'll talk about how to navigate those blurry lines between working with someone's ideas and co-opting them and between paraphrasing a source and patchwriting from it. We'll also look at the deeper cultural perceptions of originality and attribution. By the end, you'll have a sense for how to avoid plagiarism and, more importantly, *why* to avoid it.

So What Exactly Is Plagiarism Again?

Let's break it down. We know that plagiarism involves including other peoples' ideas or language in your work without attribution. But one of the reasons that plagiarism can feel so fuzzy is that it can be difficult to trace what exactly counts as "including other peoples' ideas" or what kind of attribution is needed. There's also a spectrum of severity when it comes to plagiarism, ranging everywhere from letting an author's phrasing slip into your work without putting quotation marks around it to full-on copy-and-pasting paragraphs from a source without a citation. There's even such a thing as self-plagiarism, which involves copying your own writing from a previous context or assignment and including it in a new piece of writing without alerting your

reader (or, in many cases, your instructor).

In most academic contexts you're likely to encounter in an American college setting, the following can be considered plagiarism:

> Copying wholesale phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from another source without citing, either in the in-text citations or in the works cited / reference list.
> Including language from an outside source without putting it in quotation marks, even if the work appears in your works cited or reference list.
> Patchwriting, or following too closely with the language of a source you're paraphrasing without putting quotation marks around borrowed phrases—again, even if the source appears in your works cited! (There's more on the difference between paraphrasing and patchwriting below.)
> Fabricating citations or making up where you found a quotation because you don't remember where you found it originally.
> Incorporating an original idea that comes directly from another source without attribution.
> Plagiarizing yourself or reusing your own writing from a previous piece of writing. Yes, that means it is appropriate to cite yourself if you want to reference your own writing in a new context!

Whew! That feels like a lot, to the point where including sources might start to feel like a landmine of potential mistakes. But so long as you (1) pay careful attention to where your sources come from and express that in your work, (2) stay mindful of the expectations set by your instructor for proper citations, and (3) treat other peoples' writing and ideas with respect and good faith, you'll be just fine.

Paraphrasing and Patchwriting: What's the Difference?

When you're working right alongside another author's ideas and putting their language into your own words, it's easy to slip up and let your sentences hew too close to theirs. Before we dive into the tips and tricks for paraphrasing effectively and avoiding patchwriting, let's take a look at what each of these terms means.

Paraphrasing means rephrasing another author's ideas in your own words without using any of their exact wording ("Paraphrasing"). That sentence is a paraphrase of Purdue OWL's definition of paraphrasing, because I communicated the main idea of their quote without copying it word for word. You might think of paraphrasing as a form of mental digestion—you need to fully understand a quotation and have your own sense of what it means before you can communicate it in your own way.

Patchwriting is when an author attempts to paraphrase a quotation but borrows too much language without putting quotation marks around it. In essence, patchwriting is shoddy paraphrasing! Here's an example: say I was trying to paraphrase this quote from the Purdue OWL, as I did above:

> ***Quotation:*** "Paraphrasing is one way to use a text in your own writing without directly quoting source material. Anytime you are taking information from a source that is not your own, you need to specify where you got that information" ("Paraphrasing").
>
> ***Patchwritten version:*** Paraphrasing is when you use a source in your own words without directly quoting the material. Wherever you take information from somewhere else, you have to specify where you got it ("Paraphrasing").

Do you see all the similarities there? By reusing phrases like “without directly quoting” and closely following the structure of the second sentence, I’ve patchwritten this source. The main problem is that I didn’t put quotation marks around the borrowed language, which means that even though I used in-text citations at the end, this would still count as plagiarism. That may seem extreme, since the passage does show where the information comes from originally. There are indeed some small exceptions to this rule—namely, when you’re citing statistics or numbers that would be impossible to phrase in another way. But in general, by failing to show which phrases are borrowed from the original source, you are passing others’ words off as your own—and that takes us back to the definition of plagiarism at the start of the chapter.

Patchwriting happens increasingly often when students are working side by side with internet resources, and in the world of social media, borrowing and freely sharing ideas happens all the time. It’s also hard to trace originality when we’re using common phrases, including phrases like “put it into your own words” that appear in this chapter. It might make you wonder if you need to cite every single phrase in your paper, even if you can’t track down who said it first! We could certainly do a deep dive into the question of whether an author can ever be truly original (and hopefully you will do so in class!), but for now, recall what we said about using sources in good faith: if you know a phrase came from a specific source, that’s when you’re responsible for fully paraphrasing, putting quotes around the directly borrowed phrases, and giving full attribution.

How Can I Avoid Patchwriting?

If the quote expresses the idea so well that you’re having trouble rephrasing it, quote it directly! Do check with your instructor that direct quotations are allowed—in science writing or tech writing, direct quotations might be banned!
To help with paraphrasing, write or type out the quote in one place, then fully rephrase it on paper or on a different screen without looking at the original so that you’re not overly influenced by the original language. You may need to do that a few times to digest what the quote is saying and how you’d frame it yourself.
Think about why you’re including the quotation in the first place: Is the specific language central to the reader’s understanding of the subject? If so, quote directly. If you’re trying to distill the idea and weave it more smoothly into your own content, paraphrase it. And in both cases, cite it!

Why Is Academia So Strict About Plagiarism?

You might be thinking that all of this sounds rather nitpicky, or even like a mode of gatekeeping to catch students out in an honest mistake. And honestly, you’d be at least partially right: accusations of plagiarism can come along with assumptions about who is capable of crafting original thoughts or what kinds of students are more likely to misunderstand or willfully misinterpret academic standards for citations. International students, people newer to academic settings, or people who are fluent in more than one language have been disproportionately accused of plagiarism, either because cultural differences lead them to view citation practices differently or because they don’t have as much practice with the academic conventions for citation (Mott-Smith 251; Bloch 223–224). And that’s not to mention the implicit biases that instructors might carry about students who don’t already come in equipped with knowledge of citation practices in their discipline.

Academic notions of plagiarism are also complicated by the fact that across other industries and media,

creators borrow—or outright steal—from each other all the time. For example, Apple is notorious for taking ideas from new apps available in the App Store and building them directly into the Mac operating system, in a move that's common enough to have the nickname "Sherlocking" (Albergotti). The music industry sees constant lawsuits targeting pop artists like Dua Lipa, Olivia Rodrigo, and Sam Smith for cribbing from other musicians, though it's always sticky to figure out where commonly adapted musical styles end and copyright-protected expressions begin (Finell, qtd. in Shanfeld). And when students themselves occupy an information environment where sharing, reposting, and memeifying are the norm, it's not surprising that academia's tough take on originality can feel baffling and arcane.

Any discussion of plagiarism raises complicated questions about authorship, intellectual property, and whether full originality is even possible. The freedom to build on others' ideas without fear of being slapped with an accusation of plagiarism is important to students' academic growth, and scholars in writing studies are increasingly convinced that handling plagiarism punitively does more harm than good to beginning writers (Howard and Robillard 1–7). Rather than treating unintentional plagiarism as a "gotcha" moment to gatekeep academic discourse, it's often more productive to treat it as a learning opportunity that sets students on the right track for navigating the world of citations. That's why we're expanding the conversation about plagiarism, so that students can be more thoughtful and deliberate about their citation practices. Maybe understanding the reasoning behind citations will make it less tempting to throw our hands up and disregard citation standards altogether. Because while these standards might be stringent and difficult to master, their underlying purpose is crucial: to treat others' ideas and creations with respect by attributing your sources accordingly.

While academic writing might demand more formality in showing whose ideas or creations are whose, it doesn't prevent writers from building from or collaborating with other authors. In fact, that kind of collaboration is the very reason why it's so important to cite others' work: academic conversations are more fair, equitable, and transparent for everyone when all participants use the same system to attribute original content to its source. The Apple example above shows the kinds of chaos that can ensue when there is no shared set of standards for building from others' work. Viewing citations as a form of protection for original ideas (as Liz Delf does in chapter 30, "Giving Credit Where It's Due: Why and How to Cite Your Sources," in this volume) rather than an arbitrary set of rules that you'll get punished for breaking can make the process of learning the standards feel a bit more intuitive.

Final Tips For Understanding Citation Practices In Your Discipline

As we've said before, plagiarism is contextual, which means that the standards for academic honesty and citation practices vary across disciplines and institutions. When you enter into a new writing situation, it is always your responsibility to understand and apply those standards. Here are some final tips and tricks for understanding the standards in new writing situations:

Familiarize yourself with the academic conduct guidelines at your institution.
Make sure you know what citation format you'll be expected to use in each class (and if you're not sure, ask your instructor directly).

Bookmark a trustworthy citation reference like Purdue OWL.
Consider using a research and citation tool like Zotero to keep track of your citations.
If you're not sure whether something you've written might constitute unintentional plagiarism, visit your campus writing center or ask your instructor.
If you're finding yourself panicking over an assignment and tempted to plagiarize, stop and email your instructor. It's much better to ask for an extension or get extra help on an assignment than to plagiarize and deal with the consequences later.
Remember that learning citation practices is a continual process. Even your instructors have to brush up on the latest changes in citation styles. Mistakes are OK, so long as you are treating others' work in good faith and giving credit where credit is due.

Discussion Questions

1. Return to the examples about Apple and "Sherlocking" or the example about pop musicians stealing from other artists. Should Apple be able to copy ideas from content in the App Store? Is it fair to sue an artist for using a familiar musical expression?
2. What does "originality" actually mean? Think of some contexts where originality might have varying meanings.
3. If you participate in social media, how does that influence your view of attributing content to its original source?
4. What are some of the implications when we don't hold creators to high standards for attributing content in academic spaces and beyond?

Activities

Return to a source you're using for an upcoming assignment and paraphrase a couple of key ideas according to the guidelines above. Try reading the passage and then paraphrasing it without looking at it. How similar is your language to the original text? How much did you need to alter your phrasing to meet the standards for paraphrasing? What did the process feel like?

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ATTRIBUTION

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5.14: Giving Credit Where It's Due

Giving Credit Where It's Due

Why and How to Cite Your Sources

Liz Delf

Using outside sources in your paper is a great move. Doing outside research enriches the conversation in your paper, builds your fluency and confidence in the subject, and can bolster (or challenge) your own argument. As a writer, it's important to give credit to the original author whenever you use outside words or ideas. This is true in every academic discipline, and it's true in less formal contexts, as well.

Citation Is Good for Creators

Imagine that you're scrolling through Instagram or TikTok (or whatever cool new social media platform has been invented since these words were written—the challenge of writing in such a fast-moving world!). If an influencer uses someone else's audio clip or artwork, it's considered basic internet courtesy to tag the original source to give them credit. In fact, if reposters don't do this, the original creator might publicly complain and accuse the "borrower" of stealing their work.

Why do they care? Why does it matter to the creators or artists if someone reposts their artwork? Some people would argue that reposting helps spread the art around, so it's actually good for the original artist. That makes sense, to a point—but how does that argument hold up if the original creator isn't tagged or attributed in any way?

Your answers to those questions are probably similar to the reasons why citation matters in academia. Researchers and authors are generally glad for others to reference their work—after all, they published it rather than keeping it in a private diary—but they want credit for the work they've done. Using someone else's words or ideas *without* citing them—or citing them incorrectly—can feel like stealing. The original author (or content creator) only benefits from the "repost" if you cite their work, leading others back to the original source. In that sense, citation is an ethical issue: giving credit where credit is due.

Citation Is Good for You Too

Don't get me wrong though. Citation isn't a purely selfless act. It also benefits you, the writer! Citing your

sources builds your credibility as a speaker on the subject because it shows your audience that you have done your research. It gives your statements more weight by indicating that they came from a reliable source. (You should, of course, be using reliable sources; chapters 22 and 23 on evaluating sources can help you determine whether a source is trustworthy.)

For example, if you write that there will be 25 million centenarians (people who are 100 years old or more) in the year 2100, your reader will immediately want to know how you reached that conclusion. "Based on what?!" they'll ask. If the statistic seems to come out of nowhere, your audience could be distracted by the statement. They might even wonder if your arguments or conclusions are well founded, since you seem to be pulling numbers from thin air.

However, if you cite your source—and it's a reliable, reputable source—you will instantly build credibility with your audience. They will be more willing to accept the initial statistic and then listen to your argument on its own merits. You will show them that you have some knowledge on the topic and that your knowledge comes from authoritative sources.

Consider the following examples. Which is the most credible? The answer is clear: it's the one with the specifics and the citation.

> There will be even more elderly people in the future.
>
> There will be more than 25 million centenarians in the year 2100.
>
> Although the United Nations predicts that there will be 25 million centenarians by 2100, other demographers have found that population transitions and global events make it harder to pinpoint. A truer estimate is somewhere between 13 and 50 million (Robine and Cubaynes 60).

As you can see, citing your sources also pushes you to be more specific. In this case, I saw the "25 million" statistic in the article's abstract, but on closer reading, I found that the authors' research actually suggested a range. I had to read the article carefully to understand that point though—another key part of building your knowledge, fluency, and credibility.

Now, depending on your purposes, you may wish for a simpler version of the information. In many cases though, the more complex (and research-supported) version works better—it's potentially more accurate and, honestly, more interesting.

What To Cite

In every discipline, you need to cite outside words and ideas. If you're not sure whether to cite something or not, err on the side of caution and cite it! It's better to overcite than undercite. For example, you should always cite the following:

Quotes
Paraphrases
Statistics
Charts or other graphics
Images

Arguments or ideas
Original phrases

Depending on your discipline, you might use some of these examples more than others. In the humanities, for example, quotes are an important form of evidence: how someone says something can be just as important as what they say. For that reason, quoting the original source is common in literature, history, and philosophy classes.

In other fields, the data are the most important point. In your science and social science classes, then, you will probably rely mostly on statistics and paraphrases as supporting evidence. It's rare to see a direct quote in an engineering paper.

Knowing what kinds of sources to use—and how to use them—is part of the learning you will do in your discipline. You can read example papers and articles in a particular field or ask your instructor for guidance.

What's consistent across all of these disciplines, though, is the need to cite the information. If you are using outside words or ideas, you need to essentially tell your audience, "Hey! This information came from another source. Here's how you can find it." You will do this by including two forms of citation for every outside source: (1) an in-text citation and (2) an end citation.

How To Cite

In-TEXT CITATION

The details of how to create citations will vary depending on what kind of class you're taking. In writing and other humanities courses, we often use MLA citation (which stands for Modern Language Association); psychology and other social sciences often use APA citation (American Psychological Association). Other citation styles include IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), CSE (Council of Science Editors), CMS (*Chicago Manual of Style*), and more. Ask your instructor which citation style you should use for each class.

In all cases, though, you need to include an in-text citation (which will match up with an end citation—more on those in a minute). An in-text citation is like a signpost that says, "This! This right here! I didn't make this up—it's from an outside, credible source."

In MLA, this in-text citation is a parenthetical citation after the quote or paraphrase, like this: (Robine and Cubaynes 62). It typically includes the author's name and the page number that the information came from (if there is one). APA is similar but includes the author's last name and the year of publication, like this: (Garcia, 2008). In both cases, the reader will easily find more information on the alphabetized works cited or references page by looking in the G section for Garcia.

Other citation styles may use a number enclosed in brackets [1] or a superscript number1 to indicate that this information is from an outside source. In those cases, the number 1 will lead the reader to the first entry on the references list, where they will find a full citation.

What if there's no author listed? What if there are seventeen authors listed? The answer varies depending on your citation style—so you will have to do your own footwork to find the answer. The OWL at Purdue is an excellent resource for citation questions, whether you're working with MLA, APA, IEEE, or something else.

END CITATIONS

Similar to in-text citations, end citations vary quite a bit. In fact, even the name of the citations section varies: in MLA, we call this the "works cited," while in other disciplines, you may see it being called "references" or "bibliography." In all cases, though, the end citations provide significant details about the sources you cited in the text.

As a general rule, your in-text citations and end citations should match up. If you have six sources listed on your works cited but only one cited in the body of your paper, there's a problem. In this example, your reader will get the sense that you did some research—but they won't be able to tell which information came from which source or even which ideas were yours and which belong to someone else. To avoid this problem, cite as you go—don't wait until the end and try to insert citations throughout the paper. That's a recipe for disaster.

While the specifics about formatting may vary, most end citations will include some or all of the following things in the order required by the style guide:

Author(s)
Title of the article
Title of the source it came from (e.g., the journal, newspaper, or website title)
Date of publication
Volume and issue number (for journals)
DOI or URL (for digital sources)

Again, though, there will be variation across citation styles. Some elements may be italicized or in quote marks, for example, or the authors' names may use only first initials.

While these differences and details may seem arbitrary, they're important because they tell careful readers what they're looking at. In MLA, the article title is in quotes and the journal title is italicized; if these markers are reversed, it's a little harder to figure out what we're looking at. Attention to detail here can also add to the professionalism and credibility of your paper as a whole.

Here's the good news: you never have to memorize how to create perfect MLA or APA citations. What you *do* need to know, though, is that your sources have to be cited—and that you can find and apply the appropriate rules for your project whether it's in communications, psychology, or civil engineering.

A Word about Citation Tools

Real talk: how do you actually create citations for your papers? Chances are, you use a citation maker of some kind—either online, in the research database you are using, or embedded in Word or Google Docs. Instructors have different opinions about these, but I would argue that they're a valuable tool. Use what you have!

A warning, though: citation tools are a useful starting point, but they're not perfect. The free online versions are especially prone to missing style updates or incorrect formatting. The database and word processor versions (as well as citation managers like Zotero and EndNote) tend to be better, but again—not perfect. They're only as good as the information they pick up from the source (or that you input, depending on the tool).

For that reason, you should consider the citations that are churned out by these tools to be a rough draft. You will need to check them to ensure that they are accurate and consistent.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is attribution important to online content creators? Do you know of any examples where a creator was not given appropriate credit? How did it impact them?
2. Do you think that attribution/citation norms are shifting and changing in the digital world? Do you see a generational divide, or does it seem more important to some people than others? Why do you think that is?

Activities

1. Use the OWL at Purdue to figure out how to create an in-text citation for the following scenarios. Use the citation style of your class assignments.

    a. A source with five authors
    b. A quote from one source that you found in another source (i.e., your article is referencing another article)
    c. A source with no author listed

2. Create one end citation the old-fashioned way: look it up on the OWL at Purdue, find each required piece of information, and use the citation style required in your class to write a full end citation for a source of your choice. Talk through it as a class. Which pieces of information were hard to find? Where are there points of confusion? How did this process help you better understand the citation requirements? How might this help you in the future, even if you continue to use citation tools?
3. Use a citation maker of your choice to create an end citation for a source. Then compare that citation to the guidance on the OWL at Purdue. Is everything correct? What's missing or incorrect?

Additional Resources

1. For more on citation tools and citation managers: Oregon State University Libraries: Citations 101.
2. For all of the details about how to cite very specific source types, both in text and on the references page: The OWL at Purdue: Research and Citation Resources.

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Attribution

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CHAPTER 6: MLA STYLE AND CITATION PRACTICES

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6.1: Document Formatting in MLA Style

Document Formatting in MLA Style

One purpose of using MLA format is to streamline the writing process and establish a consistent and uniform way of presenting material. For this reason, there are specific guidelines you'll need to follow when formatting your paper.

General MLA Formatting Rules

- **Font:** Your paper should be written in 12-point text. Whichever font you choose, MLA requires that regular and italicized text be easily distinguishable from each other. Times and Times New Roman are often recommended.
- **Line Spacing:** All text in your paper should be double-spaced.
- **Margins:** All page margins (top, bottom, left, and right) should be 1 inch. All text should be left-justified.
- **Indentation:** The first line of every paragraph should be indented 0.5 inches.
- **Page Numbers:** Create a right-justified header 0.5 inches from the top edge of every page. This header should include your last name, followed by a space and the page number. Your pages should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3 …) and should start with the number 1 on your title page. Most word-processing programs have the ability to automatically add the correct page number to each page so you don't have to do this by hand.
- **Use of Italics:** In MLA style, you should italicize (rather than underline) the titles of books, plays, or other standalone works. You should also italicize (rather than underline) words or phrases you want to lend particular emphasis—though you should do this rarely.

- **Sentence Spacing:** Include just one single space after a period before the next sentence: “Mary went to the store. She bought some milk. Then she went home.”

- **The First Page:** Like the rest of your paper, everything on your first page, even the headers, should be double-spaced. The following information should be left-justified in regular font at the top of the first page (in the main part of the page, not the header):

    - on the first line, your first and last name
    - on the second line, your instructor’s name
    - on the third line, the name of the class
    - on the fourth line, the date: day month year

- **The Title:** After the header, the next double-spaced line should include the title of your paper. This should be centered and in title case, and it should not be bolded, underlined, or italicized (unless it includes the name of a book, in which case just the book title should be italicized).

- **The Oxford Comma:** The Oxford comma (also called the serial comma) is the comma that comes after the second-to-last item in a series or list. For example: *The UK includes the countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.* In the previous sentence, the comma immediately after “Wales” is the Oxford comma. In general writing conventions, whether the Oxford comma should be used is actually a point of fervent debate among passionate grammarians. However, it’s a requirement in MLA style, so double-check all your lists and series to make sure you include it!

