

# EXPRESSION AND INQUIRY



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Lansing Community College

Remix: Expression and Inquiry (Manning et  
al.)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

Preface

## Part I: Nuts and Bolts of Writing

- 1: Overview- The Writing Process
  - 1.2: The Writing Process
  - 1.3: Five Evaluation Criteria
- 2: Topic
  - 2.1: How Do I Choose A Topic
- 3: What Are Some Other Ways to Get Ideas
  - 3.1: What is a Brainstorm
  - 3.2: What is Clustering?
  - 3.3: What is Freewriting?
- 4: How Do I Make an Outline
  - 4.1: Outline
- 5: Researching
  - 5.1: Introduction to Researching
  - 5.2: Determine the Role of Research in Your Writing
  - 5.3: Finding Scholarly Sources
  - 5.4: Evaluating Scholarly Sources
  - 5.5: Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources
  - 5.6: Evaluating Web Sources
  - 5.7: Consider Your Project
  - 5.8: Integrating Scholarly Sources
  - 5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism
- 6: Drafting
  - 6.1: Overview of Drafting
  - 6.2: Drafting- The Process
  - 6.3: During the Drafting Process
  - 6.4: Dealing with Writer's Block
  - 6.5: Meeting the Minimum Word Count
  - 6.6: Title of Your Essay
  - 6.7: Final Thoughts on Drafting
- 7: Editing
  - 7.1: Editing and Revising- One and the Same?
  - 7.2: Sentence Structure
  - 7.3: Editing Tips
  - 7.4: Perspectives on Style
- 8: Reviewing
  - 8.1: Overview of Reviewing
  - 8.2: Establishing Criteria
  - 8.3: Writing Helpful Comments

- 8.4: Responding to Criticism
- 8.5: Peer Reviews
- 8.6: Peer Reviews cont.
- 9: Revising
  - 9.1: Overview of Revising
  - 9.2: Differences Between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading
  - 9.3: A Change for the Better
  - 9.4: Introductions
  - 9.5: Position
  - 9.6: Scope
  - 9.7: Body Paragraphs
  - 9.8: Conclusions
  - 9.9: Analyze Each Part of Your Paper

## Part II: Academic Writing and Analysis

- 10: Reading Analytically
  - 10.1: Reading with a Purpose
  - 10.2: 10.2-.2 Key Terms
  - 10.3: 10.2-.3 Authorial Intent
  - 10.4: 10.2-.4 Radical Noticing- Seeing What Is On the Page
  - 10.5: 10.2-.5 Symbols, Patterns, and References
  - 10.6: 10.2-.6 Sociocultural Lenses
  - 10.7: Reading Analytically
  - 10.8: 10.3-.1 Key Terms
  - 10.9: 10.3-.2 Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images
  - 10.10: 10.3-.3 Tracking Your Reactions
  - 10.11: 10.3-.4 Writing Your Summary
  - 10.12: 10.3-.5 Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes
  - 10.13: 10.3-.6 Original Passage
  - 10.14: Summary and Response
  - 10.15: 10.4-.1 Summary and Response- TV Show or Movie
  - 10.16: 10.4-.2 Digital Media Summary
  - 10.17: 10.4-.3 An Analysis of Texts
  - 10.18: 10.4-.4 Sample 1
  - 10.19: Reading Activities

## Part III: Techniques of Description and Narration

- 11: From Reading to Writing
  - 11.1: The Case for Critical Writers
  - 11.2: Sample 2
  - 11.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper" (1913)
  - 11.4: Rhetorical Situations
  - 11.5: Writing as a Process
  - 11.6: Chapter Vocabulary
  - 11.7: The Yellow Wallpaper
- 12: From Reading to Writing
  - 12.1: 11 From Reading to Writing
  - 12.2: 12.3-.1 Introduction