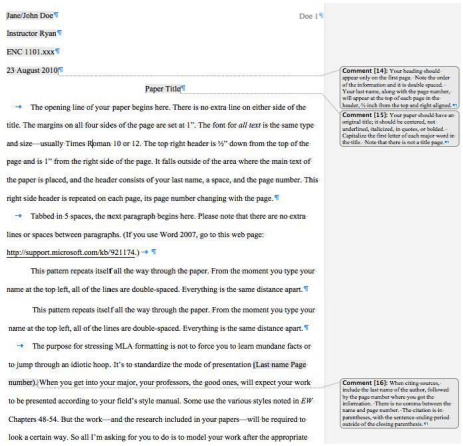


Figure 6.1.1. First page of an MLA formatted paper

This sample paper shows how the first page of a paper written in MLA is formatted. Note the header information in the upper-left corner, the last name and page numbers in the upper-right corner, the double-spaced text, and indentations that begin each paragraph.

ATTRIBUTION

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6.2: Citing Sources in Your Paper

Citing Sources in Your Paper

You need to cite all your information: if someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge, but if you are ever in doubt, go ahead and document the material.

If you are using MLA style, then your citation of the source in the body of the essay will point to the Works Cited at the end. You must cite your sources as you use them, mention the author and/or title of the source by name if you summarize their ideas. If you paraphrase or directly quote the source, you must give the author or title of the source and the page number (if available) in parentheses. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to readers that information has been incorporated from a separate source. It also provides readers with the information they need to locate the source in the Works Cited at the end of your essay where they can find the complete reference.

What Does It Mean to Credit or Cite Your Sources?

Giving credit to the sources you used to create a text is important (and useful!) for several reasons:

- It strengthens your credibility as a writer by showing that you have researched your topic and used sources responsibly.
- It gives credit to the original authors whose ideas, information, or language contributed to your work and helps you avoid plagiarism.
- It provides readers with resources (already curated by you in your research process!) they can consult if they want to learn more about your topic.

For college-level work, this generally means two things: in-text (or parenthetical) citations and a Works Cited or References page. These elements vary somewhat across academic disciplines. For example, writing courses often use MLA (Modern Language Association) format, while psychology courses commonly use APA (American Psychological Association) format.

Although citation styles differ in their specific requirements, they share the same purpose: identifying the sources used in a piece of writing. All of the information in this chapter follows MLA guidelines, which you will use in your writing classes and many other humanities courses.

Once you have brought source material into your writing through quotation, summary, or paraphrase, you

must identify the source with an in-text citation. Doing so gives credit to the original author, helps you avoid plagiarism, and allows readers to distinguish between source material and your own ideas.

In-Text Citation

Every time you use an idea or language from a source in your text (so every time you summarize, paraphrase, or directly quote material from a source), you will want to add an in-text citation. Sometimes you can accomplish this simply by mentioning the author or title of a source in the body of your writing, but other times you'll handle in-text citation differently, with a parenthetical citation. Parenthetical means that the citation appears in parentheses in the text of your essay.

A basic MLA parenthetical citation includes the author's last name and the page number where the information appears. For example, let's say I'm using material from an article written by Lisa Smith. The article appears in a print magazine on pages 38–42. On page 41, Smith writes, "While most studies have shown that Expo dry erase markers have superior lasting power, erasability, and color saturation than other brands on the market, their higher cost is a concern for some consumers."

I might incorporate that into a paper like this:

- By most measurable standards, Expo markers are clearly the favored option (Smith 41).

However, you do not always need both the author's name and page number in the parenthetical citation. If you mention the author's name in the sentence itself, you only need to include the page number in parentheses:

- According to Lisa Smith, Expo markers are clearly the favored option by most measurable standards (41).

Three Ways to Cite

In this section, we'll discuss three ways to cite or identify written source materials in your own writing.

1. Introduce the Author and/or the Title of the So

By introducing the author or the material, you make it clear to the reader that what you're talking about is from a source. Here's an example of a quotation that is identified by introducing the author and the title of source (which are marked in bold):

In the article "Grooming Poodles for Fun and Profit," Jonas Fogbottom explains,

> "Poodle grooming is a labor of love. It takes years of practice to be good at it, but once learned, it's a fun and worthwhile career."

Here's an example of a paraphrase that is identified in the same way:

> In the article "Grooming Poodles for Fun and Profit," Jonas Fogbottom says that although it takes a long time to become a skilled poodle groomer, it's well worth the effort and leads to a good career.

Note that, in the example above, (1) if there are no page numbers to cite, and (2) if the name of the author is signaled in the phrase that introduces the bit of source material, then there is no need for the parenthetical citation. This is an example of a situation where mentioning the author by name is the only in-text citation you'll need. And sometimes, if the name of the author is unknown, then you might just mention the title of the article instead. It will be up to you, as a writer, to choose which method works best for your given situation.

The first time that you mention a source in your writing, you should always introduce the speaker and, if possible, the title of the source as well. Note that the speaker is the person responsible for stating the information that you're citing and that this is not always the author of the text. For example, an author of an article might quote someone else, and you might quote or paraphrase that person.

> Use the speaker's full name (e.g. "According to Jonas Fogbottom …") the first time you introduce them; if you mention them again in the paper, use their last name only (e.g. "Fogbottom goes on to discuss …").

2. Use Linking or Attributive Language

Using linking language (sometimes called attributive language or signal phrases) simply means using words that show the reader you are still talking about a source that you just mentioned.

For example, you might use linking language that looks something like this:

- The author also explains …
- Fogbottom continues …
- The article goes on to say …
- The data set also demonstrates …

By using this kind of language, you make it clear to the reader that you're still talking about a source. And while you'll use this type of language throughout any researched essay whether you're also using parenthetical citations or not, as we mentioned above, sometimes this linking language will be all you need for in-text citation.

Let's look back at the last Fogbottom example from above, and imagine you wanted to add two more

sentences from the same source. The linking language is indicated in bold:

> In the article "Grooming Poodles for Fun and Profit," Jonas Fogbottom says that although it takes a long time to become a skilled poodle groomer, it's well worth the effort and leads to a good career. Fogbottom goes on to explain how one is trained in the art of dog and poodle grooming. The article also gives a set of resources for people who want to know more about a dog grooming career.

Using the linking language makes it absolutely clear to your reader that you are still talking about a source.

Works Cited

Whatever comes first in the Works Cited citation is what will go into the parentheses in a parenthetical citation. Most often that item is an author's last name, but sometimes it's a title or abbreviated title of an article or other type of text. This is another good reason to start by creating a Works Cited entry the moment you begin working with a source.

Keep in mind that the author is not always a single person. In many cases, an organization, company, or government agency is responsible for the content and should be listed as the author.

---

3. Use a Parenthetical Citation

A parenthetical citation is a citation enclosed within parentheses.

The classic parenthetical citation includes the author's name and, if there is one, a page number. To learn more about parenthetical citation and see some examples, see the Purdue OWL article on "MLA In-Text Citations: The Basics". Here's an example: (Fogbottom 16).

- If there are **two authors**, list both (with a page number, if available): (Smith and Jones 24).
- If there are **three or more authors**, list the first author only and add **"et al."*** (with a page number, if available): (Smith et al. 62).

***et al means "and others."** If a text or source has three or more authors, MLA style has us just list the first one with et al.

- **But my source doesn't have page numbers!** If you are using an electronic source or another kind of source with no page numbers, just leave the page

number out: (Fogbottom).

If you're quoting or paraphrasing someone who was cited by the author of one of your sources, then that's handled a bit differently. For example, what if you quote Smith, but you found that quote in the article by Fogbottom. In this case, you should introduce the speaker (Smith) as described above, and then cite the source for the quote, like this: (qtd. in Fogbottom).

- **But my source doesn't have an author!** This happens sometimes. Many useful documents, like government publications, organizational reports, and surveys, don't list their authors. On the other hand, sometimes no clearly listed author can be a red flag that a source is not entirely trustworthy or is not researched well enough to be a reliable source for you. If you encounter a source with no author, do look for other indicators that it is a good (or poor) source—who published it, does it have an appropriate list of references, is it current information, is it unbiased? If you determine that this source is an appropriate source to use, then, when you create your in-text citation for it, you will **simply use the title of the source** (article, chapter, graph, film, etc.) in the place where you would have used the author's name. **If the title is long**, you should abbreviate it by listing the first one or two words of it (with a page number, if available).

Let's imagine you're working with a newspaper article entitled, "What's New in Technology," enclosed in quotation marks to indicate that this is an article title, and with no known author. Here's what that would look like in a parenthetical citation: ("What's New" B6).

- If there is **no author and you're working with an electronic article**, use the first one or two words in your parenthetical citation, again, enclosed in quotation marks. Let's imagine you're working with a web article entitled, "Pie Baking for Fun and Profit" and with no author. Here's what that would look like in a parenthetical citation: ("Pie Baking").

- The **parenthetical citation** should be added at the end of the sentence that contains the source material. Let's go back to the Fogbottom example and see how a parenthetical citation would work: "Poodle grooming is a labor of love. It takes years of practice to be good at it, but once learned, it's a fun and worthwhile career" (Fogbottom).

- Here's what it would look like if we used it with a **paraphrase instead of a quotation**: Although it takes a long time to become a skilled poodle groomer, it's well worth the effort and leads to a good career (Fogbottom).

Note that the citation is placed at the end of the sentence; the period comes after the parentheses. Misplacing the period is one of the most common formatting errors made by students.

Using parenthetical citation makes it crystal clear that a sentence comes from source material. This is, by far, the easiest way to cite or identify your source materials, too.

If using parenthetical citations is easy, why would we bother with using introduction or linking language to identify sources?

Good question! There would be nothing wrong with only using parenthetical citations all the way through your writing—it would absolutely do the job of citing the material. But, it wouldn't read smoothly and would feel somewhat rough because every time a parenthetical citation popped up, the reader would be "stopped" in place for a moment. Using a combination of introduction, linking language, and parenthetical citation, as needed, makes the writing smoother and easier to read. It also integrates the source material with the writer's ideas. We call this synthesis, and it's part of the craft of writing.

Rules for In-Text Citations

The following examples illustrate basic rules for documenting sources within the text of your paper in MLA style:

Author named in the introduction to the paraphrase or quote: Jacob Leibowitz found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (56). Leibowitz states, "People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels" (56).

Author named in parentheses: One source indicates that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (Leibowitz 56). A noted nutritionist advises diabetics: "People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels" (Leibowitz 56).

Unknown author: One website points out that a low-carbohydrate diet may aggravate a heart condition by raising a person's bad cholesterol ("Cholesterol and the Low-carb Diet").

Unknown or No Page Reference: The risks of following a low-carbohydrate diet outweigh any benefits according to one researcher (Jones). Gerald Jones believes that "a balanced diet is still the safest and most effective approach to good health."

A source quoted in another source (an indirect quotation): "For the chronically overweight," states Martin Rogers, "a low-carbohydrate diet may provide a viable option for weight loss" (qtd. in Evans 46).

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Formatting In-Text Citations from Various Source Types

This section provides MLA-9 documentation style for various types of in-text citations. Review them to get a sense of what is covered, and then refer to them again as needed.

Follow the guidelines that best describe your source.

In-Text Citation Models

Citations by Author Type

- A Work by One Author
- A Work by Two Authors
- A Work by Three or More Authors
- A Work Authored by an Organization
- Two or More Works by the Same Author
- Works by Authors with the Same Last Name
- A Work with No Listed Author
- A Source Quoted in Another Source (Indirect Citation)
- Two or More Works Cited in One Reference

Electronic Sources

- Web Sources
- Personal Communication and Social Media

Citations by Format and Genre

- Encyclopedia or Dictionary Entry
- Selection in an Anthology or a Collection
- Government Document
- Historical Document
- Legal Source
- Visual, Such as a Table, a Chart, or Another Graphic
- Literary Works without Parts or Line Numbers
- Literary Works with Numbered Divisions
- Verse Play or Poem

- Sacred Text

Citations by Author Type

A Work by One Author

For a source with one author, include the author's name and the page number where the information appears. If you mention the author's name in your sentence, include only the page number in parentheses. If you do not mention the author's name in the sentence, include both the author's last name and the page number in the parenthetical citation.

Author named in the sentence:

- Chang emphasized that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

Author not named in the sentence:

- “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (Chang 49).

Paraphrase with author named in the sentence and page number unknown:

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

Paraphrase with author not named in the sentence:

- Weight-bearing exercise has many potential benefits for women (Chang 49).

One-page Works:

Do not include the page number if the work is only one-page long.

- According to Rachel McLish, weight-bearing exercise has many potential benefits for women.

A Work by Two Authors

When a source has two authors, include both authors' last names each time you cite the source. Join their names using “and.” If you mention the authors in your sentence, include only the page number in parentheses. If you do not mention the authors in the sentence, include both last names and the page number in the parenthetical citation.

- As Garrison and Gould pointed out, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (101).

- As health experts continue to emphasize, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (Garrison and Gould 101).

The same format applies when you paraphrase information from a source:

- As Garrison and Gould pointed out, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (101).

- As health experts continue to emphasize, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (Garrison and Gould 101).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

A Work by Three or More Authors

If the work you are citing has three or more authors, include the first author’s last name followed by *et al.* in your in-text citations. *Et al.* is a Latin abbreviation meaning “and others.”

On first reference and all subsequent references, you may use the same format.

- Henderson et al. surveyed 350 smokers aged 18 to 30 (23).

- One survey, conducted among 350 smokers aged 18 to 30, included a detailed questionnaire about participants’ motivations for smoking (Henderson et al. 23).

When you mention the authors in your sentence, include only the first author’s name followed by *et al.* and the page number in parentheses if

needed:

- Henderson et al. found that some young people, particularly young women, use smoking as a means of appetite suppression.

- Some young women use smoking as a means of appetite suppression (Henderson et al. 23).

In MLA style, *et al.* is not followed by a comma in the parenthetical citation, and no comma appears between the author and page number. The abbreviation *et al.* includes a period after "al." because it is a shortened Latin term meaning "and others."

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

A Work Authored by an Organization

When citing a work with no individual author, use the name of the organization in place of the author's name. If the organization has a well-known abbreviation, you may introduce it the first time you cite the source by writing out the full name followed by the abbreviation in brackets. After that, you may use the abbreviation alone.

- It is possible for a patient to have a small stroke without even realizing it (American Heart Association).

When the organization name is used in the sentence, include only the page number in parentheses if applicable, or omit a citation if no page number is available in the source text.

In MLA style, there is no comma between the organization name and the page number in parenthetical citations.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

A Work with No Listed Author

If no individual author is listed and the source cannot be attributed to an organization, use a shortened version of the title in place of the author's name in your in-text citation. You may use the full title in your sentence or shorten it to the first few key words in a parenthetical citation. The shortened title should match the way the source is listed on your Works Cited.

Follow standard MLA conventions for formatting titles:

- Italicize titles of books and other larger works.
- Place titles of articles, chapters, and shorter works in quotation marks.

Original Title: “Living with Diabetes: Managing Your Health.”

Shortened Title: “Living with Diabetes”

- “Living with Diabetes” recommends regular exercise for patients with diabetes.
- Regular exercise can benefit patients with diabetes (“Living with Diabetes”).

If you mention the title in your sentence, you do not need to repeat it in the parenthetical citation:

- In “Living with Diabetes,” the authors recommend regular exercise for patients with diabetes.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Two or More Works by the Same Author

If you use more than one source by the same author, include a shortened version of the title in your in-text citation to help readers identify which source you are referencing. The shortened title should match the title listed in your Works Cited.

For example, if you use two sources by Rodriguez—one titled “Nutrition Myths” and another titled “Supplement Safety”—your citations might look like this:

- Rodriguez criticized the nutrition-supplement industry for making unsubstantiated and sometimes misleading claims about the benefits of taking supplements (“Nutrition” 27).
- Consumers are often unaware of the potential harmful effects of some popular supplements (“Supplement” 42).

If you mention the author's name in your sentence, include only the shortened title and page number in parentheses:

- Rodriguez argued that many supplement manufacturers make claims that are not supported by scientific evidence (“Nutrition” 27).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Works by Authors with the Same Last Name

If you are citing works by different authors who share the same last name, include the author's first

name in the signal phrase to distinguish between them or first initial in the parenthetical citation.

- Jake Williams believes nutritional supplements can be a useful part of some diet and fitness regimens. Cecil Williams, however, argues that these supplements are overrated.

If you do not mention the authors' names in the sentence, include the initials and last names in the parenthetical citation:

- According to two leading researchers, the rate of childhood obesity exceeds the rate of adult obesity (K. Connelley 24; O. Connelley 31).

- Studies from both Angel Wright and Caroline Wright confirm the benefits of diet and exercise for weight loss (A. Wright 17; C. Wright 42).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

A Source Quoted in Another Source

If a source you are using includes a quotation from another author, and you cannot access the original source directly, indicate this in your parenthetical citation by naming the original speaker or writer in your sentence and identifying the source you actually consulted in your parenthetical citation.

Use ***qtd. in*** to show that the quotation appears within another source.

- Rosenhan's study "On Being Sane in Insane Places,"found that psychiatrists diagnosed schizophrenia in individuals who claimed to be experiencing hallucinations and sought treatment—even though these patients were, in fact, imposters (qtd. in Spitzer 45).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Two or More Works Cited in One Reference

At times, you may include more than one source in a single parenthetical citation, such as when discussing related research or studies with similar findings. When citing multiple sources in the same parentheses, list them in alphabetical order according to the Works Cited entry and separate each citation with a semicolon.

- Some researchers have found serious flaws in the way Rosenhan's study was conducted (Dawes 32; Spitzer 45).

Both of these sources support the same general point, so they may be cited together in a single

parenthetical reference.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Citations by Format and Genre

Encyclopedia or Dictionary Entry

When citing an entry from an encyclopedia or dictionary, use the author if one is provided. If no author is listed, use the title of the entry. Most online reference works do not include page numbers, so the in-text citation will often include only the author or title.

- Many people revere Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world ("Mount Everest").

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Selection in an Anthology or a Collection

When citing a work that appears within a larger collection, such as an essay, short story, poem, or chapter in an anthology, cite the author of the specific selection rather than the editor of the collection, because in-text citations refer to the author of the work being quoted or paraphrased. Use page numbers when available.

- Fromm argues that in some cases, dependence on technology may feel more disruptive to lose than certain interpersonal relationships. This raises questions about how emotional attachment is being redirected in contemporary life and whether this shift reflects a broader change in human values (381).

- In some cases, dependence on technology may feel more disruptive to lose than certain interpersonal relationships. This raises questions about how emotional attachment is being redirected in contemporary life and whether this shift reflects a broader change in human values (Fromm 381).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Government Document

Government documents are cited in MLA style using the name of the government agency or office listed as the author. In most cases, these sources are treated like other organizational authors.

If the author is clearly identified, use that name in your in-text citation. If the source includes multiple levels of government agencies, include enough information to help readers match the in-text citation to the Works Cited entry. In some cases, this may require listing the government name first followed

by the specific agency (for example, **country → branch → agency**).

When government names are standardized in the Works Cited entry, use the same standardized form in your in-text citation. In standardized entries, the full government name should be spelled out (for example, “United States,” not “U.S.”). However, if your Works Cited list includes multiple different agencies under the same government, you must include enough of the sub-agency names in your parentheses to clearly distinguish the sources from one another.

Full Standardized Form Example:

> Title VI and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act prohibit discrimination “on the ground of race, color, or national origin, under ‘any health program or activity, any part of which is receiving Federal financial assistance … or under any program or activity that is administered by an Executive agency or any entity established under [Title I of ACA]’” (United States, Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, “Discrimination on the Basis of Race, Color, or National Origin”).

When a standardized government name is exceptionally long, MLA style allows you to shorten the name inside a parenthetical citation to its first main noun phrase (for example, shortening United States, Department of Health and Human Services to just United States).

Shortened Parenthetical Form Example:

> Title VI and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act prohibit discrimination “on the ground of race, color, or national origin, under ‘any health program or activity, any part of which is receiving Federal financial assistance … or under any program or activity that is administered by an Executive agency or any entity established under [Title I of ACA]’” (United States, “Discrimination.”).

However, if you choose to integrate the author's name directly into your sentence prose rather than using parentheses, you do not need to use the rigid, fully spelled-out standardized format. Instead, you can use the agency's familiar name to maintain natural readability for your reader. In these narrative cases, you only need to place a shortened version of the title in parentheses at the end.

Author Mentioned in Signal Phrase:

> According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, Title VI and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act prohibit discrimination “on the ground of race, color, or national origin, under ‘any health program or activity, any part of which is receiving Federal financial assistance … or under any program or activity that is administered by an Executive agency or any entity established under [Title I of ACA]’” (“Discrimination”).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Historical Document

Some historical documents, such as constitutions, declarations, treaties, and founding legal texts, do not rely on page numbers. Instead, cite the title of the document and the numbered division that helps readers locate the passage, such as an article (art.), section (sec.), amendment (amend.), or clause. Use the abbreviations provided by the document when appropriate.

- Freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (United States Constitution, amend. 1).

Note: Use the numbering system provided by the document to help readers locate the passage.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Legal Source

Legal sources, such as legislative acts and court cases, are generally identified by their titles. When a law or court case is mentioned in your writing, use the title that appears in the Works Cited entry. Court case names are typically italicized, while the names of laws and acts are not.

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in employment and public life.

- In *Katz v. United States*, the Supreme Court expanded privacy protections under the Fourth Amendment.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Visual, Such as a Table, a Chart, or Another Graphic

Visual sources, such as tables, charts, graphs, photographs, maps, and illustrations, should be identified using the information provided in the source. If a visual is labeled with a figure number, use that figure number to help readers locate the material. When no figure number is provided, identify the visual by its title, description, creator, or other identifying information that corresponds to the Works Cited entry.

If you refer to a numbered visual in your writing, spell out the word *Figure* in the sentence. In parenthetical citations, use the abbreviation *fig.* followed by the figure number.

- Figure 2 shows a steady decline in newspaper circulation over the past two decades.

- Newspaper circulation declined steadily over the past two decades (Lopez, fig. 2).

When a visual does not include a figure number, identify the image in your discussion and provide the author, creator, or title that appears in the Works Cited entry.

- The photograph *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* demonstrates the dramatic use of light and contrast in landscape photography (Adams).

When citing an online image, infographic, chart, or photograph, use the creator's name or the title of the work in the same way you would cite any other source.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Literary Works without Parts or Line Numbers

Many literary works, including short stories, novels, and some plays, do not use a numbering system that allows readers to locate passages by chapter, act, scene, or line number. In these cases, cite the page number when available.

- At the end of the story, the narrator realizes that her assumptions about her neighbor were incorrect (Garcia 42).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Literary Works with Numbered Divisions

Some literary works are available in multiple editions, making page numbers less useful for locating passages. When a work includes a numbering system, such as acts, scenes, chapters, books, or line numbers, provide those divisions to help readers find the passage regardless of the edition they are using.

- Juliet questions the importance of family names when she asks, “What’s in a name?” (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.43).

or

- Odysseus reveals his identity only after testing the loyalty of those around him (*Odyssey* 23.205–210).

Note: If the work provides a useful numbering system, use it. If it does not, use page numbers.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Verse Play or Poem

Verse plays and poems are often available in multiple editions. Because page numbers may vary between editions, MLA style generally uses line numbers and other numbered divisions provided by the work.

For verse plays, cite the act, scene, and line numbers when available. Separate the numbers with

periods.

- Hamlet immediately seeks revenge after learning of his father's murder, declaring that he will act "with wings as swift / As meditation" (*Hamlet* 1.5.35-37).

For poems, cite the numbering system provided by the work, such as books, cantos, parts, stanzas, or line numbers. When line numbers are cited for the first time, use the word *line* or *lines*. In subsequent citations, the numbers alone may be used if it is clear that they refer to lines.

- Odysseus reflects on human vulnerability, observing that people are among the weakest of living creatures (Homer, bk. 18, lines 129-31).

When a poem does not provide line numbers, do not count lines yourself. Instead, use page numbers or another numbered division supplied by the source.

If the author's name, title, or both are not mentioned in your sentence, include the necessary identifying information in the parenthetical citation.

The hero's strength is celebrated throughout the poem (*Beowulf*, lines 145-46).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Sacred Text

When citing a sacred text, provide a Works Cited entry for the specific edition you consulted. In your in-text citation, identify the passage using the divisions provided by the text, such as book, chapter, and verse, rather than page numbers.

The first time you cite a passage, include the title of the edition listed in the Works Cited entry. Subsequent citations from the same edition may include only the book, chapter, and verse numbers.

- One proverb encourages compassion even toward those who oppose us: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, Prov. 25.21).

After the first citation, the edition title may be omitted if no confusion will result.

- The same theme of compassion appears elsewhere in scripture (Prov. 25.21).

When referring to a sacred work in a general sense, do not italicize its name.

- The Bible and the Quran contain narratives, teachings, and parables that have

influenced cultures throughout the world.

When referring to a specific published edition, italicize the title of that edition.

- *The New Jerusalem Bible* includes extensive notes and commentary for readers.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Electronic Sources

Whenever possible, cite electronic sources as you would print sources, using the author, the date, and where appropriate, a page number. For some types of electronic sources—for instance, many online articles—this information is easily available. Other times, however, you will need to vary the format to reflect the differences in online media.

Web Sources

Citations for online sources follow the same MLA principles used for all other works. The goal is to provide enough information in the text for readers to identify the source and locate the passage in the Works Cited list.

When a source includes an author, use that name in your citation. If no author is available, use a shortened version of the title instead. Some online sources include numbered sections or headings that can help readers locate specific passages. You may include these numbers only when they are clearly provided in the original source. Do not create or assume numbering that is not already present.

- Eating a well-balanced meal consisting of the three macronutrients —protein, fat, and carbohydrates—along with exercising for 30 minutes per day is a good habit to develop for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Perez).

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

Personal Communication and Social Media

Personal communications, such as emails, interviews, letters and text messages, as well as social media posts, should be cited using the person involved, screen name, or account name listed in the works cited entry.

- In a personal communication, John Yardley stated that available information on the relationship between cell phone use and cancer is inconclusive.

- Larry Hubert wrote to the Attorney General to express concerns. In his email, he described ongoing issues with the policy.

- In a text message to Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus explained that the meeting had been rescheduled.

Back to the In-Text Citation Models TOC

ATTRIBUTION

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6.3: The Works Cited

The Works Cited

The purpose of the Works Cited is to collect all of the sources used in a text and to arrange them so they are easy for your reader to locate. Listing the sources also helps you track them and makes it less likely that you might accidentally plagiarize by forgetting to mention a piece of source material.

Introduction: The MLA Architecture

MLA style relies on a universal template of core elements rather than a rigid list of separate rules for every source type. Instead of memorizing formulas, you fit a source's information into a standardized, sequential stack.

The Standard Core Elements

When a source stands alone, you gather up to nine distinct pieces of information in this exact order:

1. Author
2. Title of source

Container

3. Title of container (in italics)
4. Contributor
5. Version
6. Number

7. Publisher
8. Publication date
9. Location

For more information on the Core Elements, see the MLA Style Center Works Cited: Quick Guide.

THE MULTI-CONTAINER FRAMEWORK

Many modern sources live inside a nested layer, resembling boxes inside larger boxes. When a source is found inside a digital database or streaming platform, you repeat elements 3 through 9 to account for that second layer.

Here is an academic journal article pulled from an online database to illustrate how the vertical map works:

Source (example, Article)

1. **Author:** Abramowitsch, Simon.
2. **Title of source:** "Addressing Blackness, Dreaming Whiteness: Negotiating 21st-Century Race and Readership in Ta-Nehisi Coates's Between the World and Me."

Container 1 (example, Journal)

3. **Title of container (in italics):** *CLA Journal*,
4. Contributor
5. Version
6. **Number:** vol. 60, no. 4,
7. Publisher
8. **Publication date:** 2017,
9. **Location:** pp. 458–78.

Container 2 (example, Database)

10. **Title of container (in italics):** *JSTOR*,
11. **Location:** www.jstor.org/stable/26557006.

Abramowitsch, Simon. “Addressing Blackness, Dreaming Whiteness: Negotiating 21st-Century Race and Readership in Ta-Nehisi Coates’s Between the World and Me.” *CLA Journal*, 2017, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 458–78. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26557006. Accessed 10 Oct. 2025.

The Source: The individual piece of content (e.g., an article, a video, a song).

Container 1 (in italics): The immediate venue where that content is published (e.g., a scholarly journal, a website, an album).

Container 2 (in italics): The larger platform or repository hosting the first container (e.g., a database like *JSTOR*, a streaming network like *Netflix* or *Spotify*).

Anatomy of Location: Container vs. Contained

To build a correct citation, you must distinguish between the container, the house, and the contained work, living in the house.

Contained (The Content) Use quotation marks around the title	**Container (The House)** Use italics
Article	Journal, magazine, or newspaper
Essay, poem, or short story	Anthology or collection
Blog post	Blog
Short microblog	Website or app (such as *TikTok* or *Bluesky*)

Post or comment	Website, app or discussion forum
Song or individual track	Album (digital or physical)
Video clip or movie	Video sharing platform (such as *YouTube*)
Individual episode	Television series, podcast, or radio program
Digitized book	Digital book repository (such as *Google Books*)
Photo or video clip	Media sharing website or app (such as *Instagram* or *TikTok*)
Digital image of a painting	Museum website
Artwork	Art exhibition or gallery
Version of the Bible	Bible (such as *King James Bible*)

Setting Up the Page

Follow these guidelines to set up your Works Cited:

- Works Cited is located at the end of a paper. Always start it at the top of a new page.
- Title it Works Cited, even if there is only a single source listed.
- Center the title at the topmost point on the page.
- The Works Cited uses the same formatting as the rest of the paper:

- 12-point standard font in Times New Roman or font style permitted by your instructor
- Double-spacing with no extra spaces before and after paragraphs
- 1” margins on all sides

- List sources alphabetically, according to whatever comes first in each citation. (Do not list them in the order they occur within the paper.)
- Use “hanging” paragraphs to set up sources. This means that the first line of each source begins at the left margin, while second and subsequent lines are indented by ½” (1 tab). This is the reverse of a regular paragraph. The “hanging” format makes it easy to visually scroll down the list and see each source. You can set hanging paragraphs by choosing the “hanging” setting in your word processing program.

Here’s an annotated example of a Works Cited. You can also open the example in a new page:

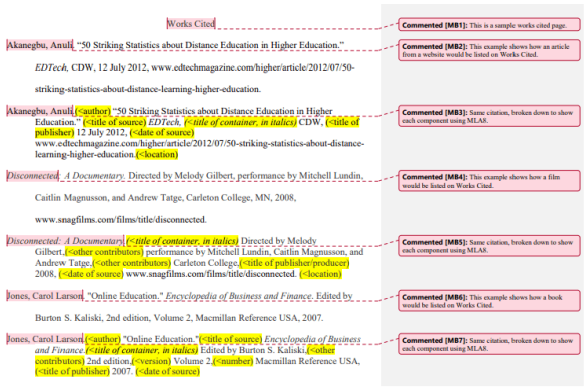


Figure 6.3.1. Works Cited page

Creating Entries on the Works Cited

The newest version of MLA—version 9—came out in April 2021, focusing on making the core element strategy more accessible through more examples and explanations for the works cited.

Let’s look at how to set up Works Cited citations. We’ll work through one, and then I’ll add some details. We’ll work with this article from *The Atlantic*: “The Importance of High

School Mentors."

Author

- The first author's name is always reversed: Last Name, First Name.
- It is in 12-point Roman font and (as you'll note in the template) is followed by a period.

Here's what you should have on line 1 (author): Sebenius, Alyza.

Title

- Capitalize all words in the title of source except for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions.
- If it is an article, essay, chapter, or any other "small" piece of material, it will be in quotation marks and plain font.
- If it is a book, film, periodical, or an entire web page, it will be in italic font with no quotation marks.
- The title of source is followed with a period—and when quotation marks are used, note that the period always goes inside the quotation marks (see below).

Here's what should be on line 2: "The Importance of High School Mentors."

Title of Container (in italics)

The container is the "place" that holds or houses the source you're using. Here are some examples:

- A book chapter (the "title of source") is held within a book (the "container").
- A newspaper article (the "title of source") is held within a newspaper (the "container").
- An essay on a web page (the "title of source") is held within a website (the "container").
- A magazine article (the "title of source") is held within a magazine (the "container").
- The container is **almost always*** in italic font and followed by a comma.
- Capitalize it fully.

***An example** of a non-italicized container would be if you were citing an actual painting and the "container" was an art museum. The museum would be listed as the container but in standard font.

Here's what Container 1 for "The Importance of High School Mentors" looks like: *The Atlantic*,

Other Contributors

This line provides a way to mention people who assisted with creating or handling the source, e.g., directors, translators, performers, illustrators, etc.

- List them using plain, unabbreviated language, e.g., performed by, directed by, etc.
- Other contributors are listed in standard font and followed with a comma.

Our article has no "other contributors," and so we would leave this blank, skipping it. When you hit sections of the template where you have no information, just skip them and move on.

Version

Use this if you want to mention an edition number (e.g., 2nd ed.,) or if you want to list a volume (vol. 3), a month (Jan.).

- The version is written in standard font and followed by a comma.

Our article has no version, so we'll leave line 5 blank.

Number

Use this to provide an issue number (e.g., for a magazine or journal), a special archive number (e.g., with museum pieces), or something similar.

- The number is in standard font (no.) and followed by a comma.

Our article has no number, so we'll leave line 6 blank.

PUBLISHER

The publisher is the person or institution that makes the source available to the world.

- Publishers for books, periodicals, and printed materials are usually written on one of the first pages.
- Web page publishers can usually be found at the page bottom. If you cannot find the publisher quickly, you might use Google to search for it, i.e., searching "New York Times Publisher."
- Film and music publishers will usually be located on the material.
- Write out the complete publisher name; capitalize it fully and don't abbreviate or omit words.
- The publisher is in standard font and followed by a comma.

If we scroll to the page bottom, we find our publisher for line 7: The Atlantic Monthly Group.

PUBLICATION DATE

This is the date of the "title of source" (see line 2).

- Use MLA date format: day month year, with no commas between.
- Follow the date with a comma.
- With longer months, you may abbreviate the source; if you do, follow the abbreviation with a period.

We could use either of these options for our source:

13 January 2016

or

13 Jan. 2016

LOCATION

The source's location tells the reader where to find the source. Many sources will not have a location, but it should be listed if present.

If using a book (or any other source with page numbers), the page number is the location.

- For single pages, use this format: p. 6.
- For two or more pages, list like this: pp. 62–4 or pp. 184–96.
- If using two or more pages and they cross a "hundred" marker, list like this: pp. 456–502

If using a website, the location is the URL or DOI:

- With web pages, give the URL—but omit the protocol, http://, at the beginning.
- If a DOI (digital object indicator) number is available, use that instead of a URL: (doi.org/add DOI string)
- Do not break URLs or DOIs manually to try and fit them into your Works Cited: just copy and paste them from the web browser's address bar.
- If you have a different kind of source and believe you have a location with it, share it as best you can, following these guidelines.
- Locations are in standard font and followed by a period.

If using a database, the location is the Permalink or Stable URL:

- If using a database, the location is the Permalink or Stable URL.
- A Permalink or Stable URL is a persistent link provided by the database that is designed to continue working over time.
- Use the Permalink or Stable URL provided by the database rather than the URL from your browser's address bar, since browser URLs often contain temporary session information and may not work for other readers.
- Copy and paste the complete Permalink or Stable URL exactly as provided by the database.
- Permalinks and Stable URLs are in standard font and followed by a period.

Here's what you would have for line 9:

- www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/mentorship-in-public-

schools/423945/.

Now, to create a Works Cited citation, link all of the available elements together, following the correct punctuation and placing a space between each component.

- Use your word processor's menus to set hanging paragraphs
- Don't break your lines manually: set hanging paragraphs and then keep typing, allowing the software to determine the line breaks.
- Your citation should always end with a period.

Here's what the final citation would include:

- Sebenius, Alyza. "The Importance of High School Mentors." *The Atlantic*, The Atlantic Monthly Group, 13 Jan. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/mentorship-in-public-schools/423945/.

And here's what it will look like on the Works Cited with double-spacing and hanging paragraph:

Works Cited

Sebenius, Alyza. "The Importance of High School Mentors." *The Atlantic*, The Atlantic Monthly Group, 13 Jan. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/mentorship-in-public-schools/423945.

Chapter Licensing And Attributions

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6.3.1: Works Cited Models

Formatting Works Cited Entries from Various Source Types

This section provides MLA-9 documentation style for various types of Works Cited entries. Review them to get a sense of what is covered, and then refer to them again as needed.

Follow the guidelines that best describe your source.

Works Cited Models

Basic Format of Authors

- One Author
- Two Authors
- Three or More Authors
- Organization or Company as Author
- No Author Listed
- Two or More Works by the Same Author or Group of Authors
- An Edited or Translated Book with No Author
- An Edited or Translated Book with Author
- Author Using a Pseudonym or Screen Name
- Author Quoted by Another Author (Indirect Source)

Basic Format of Short Works

- Basic Format for an Article or Other Short Work
  - Print
  - Web
  - Database (Two containers)
    - Snapshot
- Parts of a Book

- Foreword, Introduction, Preface, or Afterword
- Chapter in a Book

- One Selection from an Anthology or Collection
- Two or More Selections from an Anthology or a Collection
- Letter in a Collection
- Book Review
- Film Review
- Performance Review

Additional Short Works

- A Letter to the Editor
- Comment on an Online Article
- Interview
- Article in a Dictionary or an Encyclopedia

Works Cited Models

Basic Format of Long Works and Works from Websites

- Basic Format of a Book (One container)
  - Print Book or Web
  - Basic Format for an EBook (Two containers)
  - Book in a Language Other Than English
  - Entire Anthology or Collection
  - Editions Other Than the First
  - Multivolume Work
  - Sacred Text
  - Graphic Narrative or Other Illustrated Work
  - An Entire Website
    - Website With Author or Editor
    - Website with No Author
    - Website with No Title
- Work from a Website
  - Snapshot
- Blog Post or Comment

- Academic Course or Department Home Page
- Dissertation and Theses (Two containers)

Audio, Visual, and Multimedia Sources

- Video or Audio from the Web (One container)
  - Snapshot
- Video or Audio from the Web (Two containers)
- Podcast
- A Film
- Supplementary Material Accompanying a Film
- Video Game
- Computer Software
- Television or Radio Episode or Program
- Transcript
- Live Performance
- Lecture or Public Address
- Musical Score
- Sound Recording
- Artwork, Photograph, or Other Visual Art
- Visual, such as a Table, a Chart, or another Graphic
- Cartoon
- Advertisement
- Map

Government and Legal Documents

- Government Document
- Historical Document
- Legislative Act (Law)
- Court Case

Personal Communication and Social Media

- Personal Letter
- Email Message

- Text Message
- Online Discussion List Post
- Social Media Post

Basic Format of Authors

One Author

The formatting of authors' names applies to all sources.

- VanderMeer, Jeff. *Annihilation*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Two Authors

List the authors' names in the order they appear on the book's title page. Use "and" before the last author's name.

- Rothstein, Leah, and Richard Rothstein. *Just Action: How to Challenge Segregation Enacted Under the Color of Law*. Liveright Publishing, 2023.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Three or More Authors

Name the first author in the parenthetical citation followed by "et al." (Latin for "and others"). Use "and others" in the signal phrase.

- Karr, Susan, et al. *Scientific American Environmental Science for a Changing World*. 3rd ed., W. H. Freeman, 2018.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Organization or Company as Author

When an organization, corporation, or government entity is the creator of a source, eliminate it from the Author slot in your Works Cited entry to avoid useless repetition. Because organizations almost always publish content on their own platforms, typing the company name as the Author, the Container, and the Publisher is redundant.

Example of organization/company as author and publisher:

- "Los Angeles Department of Water and Power." *EWG's Tap Water Database*, Environmental Working Group, www.ewg.org/tapwater/system.php?pws=CA1910067. Accessed 22 June 2025.

Example of organization/company as author, website, and publisher:

- "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2025." *Pew Research Center*, 4 Dec. 2025, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/12/04/public-trust-in-government-1958-2025/.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

No Author Listed

If no author is listed, begin the Works Cited entry with the title.

- "Ta-Nehisi Coates." *Britannica*, 26 Sep. 2025, www.britannica.com/biography/Ta-Nehisi-Coates#ref1236579.

- "Undocumented Immigrants." *American Immigration Council*, www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/about-immigration/undocumented-immigrants/. Accessed 1 Jan. 2026.

Finding an Author on Web Sources

Author information on websites is not always obvious at first glance. When an author is listed, it may appear near the top or bottom of the page, alongside the article title, or in a byline. If you do not see an individual author, check other parts of the site such as the homepage or "About" page, where authorship or responsibility for the content is often identified.

Keep in mind that the author is not always a single person. In many cases, an organization, company, or government agency is responsible for the content and should be listed as the author.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Two or More Works by the Same Author or Group of Authors

When more than one source appears in a Works Cited list, entries are organized alphabetically by the first significant word in each title or by the author's last name when an author is provided.

If you list more than one work by the same author or the same group of authors, you do not repeat their names in the second entry. Instead, begin the second entry with three hyphens followed by a period (—.). The three hyphens stand in place of the same author name or names listed in the first entry.

- Harari, Yuval Noah. *A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Harper, 2018.
- —. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Harper, 2015.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War*. Little, Brown, 2022.
- —. *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know*. Little, Brown, 2021.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

An Edited or Translated Book with No Author

When a book does not list a single author, but instead identifies an editor or translator as the primary contributor, begin the Works Cited entry with that person's name. Follow the name with the label *editor* or *translator*. If there are two or more editors or translators, use the plural form (*editors* or *translators*).

This format highlights who is responsible for preparing or translating the text when no original author is credited.

- Grafton, Anthony, et al., editors. *The Classical Tradition*. Harvard UP, 2010.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

An Edited or Translated Book with Author

When a book has a clearly identified author but is also published with an editor or translator, begin the Works Cited entry with the author's name. The title comes next. After the title, include the editor or translator using the correct MLA phrasing: *Edited by* or *Translated by*, followed by the name.

This structure shows both the original author of the work and the person responsible for preparing or translating the edition used.

- Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim, Harper Perennial, 1999.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Author Using a Pseudonym or Screen Name

When an author uses a pseudonym or screen name, list the name exactly as it appears in the source. If the author's real name is known and relevant, it may be included in parentheses after the pseudonym.

In cases where a work is attributed only to a username or screen name, that name functions as the author in the Works Cited entry.