- 12.3: 12.3-.2 Body
- 12.4: 12.3-.3 Conclusion
- 12.5: 12.5-.1 Sample 1
- 12.6: 12.5-.2 Sample 2
- 12.7: 12.5-.3 Sample 3
- 12.8: Chapter 11 Endnotes
- 12.9: Structure of an Analytical
- 13: What is Exposition in Writing
  - 13.1: Types of Exposition
  - 13.2: Find a Topic, Read, Discuss, and Research
  - 13.3: Structure of an Analytical or Expository Essay
  - 13.4: Sample Exposition Assignments
  - 13.5: Sample Papers
  - 13.6: Analytical Essay Checklist Exercise
- 14: What is Evaluative Writing
  - 14.1: Establishing Evaluative Criteria
  - 14.2: How to Evaluate
  - 14.3: Structure of the Evaluative Essay
  - 14.4: Sample Assignments
- 15: A Brief Guide to the Art of Persuasion and Argument
  - 15.1: Basic Argument Essay Structure
  - 15.2: Strengthening Your Argument
  - 15.3: Sample Essay
- 16: How to use this Book—Pedagogical Background for Students and Teachers
  - 16.1: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities
  - 16.2: Rhetorical Situations
  - 16.3: Assignments and Activities
  - 16.4: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities
  - 16.5: Rhetorical Situations Applications
  - 16.6: Writing as Process
  - 16.7: Introductory
    - 16.7.1: Introductory
      - 16.7.1.1: Introductory
        - 16.7.1.1.01: Introductory
        - 16.7.1.1.1: Introductory/Pedagogical Vocabulary
- 17: Introduction- Description, Narration, and Reflection
  - 17.1: Description and Narration Vocabulary
  - 17.2: Techniques
  - 17.3: Descriptive Section Vocabulary
  - 17.4: Imagery and Experiential Language
- 18: Activities
  - 18.1: Specificity Taxonomy
  - 18.2: Micro-Ethnography
  - 18.3: Imagery Inventory
  - 18.4: The Dwayne Johnson Activity
  - 18.5: Surprising Yourself- Constraint-Based Scene Description
  - 18.6: Image Builder

- [19: Model Texts by Student Authors](#)
  - [19.1: Sample 1](#)
  - [19.2: Sample 2](#)
- [20: Telling a Story](#)
  - [20.1: Vocabulary and ideas to consider as you write narratives.](#)
  - [20.2: Telling a Story](#)
- [21: Story Activities](#)
  - [21.1: Idea Generation- What Stories Can I Tell?](#)
  - [21.2: Idea Generation- Mapping an Autobiography](#)
  - [21.3: Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue](#)
- [22: Model Texts by Student Authors](#)
  - [22.1: Sample 1](#)
  - [22.2: Sample 2](#)
  - [22.3: Sample 3](#)
- [23: Reflecting on an Experience](#)
  - [23.1: Reflective Vocabulary](#)
  - [23.2: Techniques](#)
  - [23.3: Reflective Activities](#)
  - [23.4: 22.4-.1 Sample 1](#)
  - [23.5: 22.4-.2 Sample 2](#)
  - [23.6: 22.4-.3 Sample 3](#)
  - [23.7: Assignment](#)
  - [23.8: One Example of a Peer Workshop Process](#)

[Index](#)

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

## Licensing

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## Preface

Users of *Expressions and Inquiry* will note that it has three major sections—Section One which primarily focuses on the nuts and bolts of writing, otherwise known as Rhetoric and Composition, important to get writers started with the process of writing and also considering what their point or claim is. This section shares ideas about expressing ideas and is primarily derived from the *Wiki Book on Rhetoric and Composition*. Section Two continues to discuss academic writing including research and other inquiry methods as well as analysis and blends more of the previously cited Wiki Book and Shane Abram's *EmpoWord: A Student Centered Anthology and Handbook for College Writers*. It also includes some examples from students at Lansing Community College and more discussion about thinking deeply about writing and techniques. Finally, Section Three Narrative and Description, is primarily based on Shane Abram's *EmpoWord*. We circled back to the techniques of description and narration because we believe these techniques are needed to engage readers and develop voice in all writing. We hope all of this will help students in the Composition courses we teach and beyond.

As we developed *Expressions and Inquiry* we laughingly called it a Franken-text because it is an Open Educational Resource (OER) made up of parts of other textbooks. We hoped it wouldn't be monstrous, but that other writing instructors and their students and ours will find our remix helpful, and we know we learned a lot as we remixed and worked together. We encourage others to collaborate and develop their own products and explore the world of open source texts, and we used this for the first time Spring Semester 2019 with slight modifications in May afterwards.

We are grateful to the Lansing Community College Board for funding the initiative that incentivized us to move from using existing OER's to re-mixing and writing our own. We would also like to thank Regina Gong LCC's (OER) Project Manager who helped us learn about licensing and encouraged our work on this project. Grace Ryder, a student aide in our department designed our cover art, worked on the accessibility portion of the text, and helped to make our text look like a book. Lydia Warnke, Support person in Integrated English, who helped us work on accessibility issues and formatting the entire text consistently. We learned a lot while doing this project. We hope our student and faculty readers are encouraged to express themselves in writing and inquire about the topics and the world around us as they read this text.

## SECTION OVERVIEW

### Part I: Nuts and Bolts of Writing

#### 1: Overview- The Writing Process

- 1.2: The Writing Process
- 1.3: Five Evaluation Criteria

#### 2: Topic

- 2.1: How Do I Choose A Topic

#### 3: What Are Some Other Ways to Get Ideas

- 3.1: What is a Brainstorm
- 3.2: What is Clustering?
- 3.3: What is Freewriting?

#### 4: How Do I Make an Outline

- 4.1: Outline

#### 5: Researching

- 5.1: Introduction to Researching
- 5.2: Determine the Role of Research in Your Writing
- 5.3: Finding Scholarly Sources
- 5.4: Evaluating Scholarly Sources
- 5.5: Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources
- 5.6: Evaluating Web Sources
- 5.7: Consider Your Project
- 5.8: Integrating Scholarly Sources
- 5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism

#### 6: Drafting

- 6.1: Overview of Drafting
- 6.2: Drafting- The Process
- 6.3: During the Drafting Process
- 6.4: Dealing with Writer's Block
- 6.5: Meeting the Minimum Word Count
- 6.6: Title of Your Essay
- 6.7: Final Thoughts on Drafting

#### 7: Editing

- 7.1: Editing and Revising- One and the Same?
- 7.2: Sentence Structure
- 7.3: Editing Tips

#### 7.4: Perspectives on Style

### 8: Reviewing

- 8.1: Overview of Reviewing
- 8.2: Establishing Criteria
- 8.3: Writing Helpful Comments
- 8.4: Responding to Criticism
- 8.5: Peer Reviews
- 8.6: Peer Reviews cont.

### 9: Revising

- 9.1: Overview of Revising
- 9.2: Differences Between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading
- 9.3: A Change for the Better
- 9.4: Introductions
- 9.5: Position
- 9.6: Scope
- 9.7: Body Paragraphs
- 9.8: Conclusions
- 9.9: Analyze Each Part of Your Paper

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 1: Overview- The Writing Process

[1.2: The Writing Process](#)

[1.3: Five Evaluation Criteria](#)

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## 1.2: The Writing Process

### 1.1 Overview

Writing is a complicated and often mysterious process. Although we may think of it as little more than arranging letters and words on a page, a few moments' reflection reveals that it is much more than that. On the one hand, writing is an art—we don't say Shakespeare's language is "correct" but rather that it is beautiful. On the other hand, writing is a science—we want the instructions that came with our Blu-Ray player to be accurate, precise, and easy to understand.

Then there is the matter of what makes writing "good writing." Although we might say that both an instruction manual and a play are "well written," we appreciate them for different reasons. A play written in the clear, unambiguous language of an instruction manual would not be a hit on Broadway. In other words, writing must be judged according to its context—what is its purpose and audience? Finally, even readers with a great deal in common may not agree about the quality of any particular text, just as people's opinions differ about which bands are really great. We really don't know why people have such preferences and can't make accurate predictions about what they will like or dislike. Simply put, writing isn't simple.