- Food Science Babe (Erin Fitzgerald). "False Food Arguments and How to Spot Them," *AG Daily*, 16 Aug. 2023, www.agdaily.com/insights/false-food-arguments-and-how-to-spot-them/.

- switchback. Comment on "How Do I Remove This Gray Gummy Substance From a Hardwood Floor?" *Ask MetaFilter*, 7 June. 2016, ask.metafilter.com/389897/How-do-I-remove-this-gray-gummy-substance-from-a-hardwood-floor.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Author Quoted by Another Author (Indirect Source)

Sometimes you will encounter a quotation in a book or website that originally came from a different person. This is called an indirect source.

In MLA style, your Works Cited list must only include the source you actually looked at with your own eyes.

To handle this in your writing, follow this simple rule: Name the speaker in your sentence, but put the actual book you read in your parenthetical citation.

Show this connection by using the abbreviation qtd. in (short for "quoted in").

In-Text Citation:

- While life is characterized by growth in a structured functional manner, the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical (Fromm qtd. in Freire 51).

Works Cited:

- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin, 2017.

(Note: You do not list Erich Fromm in your Works Cited because you did not read his original work; you only read Paulo Freire's book in which Freire quoted from Fromm.)

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Basic Format of Short Works

Basic Format for an Article or Other Short Work

Short works include articles and other shorter pieces published in print, on websites, or through databases. In MLA style, the citation format changes depending on where the work is published, but all short works begin with the author's name, followed by the title of the work in quotation marks.

Print

- Levy, Joe. "Dirty Mind: Cranking up the Synths and the Sexuality, the Rising Star Made His First Classic." *Rolling Stone: Prince, A Special Collectors Edition,* Rolling Stone, 2023, pp. 68-70.

WEB

- Puyuelo Ureña, Eva. "Between Hopelessness and Despair: Afropessimism and Black Nihilism in Ta-Nehisi Coates's Works." *Revista De Estudios Norteamericanos*, 2021, institucional.us.es/revistas/estudios/25/Art_6.pdf.

WEB (Two Containers)

- Ghoshal, Rakhi, et al., "Risk and Protective Factors for IPV in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 2023, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 505-22, *Taylor and Francis Online,* doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2022.2154185#d1e373.

Database (Two containers)

Databases may provide a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), a stable URL, or a permalink, which is positioned at the very end of the Works Cited entry.

A DOI or a dedicated stable link is preferred over a standard web browser address due to its permanent reliability. For the DOI, you will use *doi.org*, followed by a forward slash (*doi.org/*) and the DOI string.

- Abramowitsch, Simon. "Addressing Blackness, Dreaming Whiteness: Negotiating 21st-Century Race and Readership in Ta-Nehisi Coates's Between the World and Me." *CLA Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2017, pp. 458–78. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26557006. Accessed 10 Oct. 2025.

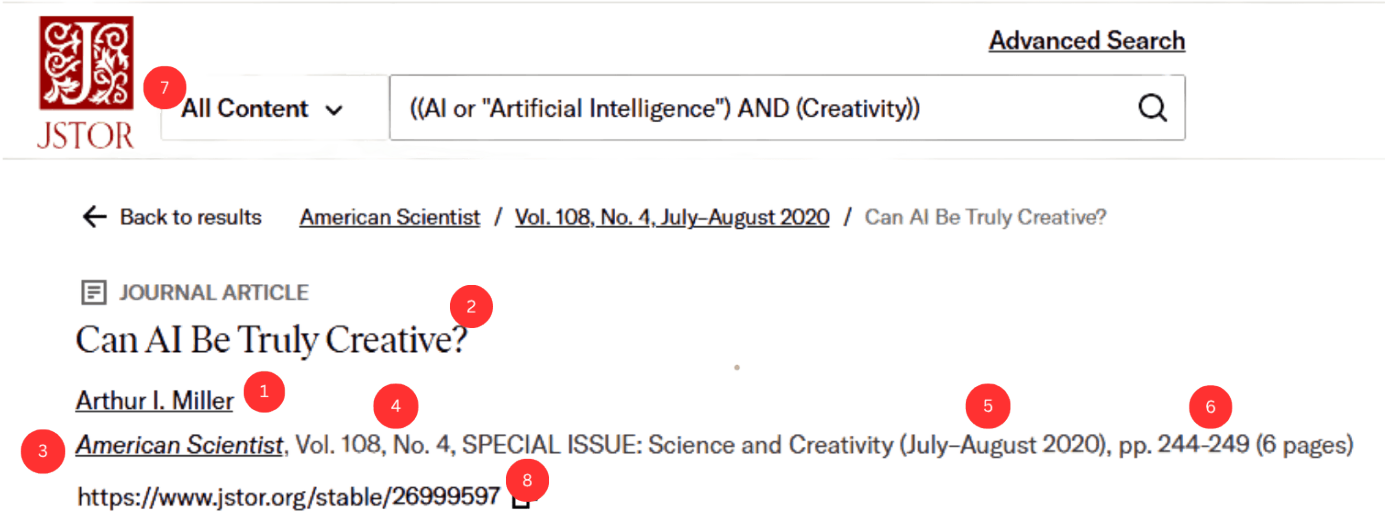
- Williams, James. "Black Muse 4 U: Liminality, Self-Determination, and Racial Uplift in the Music of Prince." *Journal of African American Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, Sept. 2017, pp. 296–319. *EBSCOhost*, doi-org.pasadenacc.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s12111-017-9370-8.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

ARTICLE FROM A DATABASE SNAPSHOT

How to cite an article from a database:

1. Author(s) of work, if any
2. Title and subtitle of article
3. Title of journal
4. Volume and issue number(s)
5. Date of publication (including month or season, if any)
6. Page number(s) of article, if any
7. Name of Database
8. Location of source (DOI, permalink, or stable URL)



Article from a Database

Works Cited in Hanging Indent:

Miller, Arthur I.[1] “Can AI Be Truly Creative?”[2] *American Scientist*,[3] vol. 108, no. 4, [4] July - Aug. 2020,[5] pp. 244-49.[6] *JSTOR*,[7] www.jstor.org/stable/26999597.[8]

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Parts of a Book

Foreword, Introduction, Preface, or Afterword

The citation begins with the author of the specific book section, followed by the capitalized, unitalicized name of that part (such as *Introduction*, *Preface*, or *Afterword*). Next, provide the italicized title of the complete book, followed by the word *by* and the primary author’s name. Conclude the entry with the book's publication details and the exact page range of the section.

Introduction in a Book

- Fowler, Karen Joy. Introduction. *Annihilation*, by Jeff VanderMeer, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014, pp. vii-xiii.

Chapter in a Book

The citation begins with the author of the specific chapter, followed by the chapter title enclosed in quotation marks. Next, provide the italicized title of the complete book and its standard publication details. Conclude the entry with the exact page range where the chapter appears.

Fromm, Erich. “Malignant Aggression: Necrophilia.” *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Henry Holt and Company, 1973, pp. 362-410.

Source Breakdown

Source Author: Fowler, Karen Joy.

Section Label: Introduction.

Container 1 (The Book): *Annihilation* (author, publication information, and location of pages)

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

One Selection from an Anthology or Collection

The citation begins with the author of the specific selection, followed by the individual work's title enclosed in quotation marks. Next, provide the italicized title of the anthology or collection, a comma, and the phrase *edited by* followed by the editor's name in standard order. Conclude the entry with the volume's publication metadata and the exact page range where the selection appears.

- Hughes, Langston. "Dream Boogie." *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*, edited by Richard Barksdale and Keneth Kinnamon, Prentice Hall, 1972, p. 522.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Two or More Selections from an Anthology or a Collection

The citation process utilizes a master entry for the complete collection alongside independent, abbreviated entries for each individual selection. The primary anthology entry follows standard container guidelines, while each selection entry contains only the specific author, the piece title in quotation marks, the collection editor's last name, and the page range. All entries are integrated into the main Works Cited list and organized alphabetically by the authors' or editors' surnames.

- Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." Barksdale and Kinnamon, 725-729.
- Barksdale, Richard, and Keneth Kinnamon, editors. *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*. Prentice Hall, 1972.
- Hughes, Langston. "Dream Boogie." Barksdale and Kinnamon, p. 522.

Source Breakdown of Master Entry

Source Creators (editors): Barksdale, Richard, and Keneth Kinnamon, editors.

Container (Anthology): *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Letter in a Collection

Print

The entry opens with the name of the letter writer, followed by the phrase *Letter to* and the recipient's name. Next, include the specific date of the letter, if available. Follow this with the title and publication details of the larger collection. For print editions, place the page range at the very end of the citation.

► Walpole, Horace. Letter to Horace Mann. 25 Feb. 1750. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Edited by W.S. Lewis, vol. 20, Yale UP, 1960, p. 126.

Web

The citation begins with the letter writer's name, the phrase *Letter to* with the recipient's name, and the creation date (if available). Next, provide the italicized title of the hosting website or digital archive. Conclude the entry with the name of the site publisher and the direct URL.

► Walpole, Horace. Letter to Horace Mann. 25 Feb. 1750. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale U, vol. 20, libsvcs-1.its.yale.edu/hwcorrespondence/page.asp. Accessed 1 Dec. 1 2019.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Book Review

Citing a book review can be confusing because you are tracking two different authors and two different titles. To keep them straight, remember that you are citing the person who wrote the review, not the person who wrote the book.

Scenario 1: The Review has both a Reviewer and a Unique Title

Use this order if the review has a named author and a creative headline:

Start with the name of the person who wrote the review (Last name, First name). If the review has its own unique headline, put it in quotation marks. Write the phrase *Review of,* followed by the Title of the Book (in italics), the word *by*, and the name of the Book Author (First name Last name). End with the standard publication details of the website, magazine, or journal where the review was published.

► Simon, Ed "Shakespeare Becoming Shakespeare, With Help From His Working-Class Peers." Review of *The Dream Factory: London's First Playhouse and the Making of William*, by Daniel Swift. *The New York Times*, 22 Nov. 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/11/22/books/review/ dream-factory-daniel-swift.html.

Scenario 2: The Review has a Reviewer but NO Unique Title

Use this order if the review names the author, but the headline is just *Review of [Book Title]*:

Name of the person who wrote the review (Last name, First name). The phrase *Review of,* followed

by the Title of the Book (in italics), the word *by*, and the Book Author's name (First name Last name).Standard publication details of the website, magazine, or journal.

- Lyall, Sarah. Review of *The Plunge*, by Lila Raicek. *The New York Times,* www.nytimes.com/2026/06/06/books/review/new-thriller-books.html.

Place the entry on your Works Cited alphabetically by the Reviewer's last name.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Film Review

A film review begins with the name of the reviewer and the title of the review, if one is provided. After the review title, include *Review of*, followed by the title of the film and the director. Then include publication information for the journal, magazine, newspaper, or website where the review appears.

- Chang, Justin. "'Backrooms,' 'Obsession,' and Hollywood's Zoomer-Horror Renaissance." Review of *Backrooms*, directed by Kane Parsons and *Obsession*, directed by Curry Barker. *The New Yorker*, 31 May 2026, www.newyorker.com/culture/the-current-cinema/backrooms-obsession-and-hollywoods-zoomer-horror-renaissance?_sp=69510d4d-23ea-4026-bc49-c4dd61218267.1780878573749.

If a review has no listed author and no title, begin the entry with *Review of*, followed by the title of the film. Alphabetize the entry by the first important word in the title of the film under review.

- Ebert, Roger, Review of *The Shawshank Redemption*, by Frank Darabont, *Roger Ebert*, Ebert Digital, 17 Oct. 1999, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-shawshank-redemption-1994.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Performance Review

A performance review begins with the name of the reviewer and the title of the review, if one is provided. After the review title, include *Review of*, followed by the title of the performance (such as a concert, play, or dance work). After the title, include the creator, director, or performing artist if relevant. Then include the publication information for the source where the review appears.

If a review has no listed author and no title, begin the entry with *Review of*, followed by the title of the performance. Alphabetize the entry by the first important word in the title of the work reviewed.

- Rich, Frank. "Theater: Lloyd Webber's 'Cats.'" Review of *Cats*. *The New York Times*, 8 Oct. 1982, timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1982/10/08/205261.html?pageNumber=59.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

A Letter to the Editor

The citation follows the structural pattern of a short work published within a periodic container, beginning with the name of the letter writer. If the letter features a formal published headline, that title is enclosed in quotation marks directly after the author slot. If the piece is untitled, a capitalized, unitalicized descriptive label—simply *Letter*—is substituted directly into the title slot instead without quotation marks. The entry then transitions immediately to the italicized name of the newspaper or magazine, followed by the publication date, location details, and any database metadata.

► Martin, Glenn. Letter. “The Postpartum Care That Mothers Need.” *The New York Times*, 7 June. 2026, www.nytimes.com/2026/06/07/opinion/mothers-postpartum-care.html.

Source Breakdown

Source Author: Martin, Glenn.

Source Title (The specific letter): “The Postpartum Care That Mothers Need.”

Container 1 (The Newspaper):*The New York Times* (Includes all publication information, including URL.)

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Comment on an Online Article

After the author’s name, include *Comment on* followed by the title of the article being commented on. Then provide the publication information for the original article and the website where it appears.

► switchback. Comment on “How Do I Remove This Gray Gummy Substance From a Hardwood Floor?” *Ask MetaFilter*, 7 June. 2016, ask.metafilter.com/389897/How-do-I-remove-this-gray-gummy-substance-from-a-hardwood-floor.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Interview

The citation begins with the name of the individual being interviewed, who occupies the primary creator position. Next, provide the specific title of the interview enclosed in quotation marks, if a formal title exists. If the conversation lacks a title, the unitalicized descriptive label *Interview* is placed in the title slot instead without quotation marks. The name of the interviewer may be inserted immediately following the title or format label, introduced by the phrase *by* or "conducted *by*, if relevant to the research.

► Springsteen, Bruce. “Bruce Springsteen: The Rolling Stone Interview.” Interview by Joe Levy. *Rolling Stone*, 1 Nov. 2007, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/bruce-springsteen-the-

rolling-stone-interview-238478/.

- Victor, Mariah. Personal interview. 25 Nov. 2025.

- Bush, George W. Interview. By Steve Scully. *C-SPAN*, 12 Feb. 2007, www.c-span.org/program/white-house-event/presidential-interview/169999.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Article in a Dictionary or an Encyclopedia

The citation begins with the author of the specific entry (if named), followed by the title of the entry. Next, provide the publication details for the encyclopedia or dictionary. For print editions, include the page range at the end of the entry.

- Anderson, R. Lanier. "Friedrich Nietzsche." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2024, Edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/nietzsche/.

- "Mount Everest." *Britannica,* 5 June 2026, www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Everest.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Basic Format of Long Works and Works from Websites

Basic Format of a Book

Print Book or ebook

A standard print book citation starts with the author's name, followed by the italicized book title. The entry finishes with the necessary publication information, including the publisher and year.

- Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues*. Alyson, 1993.

The format type or specific digital reader edition is placed directly before the publisher's name. Use standard abbreviations, such as *ed.* for an edition, to identify the e-book format, such as *Kindle ed.* or *Google Play ed.*

- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula: The Original 1897 Unabridged And Complete Edition*. Kindle ed., Global Publishers, 2023.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Basic Format of an Ebook (Two containers)

The citation provides any available print metadata for the book first, including the author, title, publisher, and year. Next, add the italicized title of the host website or digital repository. Conclude the entry with the permanent URL or direct web address.

- Bates, David. *William the Conqueror*, Yale UP, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pasadena/detail.action?docID=4728133.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Book in a Language Other Than English

The citation follows standard formatting rules, but the book title is capitalized according to the conventions of its original language. To assist readers who may not know the language, an English translation of the title is placed inside brackets directly after the original title. The entry then concludes with the standard publication details for a book.

- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *En agosto nos vemos* [*Until August*]. Vintage Espanol, 2024.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Entire Anthology or Collection

The citation centers on the volume's editorial team, beginning with the name of the editor or editors followed by a comma and the descriptive label *editor* or *editors*. Next, provide the italicized title of the complete anthology or collection. Conclude the entry with the standard publication metadata, including the publisher name and the year of release.

- Barksdale, Richard, and Keneth Kinnamon, editors. *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*. Prentice Hall, 1972.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Editions Other Than the First

The citation includes the specific edition number followed by the abbreviation *ed.* placed directly after the title information. When the volume features an editor or a translator alongside the primary author, these contributors are listed immediately after the title and prior to the edition designation. The entry then transitions to the standard publisher and date metadata elements.

- Flint, Eric, and Ryk E. Spoor. *Boundary*, 2nd ed., Baen Books, 2016.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Multivolume Work

The citation includes the total count of the series volumes at the end of the entry, designated by the abbreviation *vols.* When the individual volumes are released across a span of time rather than a single year, the complete range of inclusive publication dates is provided. The final volume tally is positioned directly following these date parameters as a supplemental detail.

- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1886-1939. 24 vols.

Individual Volume

The citation focuses on the individual volume as the primary source of information. The specific volume number is positioned directly prior to the publisher's name, followed by the release date specific to that volume. The entry then concludes with the total volume count of the entire set as a supplemental detail.

- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Compete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, vol. 4, Hogarth Press, 1900. 24 vols.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Sacred Text

The citation begins with the italicized title of the specific edition as listed on the source's title page, rather than the generic name of the religious text. Next, provide the names of any editors or translators associated with the edition, if noted. The entry concludes with the standard publication details.

- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Old and New Testaments. Edited by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, Ignatius Press, 2024.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Graphic Narrative or Other Illustrated Work

When citing a graphic narrative or other illustrated work, include both the author and the illustrator when they are different people. The order of names depends on which contributor you are emphasizing in your writing.

If your discussion focuses on the written narrative, begin with the author. If your discussion focuses on the artwork or visual storytelling, begin with the illustrator. In either case, the other contributor is included after the title using MLA's standard phrasing (*illustrator* or *Illustrated by*, depending on placement).

- Kipling, Rudyard. *How the Camel Got His Hump*. Illustrated by Tim Raglin, Rabbit Eats Productions, 1989.

- Raglin, Tim. illustrator. *How the Camel Got His Hump*. By Rudyard Kipling, Rabbits Eats Productions, 1989.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

An Entire Website

Website with Author or Editor

- Ayers, Edward L. *The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*. New American History, valley.newamericanhistory.org/.

Website with Organization as Author

- The Museum of Modern Art. *MOMA*, 2026, www.moma.org/.

Website with No Title

The citation substitutes a capitalized, unitalicized descriptive label in place of the missing page or document title. This label, such as *About page* or *Home page*, is not enclosed in quotation marks. The entry then transitions immediately to the italicized name of the overall website and the remaining publication metadata.

- Yoon, Mina. Home page. Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 2026, www.ornl.gov/staff-profile/mina-yoon.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Advanced Research Note: Citing an Entire Website Ecosystem

While undergraduate writers rarely cite an entire website, advanced researchers in sociology, media studies, or history often cite an entire web community or forum architecture as a primary source object (for example, studying the community dynamics or archiving the text of an early 2000s "pro-Ana" forum network).If you are analyzing an entire website that has been archived or removed from the live web, use the original container name as the main title and list the digital archiving service as your location source.

Work From a Website

Work with Author or Editor

The citation begins with the name of the identified author or editor. Next, provide the specific webpage or article title enclosed in quotation marks, followed by the italicized name of the overall website. Include the sponsoring organization or publisher only if it differs from the site title, followed by the publication or latest update date. When a digital source lacks a publication date, the entry concludes instead with the date of access, preceded by the word *Accessed*.

- Lopez, Ashley. "High Prices and Health Care Costs May Turn Latino Voters Away from Republicans in 2026." *NPR*, 13 Aug. 2025, www.npr.org/2025/08/13/nx-s1-5490046/latino-voters-economy-inflation-healthcare-costs-trump-2026-midterms.

- Gudoniene, Daina, et al. "Hybrid Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review." *Sustainability*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2025, art. 756, doi.org/10.3390/su17020756. Accessed 11 Feb. 2026.

Work with No Author

The citation begins directly with the title of the specific webpage or article enclosed in quotation marks. The entry then transitions to the italicized name of the overall website, followed by the standard publisher, publication date, and URL elements.