If writing is so complicated and mysterious, can it be taught? Since Aristotle, great teachers have taught complex processes to their students by breaking them into smaller, more understandable processes. Aristotle thought that effective communication skills, like good math skills, can be learned and taught. Math teachers don't teach trigonometry to their elementary students; instead, they begin with addition and subtraction. Everything else builds on those simple processes. No one is born a mathematician. Similarly, while luck certainly plays a role in any successful writer's career, successful writers (or speakers) are not just born into the role—and everyone else is not just fated to flunk English. You can learn to write with substance and style. It takes work, but it is within your power. You have already taken the first step.

Most of what we know about writing is also true of speaking. Aristotle wrote a famous treatise on the subject of effective communication called "The Rhetoric." This book is meant for speakers; however, teachers and students also have long used it to polish their writing. "The Rhetoric" is still widely read and applied today by people desiring to learn how to speak and write more convincingly to an audience. Your first-year composition course may even have the word "rhetoric" or "rhetorical" as part of its title. Aristotle taught us that rhetoric isn't just about winning arguments. Instead, rhetoric is the ability to determine all the available means of persuasion at our disposal. Ultimately, it's up to you to guess the best course of action, but rhetoric helps you make this a more educated guess.

Compared to speaking, writing is a much more recent phenomenon, and for many centuries it was assumed that the best way to learn to write well was either to pray, entreat the muses, or carefully imitate writings that were already considered great. Eventually, as more people wanted to write, teachers created rules to help them write "correctly." Unfortunately, this heavy emphasis on correctness and writing with a narrow set of rules did little to improve student writing. Simply knowing how to write grammatically correct prose is important, but it is not enough, by itself, to make writing effective or persuasive. Indeed, too much attention to correctness can result in unintentionally rigid or even comical writing. Legend has it that Winston Churchill grew so irritated at pedants telling him not to end his sentences with prepositions that he said to one of them, "Madame, that is a rule up with which I shall not put."

Since the 1970s, writing instructors have been teaching writing not as the following of fixed rules but rather as a dynamic process: a series of steps that writers follow to produce texts. At first in the '70s, these steps were taught as a somewhat rigid sequence. Now, however, writing teachers emphasize "recursively"—moving forward through some steps and then circling back to redo previous steps—as the more natural way that many successful writers work. In other words, while we still think of writing as a process taking place in a series of steps, we now understand that good writers tend to switch frequently among the different steps as they work. An insight gained while editing one chapter might convince the writer that an additional chapter is needed; as a result, she might start another drafting phase—or even decide to divide one chapter into two or three, and begin reorganizing and developing new drafts. Likewise, failure to satisfy a publisher—whether it is your boss looking at a pamphlet you've written or a book publisher deciding whether to print and sell your book—might lead the author all the way back to the idea-development or organizing stages. In short, while it is very useful to think of writing as a process, the process is not a clear, always-the-same series of steps. Instead, it is a sometimes messy, forward-and-backward process in which you strive for simplicity but try to appeal to your audience, create but also organize, enjoy yourself if possible but also follow some rules, and eventually create a product that works.

If this sounds difficult, it's not—at least, not if you learn a few lessons this book can teach you—and you practice, practice, practice. The more real writing you do, the more of a real writer you will become. If you are reading this book, then your first goal likely is to do well in a college (or upper-level high school) “composition” or “rhetoric” class. In short, you want to learn how to write a good academic paper. There are a large number of tips and methods this book can show you. They will work best if, like the writing process itself, you go back and forth between reading this book and doing some actual writing: try some of these lessons out by writing; then return to new lessons or review some of the lessons you’ve already read to discover what you next can do with what you’ve written—or with a new writing. Your next goal after learning to write a good general academic paper (or several types, perhaps—some of the most common being a summary, an analysis, an argument or “thesis,” an evaluation, and a research paper) is to write in your specific discipline or major. Each discipline or major has its own writing style, organizational method, and purpose or goal. Your major or discipline teachers can help you quite a bit as you learn to apply your academic writing skills to their discipline. And eventually, your goal is to write for your work—for your future profession.

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## 1.3: Five Evaluation Criteria

There are five criteria we can use to evaluate any piece of writing. These criteria are Focus, Development, Organization, Style, and Conventions.