- Key Facts on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)." *KFF*, 11 Feb. 2025, www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/key-facts-on-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca/. Accessed 4 January 2026.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Website Snapshot

How to cite a work from a website:

1 **Author(s) of work, if any**

2 **Title and subtitle**

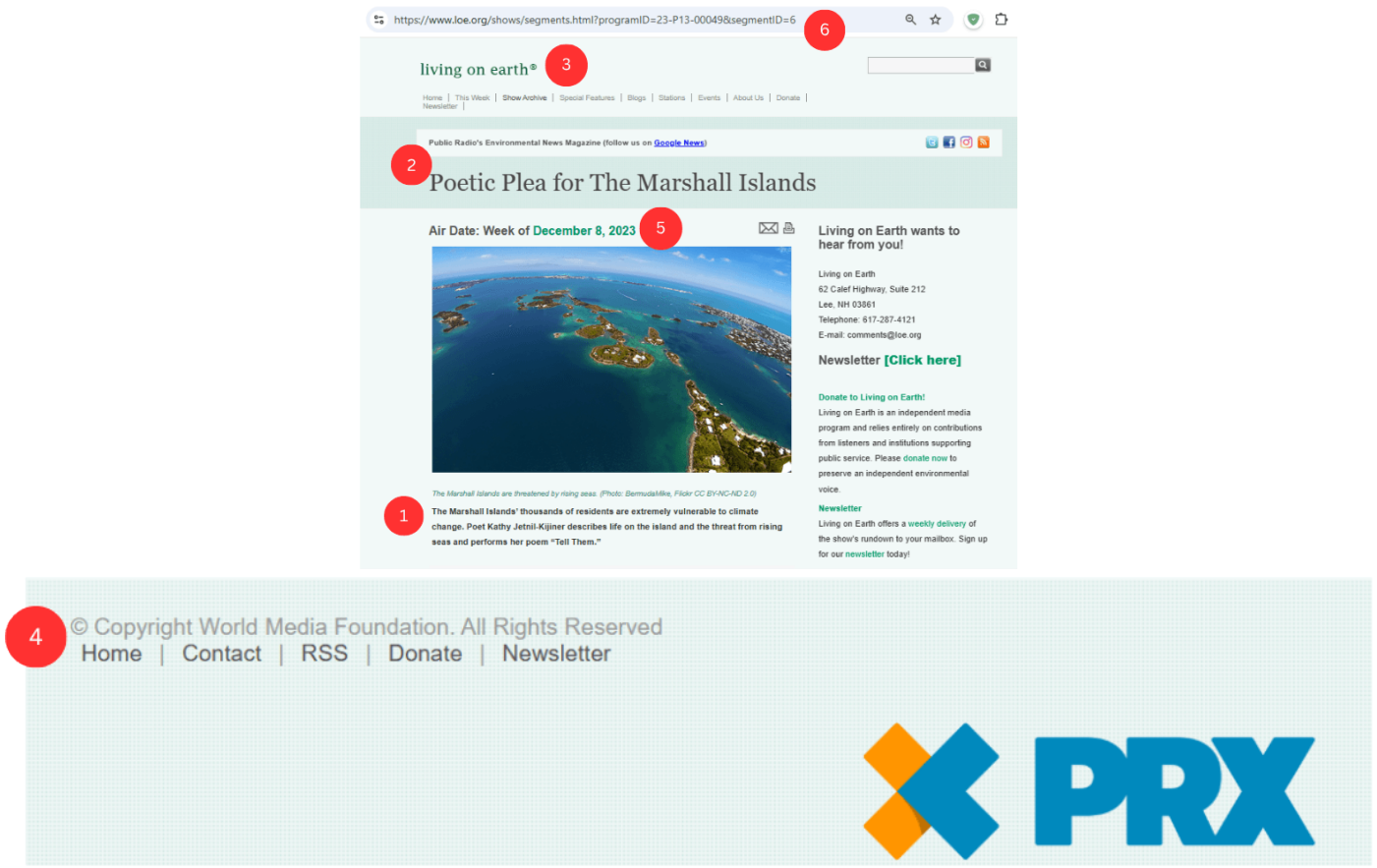
3 **Title of the website**

4 **Publisher of website (do not repeat if same as website)**

5 **Update date**

6 **URL of page**

7 **Date of access (if no update date on site)**



Page from a Website

Works Cited in Hanging Indent:

Jetñil-Kijiner.[1] "Poetic Plea for The Marshall Islands."[2] *Living on Earth*,[3] World Media Foundation,[4] 8 Dec. 2023,[5] www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?programID=23-P13-00049&segmentID=6/.[6] Accessed 15 June 2026.[7]

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Blog Post or Comment

The citation follows the standard architectural layout of a webpage source. A specific title is enclosed in quotation marks directly after the author's name. If the post or comment lacks a formal title, a capitalized, unitalicized descriptive label—such as *Blog post* or *Blog comment*—is substituted in its place without quotation marks.

Gonzalez, Jennifer. "Bringing Joy Into Our Schools: A Conversation with Gholdy Muhammad." *Cult of Pedagogy*, 17 Aug. 2025, www.cultofpedagogy.com/joy-gholdy-muhammad/.

► Jordan. Comment on "Bringing Joy Into Our Schools: A Conversation with Gholdy Muhammad"

Cult of Pedagogy, 17 Aug. 2025, www.cultofpedagogy.com/joy-gholdy-muhammad/.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

A Note on Blog Posts and Comments

Because the content may not be carefully reviewed for accuracy, discussion forums and blogs should not be relied upon as a major source of information. However, it may be appropriate to cite these sources for some types of research. You may also participate in discussion forums or comment on blogs that address topics of personal or professional interest. Always keep in mind that when you post, you are making your thoughts public—and in many cases, available through search engines. Make sure any posts that can easily be associated with your name are appropriately professional, because a potential employer could view them.

Academic Course or Department Home Page

The citation follows the structural sequence of a standard website source but utilizes distinct textual labels for clarity. A course entry opens with the instructor's name, followed by the specific course title formatted in standard text without quotation marks or italics. If a formal title is missing, the unitalicized label *Course home page* is used instead. For an academic department page, the entry begins with the department's name, followed immediately by the unitalicized description *Department home page*.

- Klin, Flourish and Kim Vaeth. CMC:100: Media Studies. *MIT OpenCourseWare*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015, ocw.mit.edu/courses/cms-100-introduction-to-media-studies-fall-2014/.

- Program in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Department home page. *Stanford University, School of Humanities and Sciences*, 2026, feminist.stanford.edu/.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Dissertation and Theses (Two Containers)

The citation begins with the author's name, followed by the italicized title of the dissertation or thesis. Next, specify the academic degree category (such as *PhD dissertation* or *Master's thesis*) and the degree-granting institution, followed by the graduation year. For works accessed through a database or digital archive, include the italicized repository name and the direct URL or DOI at the end of the entry.

- Spradlin, Christopher D. *The Connection between Liberal Arts Learning and Workforce Readiness: Perception Versus Reality*. 2026. Concordia U, PhD dissertation. *ProQuest*,

www.proquest.com/docview/3335470804?sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Audio, Visual, and Multimedia Sources

Video or Audio from the Web (One Container)

The citation follows the structural pattern of a standard webpage source, beginning with the creator's name if it is readily available. The specific title of the video or audio clip is enclosed in quotation marks directly after the author slot. The entry then transitions to the italicized name of the hosting platform or website, followed by the publisher, release date, and direct URL.

- "ITV 2003 - Michael Jackson - The Beatings from His Father Joe Jackson - Candid Interview." *YouTube*, uploaded by cfrb01, 17 Aug. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHn_NSY-TM4.

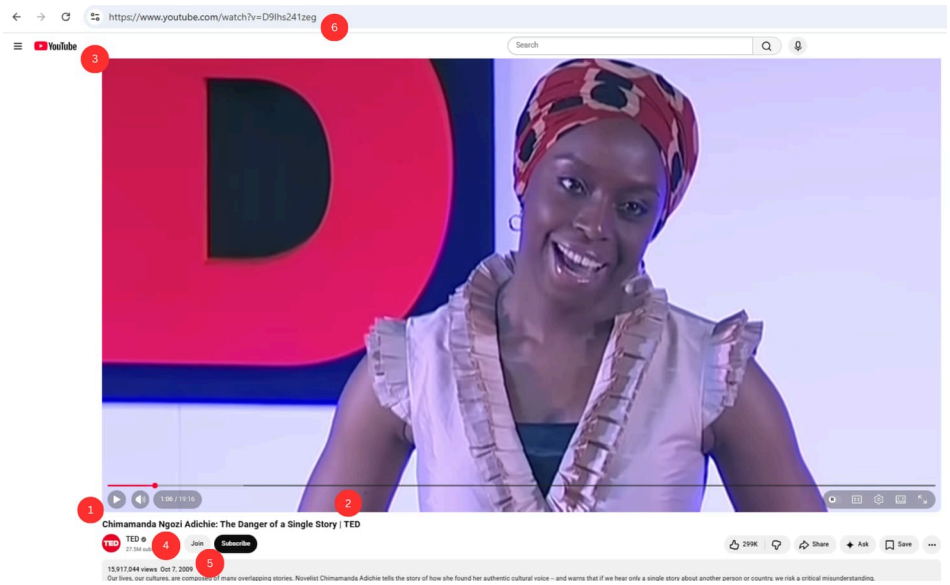
- McCabe, Jessica. "This Is What It's Really Like to Live with ADHD." *TED*, July 2017, www.ted.com/talks/jessica_mccabe_this_is_what_it_s_really_like_to_live_with_adhd_sep_2017.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Video from a Web Snapshot

How to cite a video from a website:

1. **Author(s) of work, if any**
2. **Title and subtitle**
3. **Title of the website**
4. **Uploaded by (if uploaded)**
5. **Update date**
6. **URL of page**
7. **Date of access (if no update date on site)**



Video from a Website

Works Cited in Hanging Indent:

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi[1]. “The Danger of a Single Story.”[2] *YouTube*,[3] uploaded by TED,[4] 7 Oct. 2009,[5] www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg.[6]

Video or Audio from the Web (Two Containers)

- Chakrabarti, Meghna, host. “The Wolf Runt Who Rose To Alpha-Male Status In Yellowstone.” *On Point*, interview with Rick McIntyre, 17 Oct. 2019. *New England Public Media*. www.nepm.org/2020-03-11/the-wolf-runt-who-rose-to-alpha-male-status-in-yellowstone.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

A Podcast

The citation begins with the name of the podcast host or primary presenter, followed by the specific episode title enclosed in quotation marks. Next, provide the italicized title of the overall podcast series and the name of the production company or publisher. Conclude the entry with the direct URL, ensuring that an access date is added at the very end if a specific publication or release date is missing from the source.

- Nathaniel, Isaiah. “AI, Interoperability, and the Future of Community Health.” *Digital Health and Health IT*, Becker’s Healthcare, www.beckerspodcasts.com/health-it-digital-health-podcast. Accessed 6 June 2026.

- Zomorodi, Manoush, et al. “Exhausted? Relief Is Possible — It Starts with Getting Up and Moving.” *TED Radio Hour*, NPR, 2026 May 15, www.npr.org/2026/05/15/nx-s1-5766524/

exhausted-relief-is-possible-it-starts-with-getting-up-and-moving.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

A Film

The citation typically begins directly with the italicized title of the film, followed by the names of the director and prominent performers. Each contributor name is introduced with a specific structural label, such as *Directed by* or *Performances by*. Alternatively, if the research emphasizes the work of a specific individual, the entry can open with that contributor's name, followed by a comma and their precise professional role (such as *director* or *performer*), before listing the film title and the remaining production metadata.

- *El Norte.* Directed by Gregory Nava, performances by Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez and David Villalpando, Independent Productions / Frontera Films, 1983.

- Nava, Gregory, director. *El Norte.* Performances by Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez and David Villalpando, Independent Productions / Frontera Films, 1983.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Supplementary Material Accompanying a Film

The citation begins with the specific title of the bonus feature, audio commentary, or documentary short enclosed in quotation marks. Next, include the names of any primary contributors to that specific featurette using standard role descriptors. The entry then transitions to the italicized title of the main film and concludes with the publication or platform metadata indicating where the supplementary material is located.

- "The Making of *King of the Hill*." *King of the Hill: The Complete First Season*, created by Mike Judge and Greg Daniels, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003, disc 3.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Video Game

The citation begins with the game developer or primary author, if a specific individual or studio is credited in that role. Next, provide the italicized title of the video game, followed by the specific software version or edition number, if applicable. The entry transitions to the name of the distributor or publisher and the publication year. For games accessed and played directly through a web browser, the container name of the hosting website and the direct URL are added immediately following the publication details.

- InnoGames. *Forge of Empires*. Games4Free, 2012,

- us-play.forgeofempires.com/?ref=wlxcpegs3_us_us&pid=375007123&external_param=g4fcom-gs-3.

The citation adapts when media content is hosted on an application or specialized digital streaming service rather than a traditional web page. In these instances, the name of the distribution network, streaming provider, or media platform is inserted as the container element. The entry then concludes with the specific release date or broadcast year provided by that service.

- Supergiant Games. *Hades*. Supergiant Games, 2020.

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Computer Software

The citation begins with the software developer or author, if an individual or specific organization is credited. Next, provide the italicized title of the computer program, followed by any relevant version or update numbers. The entry concludes with the name of the distributor or software publisher and the official release year.

- IBM. *SPSS Statistics*.Version 32.0, International Business Machines Corp., 2026, www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Television or Radio Episode or Program

The citation begins with the specific episode or segment title enclosed in quotation marks. Next, provide the italicized title of the overall television or radio program. Follow this with any significant contributors introduced by precise role descriptors, such as *directed by* or *narrated by*. The entry concludes with the episode number (if available), the broadcasting network or distribution service, and the original transmission date.

- "The Bath Item Gift Hypothesis." *The Big Bang Theory*, written by Bill Prady and Richard Rosenstock, directed by Mark Cendrowski, season 2, episode 11, *CBS*, 15 Dec. 2008.

- "The Rest of the Story, 2025." *Planet Money*, narrated by Nick Fountain, *NPR*, 26 Dec. 2025, www.npr.org/2025/12/26/nx-s1-5657342/subscription-diamond-gaza-games-book-saw-brot.

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Transcript

The citation follows the standard formatting layout designated for the primary source type, such as an interview, broadcast program, or digital video. Any pertinent contributor details, including narrators or speakers, are positioned before the standard publication metadata. The entry

concludes with the descriptive label *Transcript* to identify the text as a written record of the original spoken content.

- "The Rest of the Story, 2025." *Planet Money*, narrated by Nick Fountain, *NPR*, 26 Dec. 2025, www.npr.org/transcripts/nx-s1-5657342. Transcript.

Back to the Works Cited Models TOC

Live Performance

The citation begins with the italicized title of the piece, though musical works defined strictly by form, number, and key remain in standard text. Next, provide the author or composer's name, followed by any prominent production contributors introduced by their specific roles. Conclude the entry with the name of the performing company or ensemble, the specific venue name and its geographic location, and the exact date of the performance.

- *M. Butterfly*. By David Henry Hwang, directed by Stuart Ostrow, Wilshire Theater, Los Angeles, 26 June 1991.

- *The Marriage of Figaro*. By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, conducted by James Conlon, directed by James Gray, LA Opera, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles, 4 Feb. 2023.

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Lecture or Public Address

The citation begins with the speaker's name, followed by the specific title of the presentation enclosed in quotation marks. Next, provide the name of the sponsoring organization, the geographic location of the event, and the date it occurred. For lectures accessed via an online broadcast or repository, the entry follows the standard multi-container framework of a website source. To ensure clarity, an unitalicized descriptive label such as *Lecture* or *Address* is placed at the very end of the entry if the format is not explicitly stated in the title.

- Wisse, Ruth R. "A Message from the 'Blue and White' in the 'Red, White, and Blue.'" *National Endowment for the Humanities*, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, 25 Mar. 2026. Lecture.

- Obama, Barack. "President Obama Addresses the Nation." *YouTube*, uploaded by The Obama White House, 22 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ai01D82uBs8.

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Musical Score

The citation begins with the composer's name, followed by the title of the work formatted in italics

unless the piece is identified strictly by form, number, and key. Next, include the year of composition, if available. For a print edition, provide the publishing house and the publication date. For a digital edition accessed online, include the italicized website container, the publisher name, the date, and the direct URL.

- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. Symphony no. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, 1788. *IMSLP*, Petrucci Music Library, imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.40_in_G_minor,K.550(Mozart,_Wolfgang_Amadeus). Accessed 8 June 2026.

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Sound Recording

- The citation begins with the contributor most relevant to the research, which may be the composer, conductor, or primary performer. Next, provide the italicized title of the album or major musical piece, though works identified solely by form, number, and key remain in standard text. Additional production contributors—such as featured soloists, accompanying orchestras, or conductors—are listed immediately after the title, followed by the manufacturing company or record label and the release year.

- Rainey, Ma. “Deep Moaning Blues.” *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom: The Original Recordings of the Mother of the Blues*, remastered ed., *Spotify*, open.spotify.com/track/5aZ8J1QnqcOlsnW07MXXkF.

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Artwork, Photograph, or Other Visual Art

The citation begins with the artist’s name, followed by the italicized title of the visual work. The remaining metadata elements are determined by the viewing medium.

Artwork Viewed in Person

For an original artwork viewed in person, the entry includes the creation year and the physical location or museum housing the piece.

- Rivera, Diego. *The Detroit Industry Murals*, 1932-33, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

- Kahlo, Frida. *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*. 1939, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.

- Lin, Maya. *Where the Land Meets the Sea*. 2008, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. Wire sculpture.

Artwork Accessed Online

If the item is accessed online, the creation year is followed by the italicized hosting website name, publisher (if applicable), and direct URL.

- Tanner, Henry Ossawa. *The Banjo Lesson*. 1893. *Hampton University Museum*, home.hamptonu.edu/msm.

- Rivera, Diego. *Sunflowers*. 1921. *Diego Rivera*, www.diegorivera.org/sunflowers.jsp.

Artwork Reproduced in a Print Book

When citing a reproduction in a print volume, the source follows the structural guidelines for a work in an anthology, with the creation date placed immediately after the title. A descriptive label identifying the medium may be appended to the very end of the entry if relevant to the research.

- Grace, Della. *Jack's Back*, 1994. *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography*, organized by Jennifer Blessing, Guggenheim Museum, 1997, p. 176. Photograph.

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Visual, such as a Table, a Chart, or Another Graphic

The citation follows the structural pattern of a short piece contained within a larger work, enclosing the specific title of the graphic in quotation marks. Next, provide the standard container details, publication information, and location markers for the hosting source. A capitalized, unitalicized descriptive label—such as *Chart*, *Table*, or *Infographic*—is added to the very end of the entry if the format is not explicitly stated in the title.

- "Unemployment Rate in Japan from 1991 to 2025." *Statista*, 18 May 2026, www.statista.com/statistics/263700/unemployment-rate-in-japan. Table.

- "CO2 Emissions by Country." *Worldometer*, www.worldometers.info/co2-emissions/co2-emissions-by-country. Graph. Accessed 8 June 2026.

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Cartoon

The citation begins with the cartoonist's name, followed by the specific title of the cartoon enclosed in quotation marks. If the work lacks a formal title, the unitalicized descriptive label *Cartoon* is placed in the title slot instead without quotation marks. Next, provide the relevant print or digital publication

information. For online political or comic strips, the entry concludes with the standard container and URL elements of a website source, appending the format label *Cartoon* to the very end of the citation if the medium is not explicitly stated in the title.

- Bechdel, Alison. "8 Things You Need to Start Your Own Commune." *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 2026, www.nytimes.com/2026/01/11/opinion/alison-bechdel-commune-cartoon.html. Cartoon.

- Solomon, Ali. "Daily Cartoon: Tuesday, January 13th." *The New Yorker*, 13 Jan. 2026, www.newyorker.com/cartoons/daily-cartoon/tuesday-january-13th-best-books-of-2025.

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Advertisement

The citation begins with the name of the product or company featured in the advertisement, serving as the primary source element. Next, provide the full container and publication metadata for the print or digital source where the advertisement was encountered. To clarify the formatting type, append the unitalicized descriptive label *Advertisement* to the very end of the entry if the promotional nature of the source is not explicitly apparent from the main title.

- Rolex. *Rolex Boutique Rodeo Drive*, 2026. www.rolexboutique-rodeodrive.com/discover-rolex/watches.html?/. Advertisement.

- The Farmer's Dog. "The Farmer's Dog Ad: For Everyone's Dog." *YouTube*, 14 May 2026, www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYpHFJ_-MIU.

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Map

The citation formatting depends entirely on whether the map is independent or part of a larger compilation. When a map is published inside a book, journal, or website, the specific map title is enclosed in quotation marks, followed by the italicized container information. Conversely, if the map is issued as a standalone document or an individual print sheet, the title is formatted in italics. The entry concludes with the unitalicized descriptive label *Map* at the very end if the cartographic format is not explicitly stated in the title.

- "Edinburgh - Sheet III.4.15." Ordnance Survey, *National Library of Scotland*, 1894, maps.nls.uk/view/74415661. Map.

- "Oakland, California." *Library of Congress*, 1900, www.loc.gov/item/75693098/. Map.

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Government and Legal Documents

Government Document

The citation positions the issuing government organization in the primary creator slot. The entry opens with the name of the overarching nation (United States) or state (California), followed by commas and the specific department, agency, or sub-bureau responsible for the document. For publications accessed online, the entry integrates this organizational data with standard digital metadata, including the italicized hosting website name, publication or update date, and direct URL.

- United States, Department of Homeland Security. "Polls Show Americans Overwhelmingly Support President Trump's Mass Deportations." *Homeland Security*, 8 October 2025, www.dhs.gov/news/2025/10/08/polls-show-americans-overwhelmingly-support-president-trumps-mass-deportations. Accessed 14 Dec. 2025.

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Historical Document

The citation begins with the title of the well-known foundational historical document formatted in standard text without quotation marks or italics. Next, provide the relevant container details, such as the italicized name of the website, digital archive, or book where the document was accessed. Conclude the entry with any significant contributor data—such as a translator or editor—followed by the publication date and the direct URL.

- Magna Carta, 1215. *The National Archives*, translated by the British Library, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/magna-carta/british-library-magna-carta-1215-runnymede/.

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Legislative Act (Law)

For official federal laws, start the entry with the government body as the corporate author (United States, Congress.). State the title of the act in italics, followed by the date of enactment and the URL. Finally, include supplementary historical data at the very end of the citation. This extra information should detail the specific session number of Congress (e.g., 101st Congress, 2nd Session) and the official legislative type or designation number (e.g., Public Law 101-336).

- United States, Congress. *Americans with Disabilities Act*, 26 July 1990, www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-104/pdf/STATUTE-104-Pg327.pdf. 101st Congress, 2nd Session, Public Law 101-336.

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Court Case

For legal trials and court decisions, start the entry with the specific governing country and judicial body as the author (e.g., United States, Supreme Court.). State the official name of the lawsuit in italics, followed by the calendar year of the decision. Conclude the entry by listing the specific online legal repository website title in italics, the institutional publisher or law school, and the direct URL.

- United States, Supreme Court. *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022. *Legal Information Institute*, Cornell U Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/dobbs_v._jackson_women%27s_health_organization_%282022%29.

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Personal Communication and Social Media

Personal Letter

The citation begins with the name of the individual who wrote the letter, followed by the phrase *Letter to* and the recipient's name. If the communication was addressed directly to the researcher compiling the paper, the standard phrase *Letter to the author* is substituted instead. The entry concludes simply with the exact calendar date the letter was written.

- Mortensen, Lauren. Letter to the author, 30 June 2024.

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Email message

The citation begins with the name of the individual who sent the message, followed immediately by the exact subject line enclosed in quotation marks. Next, include the phrase *Received by* followed by the name of the recipient in standard order. The entry concludes with the specific date the electronic message was transmitted.

- Jones, Hinkley. “Group Meeting.” Received by Josie Rivera, 3 May. 2025.

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Text message

The citation begins with the name of the sender, followed by a brief descriptive label featuring the words *Message to* and the recipient identified as the author. The entry then concludes with the exact date the text message was sent.

- Gallegos, Jose. Message to the author. 5 Apr. 2026.

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Online Discussion List Post

The citation begins with the name of the author, followed by the specific subject line or post title enclosed in quotation marks. If the contribution lacks a formal title, the unitalicized descriptive label *Online posting* is substituted in its place without quotation marks. The entry then integrates the remaining publication metadata, utilizing the standard container and URL layout of a website source.

- Elliott, Emily Joan. "The Elephant Roundup." *The H-Net Book Channel*, H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online, 27 May 2026, networks.h-net.org/group/discussions/20152969/elephant-roundup-may-2026/.

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Social Media Post

The citation begins with the author's screen name or handle, followed by their real name enclosed in parentheses if both pieces of information are available. For short microblogging entries, the entire content of the post functions as the title and is enclosed in quotation marks. For longer media posts lacking a formal heading, a capitalized, unitalicized descriptive label—such as *Post*—is substituted in the title slot without quotation marks. The entry then transitions to the exact date and specific timestamp of publication, concluding with the direct URL to the individual post.

- daddy fall down (@daddyfalldown.bsky.social). Post. *Bluesky*, 19 May 2025, bsky.app/profile/daddyfalldown.bsky.social/post/3lpjqga2lbk2z.

- @smithsonianchannel (Smithsonian Channel). "Aldabra tortoises are huge – sometimes weighing over 500 pounds! Which means there's a little more that goes into weighing them than simply picking them up. Luckily Smithsonian's National Zoo keepers know a few tricks…" *TikTok*, 22 Nov. 2023, www.tiktok.com/@smithsonianchannel/video/7304328493842713898.

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Chapter Licensing And Attributions

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6.4: MLA Handbook Quick Guide

MLA Handbook Quick Guide

- PCC College 1 Research Guide – Library Quick Guide on MLA, includes MLA Citation Workshop: Learn to cite in 20 minutes!
- MLA Citations Overview at Owl Purdue – A foundational look at why and how we cite in MLA style.
- MLA General Format at Purdue Owl – Rules for page margins, line spacing, font choices, and header setups.
- In-Text Citations at Purdue Owl – General guidelines for signal phrases and parenthetical citations.
- Works Cited: A Quick Guide – The official MLA style center template for breaking down the 9 core elements of a source.
- Zotero – A bibliography builder that permanently saves your sources to create a curated library for future use.

Streamlining MLA with Zotero

Instead of formatting every comma and italics tag by hand, you can use Zotero—a free, open-source reference manager—to collect sources and build an MLA Works Cited automatically.

Benefit of Zotero: Unlike temporary citation tools, Zotero serves as a permanent, personal research repository. Every source you save is archived forever, allowing you to build a curated library of materials you can reuse and reference in future semesters or professional projects.

Step 1: Download & Installation

To use Zotero, you must install two free components from Zotero.org:

- **Zotero Desktop Standalone:** The main software program where you store and organize your research materials.
- **Zotero Connector:** A browser extension (for Chrome, Safari, Firefox, or Edge) that adds a "Save to Zotero" icon next to your browser's search bar.

Step 2: Collecting Sources with One Click

When you find a book, journal article, or website for your research:

- Click the Zotero Connector icon in your browser toolbar.

- Zotero automatically extracts the title, authors, dates, and publisher info, downloading a clean copy into your desktop library.
- Alternative: Click the Magic Wand icon in Zotero Desktop and type in an ISBN or DOI number to instantly generate the citation metadata.

Step 3: Setting Your Citation Style to MLA

Before you write, ensure Zotero is set to the correct edition: Open Zotero Desktop.

- Go to Preferences (Mac) or Edit > Preferences (Windows).
- Click the Cite tab.
- Select Modern Language Association (MLA) from the list.

Step 4: Generating an Instant Works Cited

You can create a perfect MLA works cited in seconds without even opening a word processor:

- Open Zotero Desktop and highlight the sources you used.
- Right-click the selected items and choose Create Bibliography from Items.
- Select Modern Language Association as your style, and choose Bibliography as the output mode.
- Select Copy to Clipboard, click OK, and paste (Ctrl+V or Cmd+V) directly into your document.

Step 5: Writing with Zotero (Word and Google Docs)

Zotero integrates directly into Google Docs and Microsoft Word, adding a top menu tab to your writing screen:

- **Add In-Text Citations:** Click Add/Edit Citation while writing. Type the author's name, select the source, and type the page number. Zotero inserts the correct parenthetical citation (e.g., (Smith 42)) automatically.
- **Insert the Final Works Cited**: At the very end of your paper, click Add/Edit Bibliography. Zotero instantly reads every in-text citation you used and generates a perfectly alphabetized MLA Works Cited list.

CHAPTER LICENSING

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CHAPTER 7: WRITING SUPPORT (SKILLS TOOLKIT)

7.1: Sentence Skills
7.2: Coordination and Subordination
7.3: Strategies for English Language Learners

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7.1: Sentence Skills

SENTENCE SKILLS

Sentence Variety and Complexity

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

In this chapter, you will follow a student named Naomi who has written a draft of an essay but needs to refine her writing. This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using a variety of techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.

INCORPORATING SENTENCE VARIETY

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

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

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

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

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

The Rule of Three

> *Effective writers often implement the "rule of three," which is basically the thought that things that contain three elements are more memorable and more satisfying to readers than any other number. Try to use a series of three when providing examples, grouping adjectives, or generating a list.*

⍰Exercise: Sentence Combining

Instructions: Combine each set of simple sentences into a compound or a complex sentence. Write the combined sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.
2. Shakespeare's writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Gay marriage is now legal in six states. Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all permit same-sex marriage. Other states are likely to follow their example.
4. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
5. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch's two children attend the school.

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

Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentence

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

> John and Amanda will be analyzing this week's financial report.
> The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.

Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

If you are having trouble figuring out why these sentences are similar, try underlining the subject in each. You will notice that the subject is positioned at the beginning of each sentence—**John and Amanda**, **the car**, **students**. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers tend to overuse this technique, which can result in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety.

Naomi wrote an essay about the 2008 government bailout. Read this excerpt from Naomi's essay:

> *This subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

This section examines several ways to introduce sentence variety at the beginning of sentences, using Naomi's essay as an example.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

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

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

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

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

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

In an academic essay, moving an adverb to the beginning of a sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph and increase sentence variety.

> *This subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would*

> *exacerbate the problem. The government **finally** opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government **optimistically** expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

Naomi has used two adverbs in her essay that could be moved to the beginning of their respective sentences. Notice how the following revised version creates a more varied paragraph:

> *This subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. **Finally**, the government opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. **Optimistically**, the government expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

Adverbs

Adverbs of time—adverbs that indicate when an action takes place—do not always require a comma when used at the beginning of a sentence. Adverbs of time include words such as yesterday, today, later, sometimes, often, and now.

⍰Exercise: Rearrange the adverbs.

Instructions: On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

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

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

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a preposition (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an object of the preposition (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition).

above

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between
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underneath
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until
around
despite
over
up
at
except
past
with
before
for
since
without
behind
from
through
below
inside
throughout

Read the following sentence:

The terrified child hid underneath the table.

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

The terrified child hid underneath the heavy wooden table.

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

Underneath the heavy wooden table, the terrified child hid.

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

The bandaged man waited **in the doctor's office.**
In the doctor's office, the bandaged man waited.
My train leaves the station **at 6:45 a.m**.
At 6:45 a.m., my train leaves the station.

Teenagers exchange drugs and money **under the railway bridge**.
Under the railway bridge, teenagers exchange drugs and money.

Prepositional phrases are useful in any type of writing. Take another look at Naomi's essay on the government bailout.

> *The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

Now read the revised version.

> ***Throughout 2007 and 2008,*** *the subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy.* ***According to some economists,*** *the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem.* ***Despite public objections,*** *the government finally opted to bail out the banks.* ***Since the 2008 bill passed, it has*** *acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

The bolded words are all prepositional phrases. Notice how they add additional information to the text and provide a sense of flow to the essay, making it less choppy and more pleasurable to read.

Unmovable Prepositional Phrases

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

I would like a chocolate sundae without whipped cream.

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

Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

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

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

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered

with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

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

Writing at Work

The overuse of prepositional phrases often occurs when our thoughts are jumbled and we are unsure how concepts or ideas relate to one another. If you are preparing a report or a proposal, take the time to organize your thoughts in an outline before writing a rough draft. Read the draft aloud, either to yourself or to a colleague, and identify areas that are rambling or unclear. If you notice that a particular part of your report contains several sentences over twenty words, you should double-check that particular section to make certain that it is coherent and does not contain unnecessary prepositional phrases. Reading aloud sometimes helps detect unclear and wordy sentences. You can also ask a colleague to paraphrase your main points to ensure that the meaning is clear.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Starting a Sentence by Inverting Subject and Verb

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

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

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

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—a truck in the first example and the file in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus. We can apply this method to an academic essay. Take another look at Naomi's paragraph.

> *The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

To emphasize the subject in certain sentences, Naomi can invert the traditional sentence structure. Read her revised paragraph:

> *The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy.* ***The banks were too big to fail, argued some economists.*** *Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008.* ***These assets will rise in value, expects the government optimistically.*** *This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

Notice that in the first underlined sentence, the subject (*some economists*) is placed after the verb (*argued*). In the second underlined sentence, the subject (*the government*) is also placed after the verb (*expects*).

⍰Exercise: Inverted Sentences

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

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

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

Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

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

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Joining Ideas Using an -ing Modifier

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.

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

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

> **Beginning:** Conducting a survey among her friends, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.
>
> **End:** Maria filed the final report, meeting her deadline.

Dangling Modifiers

A common mistake when combining sentences using the *-ing* verb form is to misplace the modifier so that it is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence. This creates a dangling modifier. Look at the following example:

> Jogging across the parking lot, my breath grew ragged and shallow.

In this sentence, *jogging across the parking lot* seems to modify *my breath*. Since breath cannot jog, the sentence should be rewritten so that the subject is placed immediately after the modifier or added to the dangling phrase.

> Jogging across the parking lot, I felt my breath grow ragged and shallow.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Joining Ideas Using an -ed Modifier

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

> **Original sentences:** The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.
>
> **Revised sentence:** Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party

started.

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

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

Using *-ing* or *-ed* modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious connections between two sentences. Take a look at how Naomi might use modifiers in her paragraph.

> *The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem.* ***Opting to bail out the banks, the government acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008.*** *The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

The revised version of the essay uses the *-ing* modifier opting to draw a connection between the government's decision to bail out the banks and the result of that decision—the acquisition of the mortgage-backed securities.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

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

> **Original sentences:** The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Seattle.
>
> **Revised sentence:** The managing director, who lives in Seattle, is visiting the company next week.

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

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

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence. Take a look at how Naomi might incorporate relative clauses into her essay.

> *The subprime mortgage crisis**, which had been steadily building throughout 2007 and 2008,** left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists**, who favored the bailout,** argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists**, who opposed the bailout,** argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.*

Notice how the underlined relative clauses can be removed from Naomi's essay without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Relative Clauses

To check the punctuation of relative clauses, assess whether or not the clause can be taken out of the sentence without changing its meaning. If the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be placed in commas. If the relative clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it does not require commas around it.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set of commas. Take a look at the way Naomi uses appositives to include additional facts in her essay.

The subprime mortgage crisis**, the biggest financial disaster since the 1929 Wall Street crash,** left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government**, the institution that would decide the fate of the banks,** finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired $700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Exercise: Sentence Pairs

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

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.
4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

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

Writing at Work

In addition to varying sentence structure, consider varying the types of sentences you are using in a report or other workplace document. Most sentences are declarative, but a carefully placed question, exclamation, or command can pique colleagues' interest, even if the subject material is fairly dry. Imagine that you are writing a budget analysis. Beginning your report with a rhetorical question, such as "Where is our money going?" or "How can we increase sales?" encourages people to continue reading to find out the answers. Although they should be used sparingly in academic and professional writing, questions or commands are effective rhetorical devices.

ATTRIBUTION

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7.2: Coordination and Subordination

COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

In the previous section, we learned how to use different patterns to create sentence variety and to add emphasis to important points in our writing. Next, we will examine two ways in which we can join sentences with related ideas:

Coordination: Joining two related ideas of equal importance.
Subordination: Joining two related ideas of unequal importance.

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs, and in turn, produces more effective writing. In this section, you will read excerpts from Naomi's classmate named Joshua, who drafted an essay about wine production. Read this excerpt from Joshua's essay.

Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

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

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

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

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

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the

fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

This section examines several ways to combine sentences with coordination and subordination, using Joshua's essay as an example.

Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

Original Sentence:I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week because I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction so:

Revised sentence: I spent my entire paycheck last week, so I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the sentence retains two independent clauses (I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

Coordinating Conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	*for* (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	*and* (joins two ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	*nor* (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	*but* (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	*or* (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	*yet* (indicates a reason)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a			

new dress is expensive. *so* (indicates a result) By staying home I will save money. Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

Chart 7.2.1. Joining independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction.

FANBOYS
To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction in a sentence, a comma should precede it.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon. A conjunctive adverb is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. Read the following sentences:

> **Original sentences:** Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

> **Revised sentence:** Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget's desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following chart of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	*also*, *furthermore*, *moreover*, *besides*	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Comparison	*similarly*, *likewise*	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.
Contrast	*instead*, *however*, *conversely*	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	*namely*, *certainly*, *indeed*	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	*accordingly*, *consequently*, *hence*, *thus*	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	*finally*, *next*, *subsequently*, *then*	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Chart 7.2.2. Using conjunctive adverbs.

Take a look at Joshua's essay on wine production and identify some areas in which he might use coordination.

> *When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.*

Now look at Joshua's revised essay. Did you coordinate the same sentences? You may find that your answers are different because there are usually several ways to join two independent clauses.

> *When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice.* ***The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins.*** *Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added.* ***It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.***

◈ **Exercise:** Sentence Combining with Coordinating Conjunctions and Conjunctive Adverbs

Instructions: Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb. Then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

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

SUBORDINATION

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a main clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, and subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

Original sentences: Tracy stopped to help the injured man. She would be late for work.

To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

> **Revised sentence:** Even though Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (*she stopped to help the injured man*) that stands as a complete sentence and a dependent clause (*even though Tracy would be late for work*) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

> **Revised sentence:** Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

Punctuation

> *To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main cause, no punctuation is required.*

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following chart of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	*although, while, though, whereas, even though*	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	*if, unless, until*	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	*as if, as, though*	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	*where, wherever*	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Reason	*because, since, so that, in order that*	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	*after, before, while, once, when*	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Chart 7.2.3. Using subordinating conjunctions.

Take a look at the excerpt from Joshua's essay and identify some areas in which he might use subordination.

> *When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.*

Now look at Joshua's revised essay and compare your answers. You will probably notice that there are many different ways to subordinate sentences.

> *When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice.* ***Because the stems contain harsh-tasting tannins, they are removed.*** *Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container.* ***Here, sulfur dioxide is added in order to prevent the liquid from becoming oxidized.*** *It also destroys bacteria.* ***Although some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.***

⍰Exercise: Subordinating Conjunctions

Instructions: Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction, and then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

⍰Exercise: Coordinating and Subordinating: Sentence Combining Using Coordination or Subordination

Instructions: Copy the paragraph from Joshua's essay onto your own sheet of paper. Then edit using the techniques you have learned in this section. Join the underlined sentences using coordination or subordination. Check your revised sentences for punctuation.

> *The yeast is added to the must. Alcoholic fermentation then begins. Here, the red wine production process differs from the method used in white wine production. Red wine is fermented for a shorter time. It is fermented at a higher temperature. Whereas white wines may ferment for over a month, red wines typically ferment for less than two weeks. During fermentation, contact between the skins and the juice releases tannins and flavor compounds into the must. This process is known as maceration. Maceration may occur before, during, or after fermentation. The fermentation process is completed. The next stage is*

pressing. Many methods are used for pressing, the most common of which is basket pressing.

PARALLELISM

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that increasing sentence variety adds interest to a piece of writing and makes the reading process more enjoyable for others. Using a mixture of sentence lengths and patterns throughout an essay is an important writing technique. However, it is equally important to avoid introducing variation within individual sentences. A strong sentence is composed of balanced parts that all have the same structure. In this section, we will examine how to create a balanced sentence structure by using parallelism.

USING PARALLELISM

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

Faulty parallelism: Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Faulty parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

Faulty parallelism: Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins each sentence by using a noun (*coordination, jeans*), but ends with a phrase (*to have good eyesight, wearing a suit*). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

Correct parallelism: Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Correct parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

Correct parallelism: Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using a parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the amount of work the reader has to do to decode the sentence. This enables the reader to focus on the main idea in the sentence and not on how the sentence is put together.

Parallelism

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

CREATING PARALLELISM USING COORDINATING CONJUNCTIO

When you connect two clauses using a coordinating conjunction (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

> **Faulty parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like to listen to music and talking to friends on the phone.
>
> **Correct parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like listening to music and talking to friends on the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (*to listen*, *talking*). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (*and*) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series:

> **Faulty parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.
>
> **Correct parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages.

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (*reduce*, *cut*) and a third item that uses a different verb form (*lowering*). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

Exercise: Make it Parallel

Instructions: On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions.

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar at weekends.
2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.
4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail

queries.

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

Creating Parallelism Using Than or As

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is much tougher than a pool.

Correct parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is much tougher than swimming in a pool.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (*than*) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (*swimming*) with a noun (*a pool*). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

Faulty parallelism: A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

Correct parallelism: Going for a brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

In this example, it is necessary to add the verb phrase *going for* to the sentence in order to clarify that the act of walking is being compared to the act of running.

⍰ **Exercise:** Parallel Structure

Instructions: On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using than or as.

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
5. Jim’s opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.

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

Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunction

A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

either … or
not only … but also
neither … nor
whether … or
rather … than
both … and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor can we take evasive action.

Correct parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor take evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

Faulty parallelism: It was both a long movie and poorly written.

Correct parallelism: The movie was both long and poorly written.

Exercise: Writing Parallel Sentences

Instructions: On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions.

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

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

Exercise: Parallel the Paragraph

Instructions: Read through the following excerpt from Alex's essay and revise any instances of faulty parallelism. Rewrite the sentences to create a parallel structure.

> *Owning a pet has proven to be extremely beneficial to people's health. Pets help lower blood pressure, boost immunity, and are lessening anxiety. Studies indicate that children who grow up in a household with cats or dogs are at a lower risk of developing allergies or suffer from asthma. Owning a dog offers an additional bonus; it makes people more sociable. Dogs are natural conversation starters and this not only helps to draw people out of social isolation but also they are more likely to find a romantic partner.*

Benefits of pet ownership for elderly people include less anxiety, lower insurance costs, and they also gain peace of mind. A study of Alzheimer's patients showed that patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Some doctors even keep dogs in the office to act as on-site therapists. In short, owning a pet keeps you healthy, happy, and is a great way to help you relax.

Exercise: Vary Your Sentences

Instructions: The following exercises will help you practice all the sentence structure options we have learned in the chapter so far. Please choose at least two to work on. After completing option 1, 2, or 5, collaborate by sharing with a classmate and comparing your answers.

1. Children's stories are deliberately written in short, simple sentences to avoid confusion. Most sentences are constructed using the standard subject-verb-object format. Choose a children's story that is suitable for eight to ten-year-olds. Rewrite a chapter of the story so that it appeals to a slightly older age group, by editing for sentence variety. Experiment with the techniques you learned in "Sentence Variety," including the three different ways to vary sentence structure at the beginning of a sentence and the three different ways to connect ideas between sentences. Compare the revised chapter with the original version and consider how sentence variety can be used to target a particular audience.
2. Compile a selection of real-life writing samples from the workplace or around the home. You might like to choose one of the following: e-mail, junk mail, personal letter, company report, social networking page, local newspaper, bulletin-board posting, or public notice. Choose two samples that lack sentence variety. Highlight areas of each writing sample that you would edit for sentence variety and explain why. Replace any recognizable name with a pseudonym, or a fictitious name.
3. **Group activity:** Choose a well-known speech, such as Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, Winston Churchill's "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat" speech, or Barack Obama's inaugural address. Make a copy of the speech and, as a group, underline examples of parallelism. Discuss the effects of using parallelism and consider whether it is always used to achieve the same result or whether the writer manipulates parallelism to create a variety of responses among his or her audience.
4. **Group activity:** Working in a small group, select a workplace document or academic essay. Examine each paragraph and identify examples of sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism. Then, choose one particular paragraph and discuss the following questions:

   As a group, identify the weaker areas of the paragraph and rewrite them. Focus on sentence structure and sentence variation. Use coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions to join sentences.

   Does the writer use sentence variety effectively?
   Does the writer connect his or her ideas effectively?
   Does the writer use subordination and coordination correctly?
   Does the writer use parallelism to emphasize his or her points?
5. Choose a college essay or a recent piece of writing from your work or everyday life. Use the techniques you have learned throughout this chapter to edit your writing for sentence variety, appropriate coordination and subordination, and parallelism. When you have finished, compare the two versions and write a brief analysis of how sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism help refine a piece of writing.

ATTRIBUTION

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7.3: Strategies for English Language Learners

Strategies for English Language Learners

If your first language is not English, you will most likely need some extra help when writing in Standard, or formal, English. New students of Standard English often make similar kinds of errors. Even if you have been speaking English for a long time, you may not feel as confident in your written English skills. This chapter covers the most common errors made by English language learners and helps you avoid similar mistakes in your writing.

Basic Sentence Structures

The most basic sentence structure in English is a subject plus a verb. A subject performs the action in the sentence, and the verb identifies the action. Keep in mind that in some languages, such as Spanish and Italian, an obvious subject does not always perform the action in a sentence; the subject is often implied by the verb. However, every sentence in English must have a subject and a verb to express a complete thought.

subject + verb

Samantha sleeps.

Not all sentences are as simple as a subject plus a verb. To form more complex sentences, writers build upon this basic structure. Adding a prepositional phrase to the basic sentence creates a more complex sentence. A preposition is a part of speech that relates a noun or a pronoun to another word in a sentence. It also introduces a prepositional phrase. If you can identify a preposition, you will be able to identify a prepositional phrase.

subject + verb + prepositional phrase

Samantha sleeps on the couch.

On is the preposition. *On the couch* is the prepositional phrase.

Common Prepositions:

- about
- beside
- off
- above
- between
- on
- across
- by
- over
- after
- during
- through
- against
- except
- to
- along
- for
- toward

- among
- from
- under
- around
- in
- until
- at
- into
- up
- before
- like
- with
- behind
- of
- without

Exercise: Underline the Prepositions

Instructions: Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper and underline the prepositional phrases.

1. Devon and Javier danced under the stars.
2. Each person has an opinion about the topic.
3. The fans walked through the gates.
4. Jamyra ran around the track.
5. Maria celebrated her birthday in January.

Another sentence structure that is important to understand is *subject + verb + object*. There are two types of objects: direct objects and indirect objects.

A direct object receives the action of the verb.

subject + verb + direct object

Rosa writes a letter.

The letter directly receives the action of the verb *writes*.

Finding the Direct Object

A quick way to find the direct object is to ask what? or who?

Sentence: *Maurice kicked the ball.*

What did Maurice kick? The direct object, ball.

Sentence: *Maurice kicked Felipe by accident.*

Who did Maurice kick? The direct object, Felipe.

An indirect object does not receive the action of the verb.

subject + verb + indirect object

Janice writes me a letter

The action (*writes*) is performed for or to the indirect object (*me*).

Finding the Indirect Object

Even though the indirect object is not found after a preposition in English, it can be discovered by asking to whom? or for whom? after the verb.

Sentence: *Dad baked the children some cookies.*

For whom did Dad bake the cookies? The indirect object, children.

⍰ Exercise: Identifying Direct/Indirect Objects

Instructions: On a separate sheet of paper, identify the subject, verb, direct object, and indirect object in the following sentences.

1. Captain Kirk told the crew a story.
2. Jermaine gave his girlfriend a dozen yellow tulips.
3. That hospital offers nurses better pay.
4. Dad served Grandma a delicious dinner.
5. Mom bought herself a new car.

QUESTIONS

English speakers rely on the following two common ways to turn sentences into questions:

1. Move the helping verb and add a question mark.
2. Add the verb *do*, *does*, or *did* and add a question mark.

Here is an example of moving the helping verb and adding a question mark.

Original sentence: Sierra can pack these boxes.

Question: Can Sierra pack these boxes?

Here is an example of adding the verb *do*, *does*, or *did* and adding a question mark:

Original sentence: Jolene skated across the pond.

Question: Did Jolene skate across the pond?

Exercise: Identifying Direct / Indirect Object

Instructions: On a separate sheet of paper, create questions from the following sentences.

1. Slumdog Millionaire is a film directed by Danny Boyle.
2. The story centers on a character named Jamal Malik.
3. He and his older brother find different ways to escape the slums.
4. His brother, Salim, pursues a life of crime.
5. Jamal ends up on the game show Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

ADJECTIVES

An adjective is a kind of descriptive word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It tells which one, what kind, and how many. Adjectives make your writing more lively and interesting. Keep in mind, a common error that English language learners make is misplacing the adjectives in a sentence. It is important to know where to place the adjective in a sentence so that readers are not confused.

If you are using more than one adjective to describe a noun, place the adjectives in the following order before the noun:

1. **Opinion:** an interesting book, a boring movie, a fun ride
2. **Size:** a large box, a tiny turtle, a tall woman
3. **Shape:** a round ball, a long hose, a square field
4. **Age:** a new day, an old horse, a modern building
5. **Color:** an orange sunset, a green jacket, a red bug
6. **Ethnicity:** Italian cheese, French wine, Chinese tea
7. **Material:** silk shirt, wool socks, a cotton dress

Playing with Adjectives

Adjectives can also be placed at the end of a sentence if they describe the subject of a sentence and appear after the verb.

Sentence: *My English teacher is excellent.*

Exercise: Order the Adjectives

Instructions: On a separate sheet of paper, place the following sets of adjectives in the correct order before the noun. The first one has been done for you.

1. **book:** old, small, Spanish

   a small old Spanish book (age, size, ethnicity)

2. **photograph:** new, strange
3. **suit:** wool, green, funny
4. **opinion:** refreshing, new
5. **dress:** fashionable, purple

Negative Statements

Negative statements are the opposite of positive statements and are necessary to express an opposing idea. The following charts list negative words and helping verbs that can be combined to form a negative statement.

Negative Words:

- never
- no
- hardly
- nobody
- none
- scarcely
- no one
- not
- barely
- nowhere
- rarely

Common Helping Verbs:

- am
- is
- are
- was
- were
- be
- being
- been
- have
- has
- had
- do
- does
- did
- can
- could
- may
- might
- must
- will
- should
- would
- ought to
- used to

The following examples show several ways to make a sentence negative in the present tense.

1. A helping verb used with the negative word *not*.

   Original sentence: My guests are arriving now.

   Negative: My guests are not arriving now.

2. The negative word *no*.

   Original sentence: Jennie has money.

Negative: Jennie has no money.

3. The contraction *n't*.

   Original sentence: Janetta does miss her mom.

   Negative: Janetta doesn't miss her mom.

4. The negative adverb *rarely*.

   Original sentence: I always go to the gym after work.

   Negative: I rarely go to the gym after work.

5. The negative subject *nobody*.

   Sentence: Everybody gets the day off.

   Negative: Nobody gets the day off.

⍰ Exercise: Positive ⍰ Negative

Instructions: On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the positive sentences as negative sentences. Be sure to keep the sentences in the present tense.

1. Everybody is happy about the mandatory lunch.
2. Alexis likes to use dating apps.
3. Jordan donates blood every six months.
4. Our writing instructor is very effective.
5. That beautiful papaya is cheap**.**

The following sentences show you the ways to make a sentence negative in the past tense.

Original sentence: Paul called me yesterday.

Negative: Paul did not call me yesterday.

Original sentence: Jamilee went to the grocery store.

Negative: Jamilee never went to the grocery store.

Gina laughed when she saw the huge pile of laundry.

Negative: Gina did not laugh when she saw the huge pile of laundry.

Notice that when forming a negative in the past tense, the helping verb *did* is what signals the past tense, and the main verb *laugh* does not have an *-ed* ending.

Double negatives are two negatives used in the same phrase or sentence. They are considered incorrect in Standard English. You should avoid using double negatives in all formal writing. If you want to say something negative, use only one negative word in the sentence. Return to the list of negative words, and then study the following examples.

Double Negatives.

Double negative (incorrect)

neg. + neg.

I couldn't find no paper

neg. + neg.

I don't want nothing.

Single negative (correct)

neg.

I couldn't find any paper.

neg.

I don't want anything.

Count and Noncount Nouns and Articles

Nouns are words that name things, places, people, and ideas. Right now, you may be surrounded by desks, computers, and notebooks. These are called count nouns because you can count the exact number of desks, computers, and notebooks—three desks, one computer, and six notebooks, for example.

On the other hand, you may be carrying a small amount of money in your wallet and sitting on a piece of furniture. These are called noncount nouns. Although you can count the pieces of furniture or the amount of money, you cannot add a number in front of money or furniture and simply add *-s* to the end of the noun. Instead, you must use other words and phrases to indicate the quantity of money and furniture.

Incorrect: five moneys, two furnitures

Correct: some money, two pieces of furniture

Count and Noncount Nouns

A count noun refers to people, places, and things that are separate units. You make count nouns plural by adding *-s*.

Count Nouns

Count Noun	Sentence
Quarter	It takes six quarters to do my laundry.
Chair	Make sure to push in your chairs before leaving class.
Candidate	The two candidates debated the issue.
Adult	The three adults in the room acted like children.
Comedian	The two comedians made the audience laugh.

A noncount noun identifies a whole object that cannot separate and count individually. Noncount nouns may refer to concrete objects or abstract objects. A concrete noun identifies an object you can see, taste, touch, or count. An abstract noun identifies an object that you cannot see, touch, or count. There are some exceptions, but most abstract nouns cannot be made plural, so they are noncount nouns. Examples of abstract nouns include *anger*, *education*, *melancholy*, *softness*, *violence*, and *conduct*.

Noncount Nouns

Type of Noncount Noun	Examples	Sentence
Food	*sugar*, *salt*, *pepper*, *lettuce*, *rice*	Add more sugar to my coffee, please.
Solids	*concrete*, *chocolate*, *silver*, *soap*	The ice cream was covered in creamy chocolate.
Abstract Nouns	*peace*, *warmth*, *hospitality*, *information*	I need more information about the insurance policy.

Definite and Indefinite Articles

The word *the* is a definite article. It refers to one or more specific things. For example, *the woman* refers to not any woman but a particular woman. The definite article *the* is used before singular and plural count nouns.

The words *a* and *an* are indefinite articles. They refer to one nonspecific thing. For example, *a woman* refers to any woman, not a specific, particular woman. The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used before a singular count noun.

Here are some examples of definite Articles (*the*) and Indefinite Articles (*a/an*) with count nouns:

I saw *the concert*. (singular, refers to a specific concert)
I saw *the concerts*. (plural, refers to more than one specific concert)
I saw *the U2* concert last night. (singular, refers to a specific concert)
I saw *a concert*. (singular, refers to any nonspecific concert)

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that can be used in place of the noun. We use pronouns so we do not have to repeat words. For example, imagine writing the following sentence: Afrah put her scarf on because Afrah was cold. The sentence sounds a bit strange because *Afrah* is named twice; however, if you use a pronoun, the sentence will be shorter and less repetitive. You might rewrite the sentence to something similar to the following: Afrah put her scarf on because she was cold. *She* refers to Afrah, so you do not have to write the name twice.

TYPES OF PRONOUNS

Subject pronouns are often the subject of a sentence—"who" and "what" the sentence is about.

Sentence: *She* loves the desserts in France.

She is the subject.

Sentence: By lunch time, *they* were hungry.

They is the subject.

Object pronouns are often the object of the verb— "who" or "what" was acted upon.

Sentence: Melanie's thoughtfulness *touched him*.

Him is the object of the verb *touched*.

Sentence: We *lifted it*.

It is the object of the verb *lifted*.

Pronouns

The masculine subject pronoun is he, and the masculine object pronoun is him. The feminine subject pronoun is she, and the feminine object pronoun is her. The non-binary subject pronoun is they, and the non-binary object pronoun is them.

A pronoun that shows possession or ownership is called a possessive pronoun.

Sentence: The teacher took *her apple* and left.

The pronoun *her* shows the teacher owns the apple.

Sentence: The hikers spotted *their guide* on the trail.

The pronoun *their* shows the hikers follow the guide who was assigned to the hikers.

Pronouns

Subject Pronouns	I, you, he, she, it, we, they
Object Pronouns	*me*, *you*, *him*, *her*, *it*, *us*, *them*
Possessive Pronouns	*my* (mine), *your*(s), *his*, *hers*, *its*, *our*(s), *their*(s)

Common Pronoun Errors

English language learners often make the same errors when using pronouns. The following examples illustrate common errors.

Incorrect: *Me and Daniela* went to the restaurant for lunch.
This sentence is incorrect because an object pronoun (*me*) is used instead of a subject pronoun.
Correct: *Daniela and I* went to the restaurant for lunch.
This sentence is now correct because a subject pronoun (*I*) is used.
Incorrect: Mark put *her* grocery bag on the counter.
This sentence is incorrect because the pronoun *her* refers to a female, and Mark is a male.
Correct: Mark put *his* grocery bag on the counter.
This sentence is now correct because the male pronoun his refers to the male person, Mark.
Incorrect: *The woman she* went to work earlier than usual.
This sentence is incorrect because the subject *the woman* is repeated by the pronoun *she*.
Correct: *The woman* went to work earlier than usual.
Correct: *She went* to work earlier than usual.

These sentences are now correct because the unnecessary repeated subject has been removed.

Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun is a type of pronoun that helps connect details to the subject of the sentence and may often combine two shorter sentences. The relative pronouns are *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, and *that*.

Sentence: *A relative pronoun* [is a type of pronoun.]

The subject of this sentence is a *relative pronoun*. The clause *is a type of pronoun* [*that gives* some information about the subject.]

The relative pronoun *that* may be added to give more details to the subject.

Sentence using a relative pronoun: A relative pronoun is a type of pronoun that helps connect details to the subject of the sentence.

Relative Pronoun

Remember the following uses of relative pronouns:

Who, whom, and whose refer only to people.

Which refers to things.

That refers to people or things.

The following examples show how a relative pronoun may be used to connect two sentences and to connect details to the subject.

Original sentences: Gossip is a form of communication. It is a waste of time and energy.

Combined sentence: Gossip is a form of communication *that* is a waste of time and energy.

Notice how the relative pronoun *that* replaces the subject *it* in the second sentence. *That* is called a relative pronoun because it connects the details (*is a waste of time and energy*) to the subject (*Gossip*).

Original sentences: My grandmother is eighty years old. She collects seashells.

Combined sentence: My grandmother, *who* is eighty years old, collects seashells.

Notice how the relative pronoun *who* replaces the subject *she* in the second sentence. *Who* is called a relative pronoun because it connects the details (*is eighty years old*) to the subject (*My grandmother*).

VERB TENSES

You must always use a verb in every sentence you write. Verbs are parts of speech that indicate actions or states of being. The most basic sentence structure is a subject followed by a verb.

SIMPLE VERB TENSES

Verb tenses tell the reader when the action takes place. The action could be in the past, present, or future.

TENSE

Past	← Present →	Future
Yesterday I jumped.	Today I jump.	Tomorrow I will jump.

Simple present verbs are used in the following situations:

1. When the action takes place now

   I **drink** the water greedily.

2. When the action is something that happens regularly

   I always cross my fingers for good luck.

3. When describing things that are generally true

   College tuition **is** very costly.

CONJUGATION

Verb	I	He/She/It	You	We	They
ask	asked	asked	asked	asked	asked
bake	baked	baked	baked	baked	baked
cook	cooked	cooked	cooked	cooked	cooked
cough	coughed	coughed	coughed	coughed	coughed
clap	clapped	clapped	clapped	clapped	clapped
dance	danced	danced	danced	danced	danced
erase	erased	erased	erased	erased	erased
kiss	kissed	kissed	kissed	kissed	kissed
push	pushed	pushed	pushed	pushed	pushed

wash	washed	washed	washed	washed	washed

When *he*, *she*, or *it* is doing the action in the past tense, remember to add *-d* or *-ed* to the end of regular verbs.

Simple future verbs are used when the action has not yet taken place:

I *will* work late tomorrow.
I *will* kiss my boyfriend when I see him.
I *will* erase the board after class.

Conjugation Pt. 2

Verb	I	He/She/It	You	We	They
ask	will ask	will ask	will ask	will ask	will ask
bake	will bake	will bake	will bake	will bake	will bake
cook	will cook	will cook	will cook	will cook	will cook
cough	will cough	will cough	will cough	will cough	will cough
clap	will clap	will clap	will clap	will clap	will clap
dance	will dance	will dance	will dance	will dance	will dance
erase	will erase	will erase	will erase	will erase	will erase
kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss
push	will push	will push	will push	will push	will push
wash	will wash	will wash	will wash	will wash	will wash

Going to can also be added to the main verb to make it future tense:

I am *going to go* to work tomorrow.

To Be, To Do, and To Have

There are some irregular verbs in English that are formed in special ways. The most common of these are the verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *to do*.

Irregular Verbs

Base Form	Present Tense Form	Past Tense Form	Future Tense Form
be	am/is/are	was/were	will be
do	do/does	do/does	will do
have	have/has	had	will have

Sing It to Win It

Memorize the present tense forms of to be, to do, and to have. A song or rhythmic pattern will make them easier to memorize.

Review these examples of *to be*, *to do*, and *to have* used in sentences:

To Be, To Do, To Have

Past	← Present →	Future
To Be	**To Be**	**To Be**
Yesterday I was angry.	Today I am not angry.	Tomorrow I will be angry.
To Do	**To Do**	**To Do**
I did my best yesterday.	I do my best every day	Tomorrow I will do my best.
To Have	**To Have**	**To Have**
Yesterday I had ten dollars.	Today I have ten dollars.	Tomorrow I will have ten dollars.

Remember the following uses of to be, to have and to do:

To Be

I → am/was/will be
you/we/they → are/were/will be
he/she/it → is/was/will be

To Have

I/you/we/they → have/had/will have
he/she/it → has/had/will have

To Do

I/you/we/they → do/did/will do
he/she/it → does/did/will do

Compound Subjects

Remember, if you have a compound subject like Marie and Jennifer, think of the subject as "they" to determine the correct verb form.

Marie and Jennifer (they) have a house on Bainbridge Island.

Similarly, single names can be thought of as he, she, or it.

LeBron (he) has scored thirty points so far.

PERFECT VERB TENSES

Up to this point, we have studied the three simple verb tenses—simple present, simple past, and simple future. Now we will add three more tenses, which are called perfect tenses. They are present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. These are the three basic tenses of English. A past participle is often called the *-ed* form of a verb because it is formed by adding *-d* or *-ed* to the base form of regular verbs. Past participles can also end in *-t* or *-en*. Keep in mind, however, the past participle is also formed in various other ways for irregular verbs. The past participle can be used to form the present perfect tense.

Review the following basic formula for the present perfect tense:

Subject	+ has or have +	past participle
I	have	helped

The present perfect tense has a connection with the past and the present.

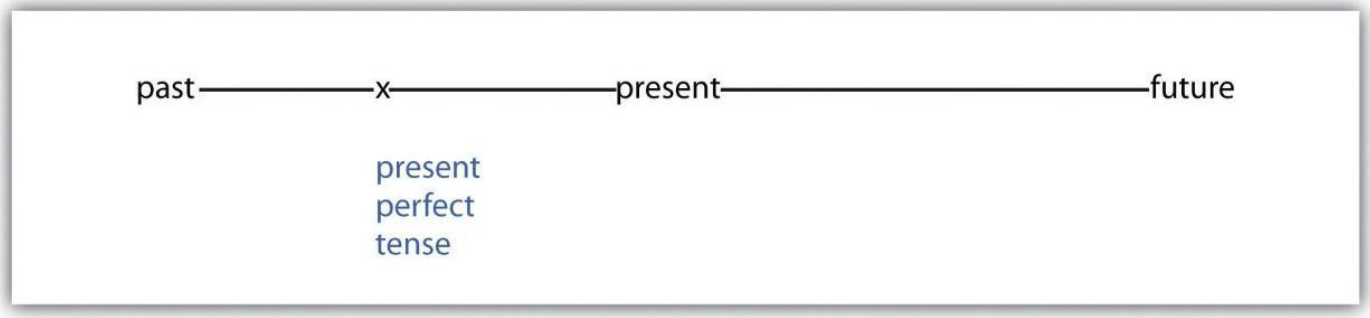


Figure 7.3.1. The Present Perfect Tense

Use the present perfect tense to describe a continuing situation and to describe an action that has just happened.

I **have worked** as a caretaker since June.

This sentence tells us that the subject has worked as a caretaker in the past and is still working as a caretaker in the present.

Dmitri **has** just **received** an award from the Dean of Students.

This sentence tells us that Dmitri has very recently received the award. The word *just* emphasizes that the action happened very recently.

Study the following basic formula for the past perfect tense:

Subject	+ had or have +	past participle
I	had	listened

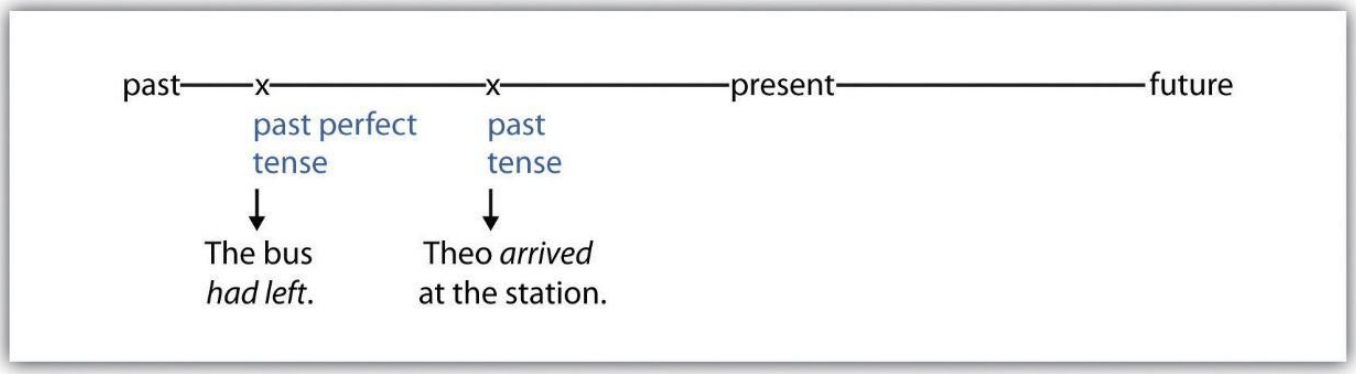


Figure 7.3.2. The Past Perfect Tense

The bus **had left** by the time Theo arrived at the station.

Notice that both actions occurred entirely in the past, but one action occurred before the other. At some time in the past, Theo *arrived* (simple past tense) at the station, but at some time before that, the bus *had left* (past perfect).

Look at the following basic formula for the future perfect tense:

Subject + *will have* past participle

+

I will have graduated

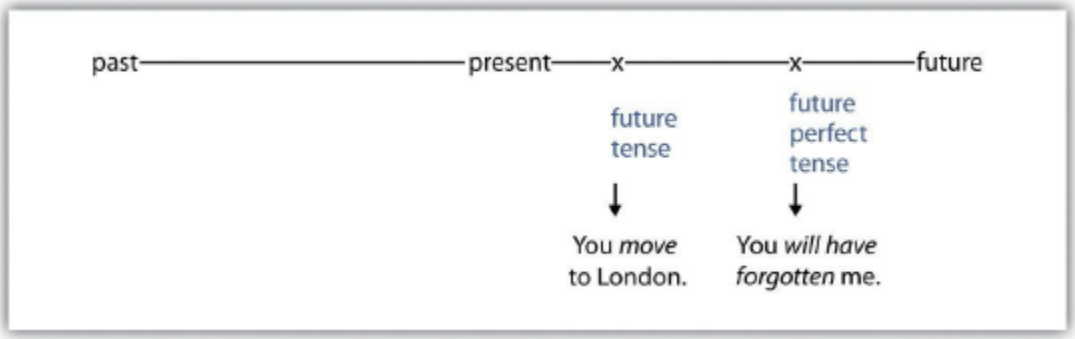


Figure 7.3.3. The Future Perfect Tense

The future perfect tense describes an action from the past in the future, as if the past event has already occurred. Use the future perfect tense when you anticipate completing an event in the future, but you have not completed it yet.

You **will have forgotten** me after you move to London.

Notice that both actions occur in the future, but one action will occur before the other. At some time in the future, the subject (*you*) *will move* (future tense) to London, and at some time after that, the subject *will have forgotten* (future perfect tense) the speaker, *me*.

Progressive Verb Tenses

Progressive verb tenses describe a continuing or unfinished action, such as *I am going*, *I was going*, or *I will be going*.

The present progressive tense describes an action or state of being that takes place in the present and that continues to take place.

Present tense form of *to be*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
am/is/are	helping

You should use the present progressive tense to describe a planned activity, to describe an activity that is recurring right now, and to describe an activity that is in progress, although not actually occurring at the time of speaking:

> Preeti **is starting** school on Tuesday.

This sentence describes a planned activity.

> Janetta **is getting** her teeth cleaned right now.

This sentence describes an activity that is occurring right now.

> I **am studying** ballet at school.

This sentence describes an activity that is in progress but not actually occurring at the time of speaking.

The past progressive tense describes an action or state of being that took place in the past and that continues to take place.

To make verbs in the past progressive tense, combine these two parts:

Past tense form of *to be*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
was/were	helping

You should use the past progressive tense to describe a continuous action in the past, to describe a past activity in progress while another activity occurred, or to describe two past activities in progress at the same time:

> Ella and I **were planning** a vacation.

This sentence describes a continuous action in the past.

> I **was helping** a customer when I smelled delicious fried chicken.

This sentence describes a past activity in progress while another activity occurred.

While I **was finishing** my homework, my wife **was talking** on the phone.

This sentence describes two past activities in progress at the same time.

The future progressive tense describes an action or state of being that will take place in the future and that will continue to take place. The action will have started at that future moment, but it will not have finished at that moment.

To make verbs in the future progressive tense, combine these parts:

Future tense form of *to be*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
will be	helping

Use the future progressive tense to describe an activity that will be in progress in the future:

Samantha and I **will be dancing** in the school play next week.

Tomorrow Agnes **will be reading** two of her poems.

Similar to the present perfect tense, the present perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continues into the present. However, the present perfect progressive is used when you want to stress that the action is ongoing.

To make verbs in the present perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Present tense form of *to have*	+ *been*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
has or have	been	helping

She **has been talking** for the last hour.

This sentence indicates that she started talking in the past and is continuing to talk in the present.

I **have been feeling** tired lately.

This sentence indicates that I started feeling tired in the past, and I continue to feel tired in the present. Instead of indicating time, as in the first sentence, the second sentence uses the adverb *lately*. You can also use the adverb *recently* when using the present perfect progressive tense.

Similar to the past perfect tense, the past perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continued until another time in the past. The past perfect progressive does not continue into the present but stops at a designated moment in the past.

To make verbs in the past perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Past tense form of *to have*	+ *been*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
had	been	helping

The employees **had been talking** until their boss arrived.

This sentence indicates that the employees were talking in the past and they stopped talking when their boss arrived, which also happened in the past.

I **had been working** all day.

This sentence implies that I was working in the past. The action does not continue into the future, and the sentence implies that the subject stopped working for unstated reasons.

The future perfect progressive tense is rarely used. It is used to indicate an action that will begin in the future and will continue until another time in the future.

To make verbs in the future perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Future tense form of *to have*	+ *been*	+ *-ing* (present participle)
will have	been	helping

By the end of the meeting, I **will have been hearing** about mortgages and taxes for eight hours.

This sentence indicates that in the future I will hear about mortgages and taxes for eight hours, but it has not happened yet. It also indicates the action of hearing will continue until the end of the meeting, something that is also in the future.

GERUNDS

A gerund is a form of a verb that is used as a noun. All gerunds end in *-ing*. Since gerunds function as nouns, they occupy places in a sentence that a noun would, such as the subject, direct object, and object of a preposition.

You can use a gerund in the following ways:

1. As a **subject**
2. As a **direct object**
3. As an **object of a proposition**

Often verbs are followed by gerunds.

GERUNDS

Gerund	Verb Followed by a Gerund
moving	Denise **considered moving** to Paris.
cleaning	I **hate cleaning** the bathroom.
winning	Nate **imagines winning** an Oscar one day.
worrying	Mom says she **has stopped worrying**.
taking	She **admitted taking** the pumpkin.

INFINITIVES

An infinitive is a form of a verb that comes after the word *to* and acts as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

to + verb = infinitive

to move *to move*

Examples of infinitives include *to move*, *to sleep*, *to look*, *to throw*, *to read*, and *to sneeze*.

Often verbs are followed by infinitives.

INFINITIVES

Infinitive	Verb Followed by Infinitive
to help	Jessica **offered to help** her move.
to arrive	Mick **expects to arrive** early.

to win	Sunita **wants to win** the writing contest.
to close	He **forgot to close** the curtains.
to eat	She **likes to eat** late.

You may wonder which verbs can be followed by gerunds and which verbs can be followed by infinitives. With the following verbs, you can use either a gerund or an infinitive:

Gerunds and Infinitives

Base Form of Verb	Sentences with Verbs Followed by Gerunds and Infinitives
begin	John **began crying**. John **began to cry**.
hate	Marie **hated talking** on the phone. Marie **hated to talk** on the phone.
forget	Wendell **forgot paying** the bills. Wendell **forgot to pay** the bills.
like	I **liked leaving** messages. I **liked to leave** messages.
continue	He **continued listening** to the news. He **continued to listen** to the news.
start	I will **start recycling** immediately. I will **start to recycle** immediately.
try	Mikhail will **try climbing** the tree. Mikhail will **try to climb** the tree.
prefer	I **prefer baking**. I **prefer to bake**.

love	Josh **loves diving**. Josh **loves to dive**.

Modal Auxiliaries

We all need to express our moods and emotions, both in writing and in our everyday life. We do this by using modal auxiliaries.

Modal auxiliaries are a type of helping verb that are used only with a main verb to help express its mood.

The following is the basic formula for using a modal auxiliary:

Subject	+ modal auxiliary +	main verb
James	*may*	call

There are ten main modal auxiliaries in English.

Modal Auxiliaries

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
can	Expresses an ability or possibility	I **can lift** this forty-pound box. (ability) We **can embrace** green sources of energy. (possibility)
could	Expresses an ability in the past; a present possibility; a past or future permission	I **could beat** you at chess when we were kids. (past ability) We **could bake** a pie! (present possibility) **Could** we **pick** some flowers from the garden? (future permission)
may	Expresses uncertain future action; permission; ask a yes-no question	I **may attend** the concert. (uncertain future action) You **may begin** the exam. (permission) **May** I **attend** the concert? (yes-no question)
might	Expresses uncertain future action	I **might attend** the concert. (uncertain future action—same as may)

shall	Expresses intended future action	I **shall go** to the opera. (intended future action)
should	Expresses obligation; ask if an obligation exists	I **should mail** my RSVP. (obligation, same as *ought to*) **Should** I **call** my mother? (asking if an obligation exists)
will	Expresses intended future action; ask a favor; ask for information	I **will get** an A in this class. (intended future action) **Will** you **buy** me some chocolate? (favor) **Will** you **be finished** soon? (information)
would	States a preference; request a choice politely; explain an action; introduce habitual past actions	I **would like** the steak, please. (preference) **Would** you **like** to have breakfast in bed? (request a choice politely) I **would go** with you if I didn't have to babysit tonight. (explain an action) He **would write** to me every week when we were dating. (habitual past action)
must	Expresses obligation	We **must be** on time for class.
ought to	Expresses obligation	I **ought to mail** my RSVP. (obligation, same as *should*)

Modal Auxiliary

Use the following format to form a yes-no question with a modal auxiliary:

Modal auxiliary *+ subject + main verb*

Should I drive?

Be aware of these four common errors when using modal auxiliaries:

1. Using an infinitive instead of a base verb after a modal

   Incorrect: I can to move this heavy table.

   Correct: I can move this heavy table.

2. Using a gerund instead of an infinitive or a base verb after a modal

Incorrect: I could moving to the United States.

Correct: I could move to the United States

3. Using two modals in a row

   Incorrect: I should must renew my passport.

   Correct: I must renew my passport.

   Correct: I should renew my passport.

4. Leaving out a modal

   Incorrect: I renew my passport.

   Correct: I must renew my passport.

Modals and Present Perfect Verbs

In the previous section, we defined present perfect verb tense as describing a continuing situation or something that has just happened.

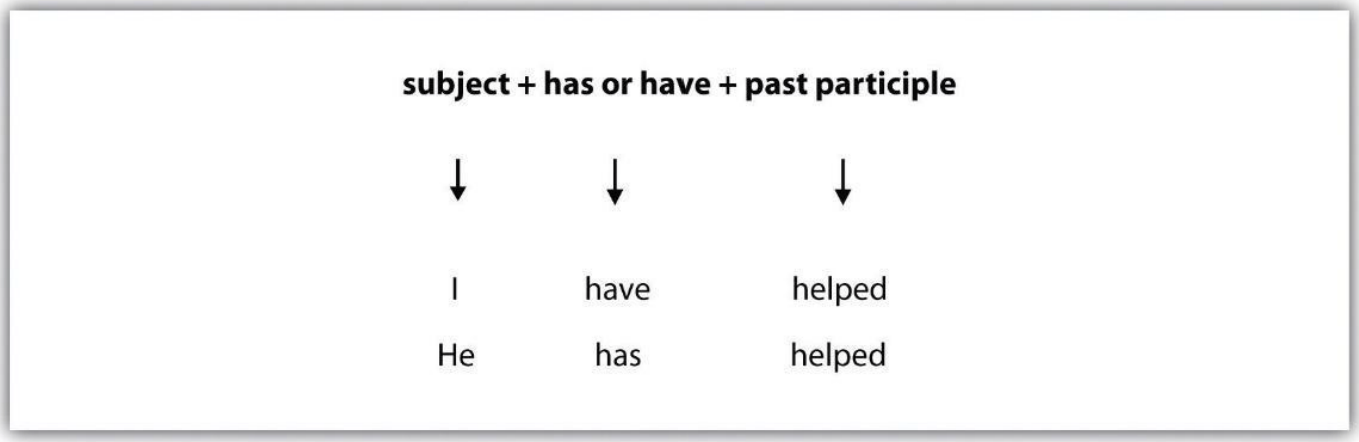


Figure 7.3.4. Present Perfect Verb Tense

Remember, when a sentence contains a modal auxiliary before the verb, the helping verb is always *have*.

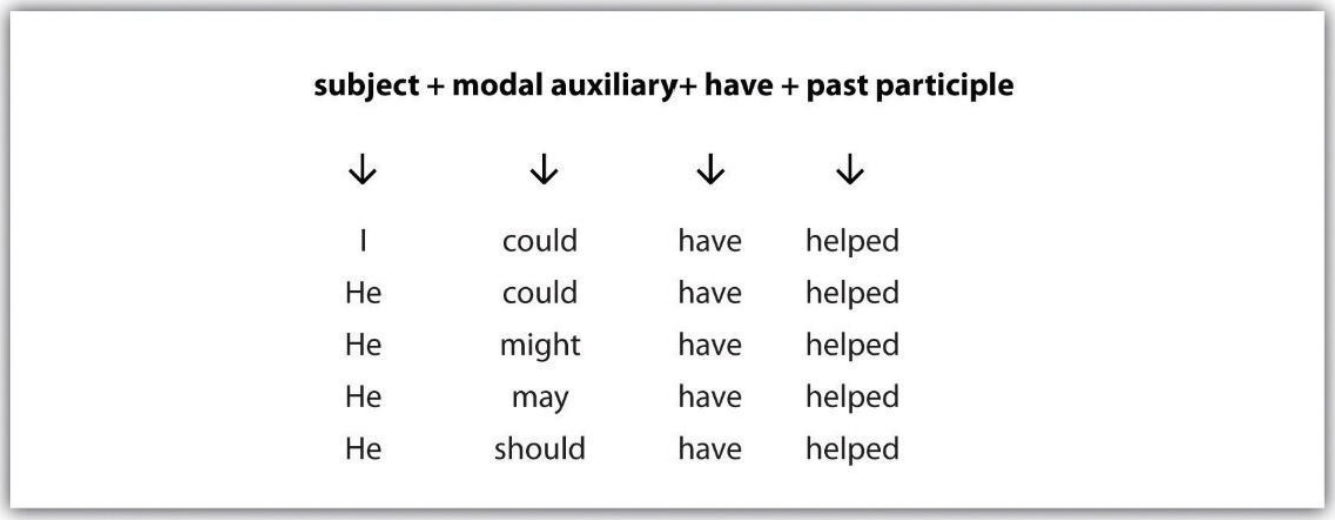


Figure 7.3.5. Modal Auxiliary before the verb

Be aware of the following common errors when using modal auxiliaries in the present perfect tense:

PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word that connects a noun or a pronoun to another word in a sentence. Most prepositions such as *above*, *below*, and *behind* usually indicate a location in the physical world, but some prepositions such as *during*, *after*, and *until* show location in time.

In, On, and At

The prepositions *in*, *at*, and *on* are used to indicate both location and time, but they are used in specific ways.

In

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
in	year	in 1942	country	in Zimbabwe
in	month	in August	state	in California
in	season	in the summer	city	in Chicago
in	time of day (not with *night*)	in the afternoon	n/a	n/a

On

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
on	day	on Monday	surfaces	on the table
on	date	on May 23	streets	on 124th Street
on	specific days/ dates	on Monday	modes of transportation	on the bus

At

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
at	time	at five o'clock	addresses	at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
at	with *night*	at night	location	at Rooney's Grill

Prepositions after Verbs

Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings. These expressions are sometimes called prepositional verbs. It is important to remember that these expressions cannot be separated.

Verbs + Prepositions

Verb + Preposition	Meaning	Example
agree with	to agree with something or someone	My husband always **agrees with** me.
apologize for	to express regret for something, to say sorry about something	**I apologize for** being late.
apply for	to ask for something formally	I will **apply for** that job.
believe in	to have a firm conviction in something; to believe in the existence of something	I **believe in** educating the world's women.

care about	to think that someone or something is important	**I care about** the health of our oceans.
hear about	to be told about something or someone	**I heard about** the teachers' strike.
look after	to watch or to protect someone or something	Will you **look after** my dog while I am on vacation?
talk about	to discuss something	We will **talk about** the importance of recycling.
speak to, with	to talk to/with someone	I will **speak to** his teacher tomorrow.
wait for	to await the arrival of someone or something	I will **wait for** my package to arrive.

Verbs + Prepositions

It is a good idea to memorize these combinations of verbs plus prepositions. Write them down in a notebook along with the definition and practice using them when you speak.

Prepositions after Adjectives

Similar to prepositions after verbs, prepositions after adjectives create expressions with distinct meanings unique to English. Remember, like prepositional verbs, these expressions also cannot be separated.

Adjectives + Prepositions

Adjective + Preposition	Meaning	Example
angry at, about	to feel or show anger toward (or about) someone or something	I am **angry about** the oil spill in the ocean.

confused about	to be unable to think with clarity about someone or something.	Shawn was **confused about** the concepts presented at the meeting.
disappointed in, with	to feel dissatisfaction with someone or something	I was **disappointed in** my husband because he voted for that candidate.
dressed in	to clothe the body	He was **dressed in** a pin-striped suit.
happy for	to show happiness for someone or something	I was **happy for** my sister who graduated from college.
interested in	giving attention to something, expressing interest	I am **interested in** musical theater.
jealous of	to feel resentful or bitter toward someone or something (because of their status, possessions, or ability)	I was **jealous of** her because she always went on vacation.
thankful for	to express thanks for something	I am **thankful for** my wonderful friends.
tired of	to be disgusted with, have a distaste for	I was **tired of** driving for hours without end.
worried about	to express anxiety or worry about something	I am **worried about** my father's health.

Adjectives that Follow At

The following adjectives are always followed by the preposition at:

Good

She is really good at chess.

Excellent

Henry is excellent at drawing.

Brilliant

Mary Anne is brilliant at playing the violin.

Slang and Idioms

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.

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. 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. The important thing to understand is that slang is casual talk, and you should avoid using it in formal contexts. There are literally thousands of slang words and expressions. The table below explains just a few of the more common terms.

Slang Expressions

Slang Word or Phrase	Meaning
check it out, check this out	v. look at, watch, examine
chocoholic, workaholic, shopaholic	n. a person who loves, is addicted to chocolate/work/

	shopping
stuff	n. things (used as a singular, noncount noun)
taking care of business	doing things that need to be done
pro	n. a person who is a professional
crack up	v. to laugh uncontrollably
veg (sounds like the veg in vegetable)	v. relax and do nothing
dude, man	n. person, man
all-nighter	n. and event, like a study session, that continues throughout the night
cool	adj. good, fashionable
gross, nasty	adj. disgusting
pig out	v. eat a lot, overeat
screw up	make a mistake
awesome	adj. great

IDIOMS

Idioms are expressions that have a meaning different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words in the expression. Because English contains many idioms, nonnative 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 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 (like 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 happening
on top of the world	feeling great
pulling your leg	making a joke by tricking another person

the sky is the limit	the possibilities are endless

What if you come across an idiom that you do not understand? There are clues that can help you. They are called context clues. Context clues are words or phrases around the unknown word or phrase that may help you decipher its meaning.

Pay attention to the signal word *but*, which tells the reader that an opposite thought or concept is occurring.

1. Using *had* instead of *have*

   Correct: Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

2. Leaving out *have*

   Correct: Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

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 marathon would be a *piece of cake*, but it turned out to be very difficult.

ATTRIBUTION

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GLOSSARY

S

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