**Focus.** What are you writing about? What claim or thesis are you defending? This criterion is the broadest, concerned with the context, purpose, and coherence of a piece of writing. Is your topic appropriate for an assignment? Do you stay on that topic or drift off on unhelpful tangents? Have you focused too minutely or too widely? For instance, an essay about the American Civil War in general is probably too broad for most college essays. You might be better off writing about a particular battle, general, or incident.

**Development.** Development is concerned with details and evidence. Do you provide enough supporting material to satisfy the expectations of your readers? A proper research paper, for instance, usually includes many references and quotations to many other relevant works of scholarship. A description of a painting would probably include details about its appearance, composition, and maybe even biographical information about the artist who painted it. Deciding what details to include depends on the intended audience of a piece. An article about cancer intended for young children would look quite different than one written for senior citizens.

**Organization.** Organization, often called “arrangement,” concerns the order and layout of a paper. Traditionally, a paper is divided into an introduction, body, and conclusion. Paragraphs are focused on a single main idea or topic (unity), and transitions between sentences and paragraphs are smooth and logical. A poorly organized paper rambles, drifting among unrelated topics in a haphazard and confusing fashion.

**Style.** Style is traditionally concerned with clarity, elegance, and precision. An effective stylist is not only able to write clearly for an audience, but can also please them with evocative language, metaphors, rhythm, or figures of speech. Effective stylists take pains not just to make a point, but to make it well.

**Conventions.** This criterion covers grammar, mechanics, punctuation, formatting, and other issues that are dictated by convention or rules. Although many students struggle with conventions, the knowledge of where to place a comma in a sentence is usually not as important as whether that sentence was worth writing in the first place. Nevertheless, excessive errors can make even a brilliant writer seem careless or ignorant, qualities that will seldom impress one’s readers.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 2: Topic

#### 2.1: How Do I Choose A Topic

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## 2.1: How Do I Choose A Topic

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Have you ever been stressed out because you can't think of a good topic for an important writing assignment? You're not alone. As a student, you'd probably prefer it if professors would just assign topics rather than leave you to find one on your own. However, professors aren't vague because they want to punish you; they usually just don't want to constrain your creativity or discourage you from writing about topics that truly interest you. Professors also want to be surprised by their students' ingenuity, and very few teachers want to read a big stack of essays all on the same stale topic. Unfortunately, just being told to "be creative" is unlikely to calm you down when you've got a major paper due next week and still haven't found a topic to write about!

Imagine that you are in an introductory literature course. The professor has assigned a 3-5 page essay on a Shakespearean play that requires multiple sources. You try asking the professor to be more specific, or offer some suggestions. The professor responds, "No, it's up to you. Surprise me." What do you do?

One smart option is to go to the library and look for scholarly journals that cover Shakespearean studies. You might also try scholarly books about Shakespeare and his plays. Browsing these sources should give you some ideas about the aspects of Shakespeare and his plays, that scholars have found worth writing about. You might find that an idea that you thought was "totally original" has already been done. However, you shouldn't let this worry you. If every essay or book had to be 100% original, we'd have precious few to read!

If you keep reading and skimming articles and books, you'll find many different discussions and possibilities for writing topics. Scholars frequently engage in complex and long-lasting arguments that span across different journal articles and books. Professor X's article on climate change will be mentioned, discussed, or challenged by Professor Y in a book and Professor Z in another article. None of them are worried about saying things that have never been said before; the key is just to say them differently and perhaps better.

You will always have one advantage over any other scholar you read—their articles and books cannot take advantage of all the relevant scholarship that appeared after their publication date. Don't be afraid to freshen up an old article with new supporting evidence—or challenge one whose conclusions are called into question by subsequent research.

You should also look for an issue that you can reasonably cover given the time and space (page count) you have available. After that it's a simple matter of supporting your argument by bringing in relevant quotations from those who agree with you. You should also identify the counter-arguments and provide pertinent background information.

This technique also works well for writing theses and dissertations. Instead of writing about "things never written about before," try to make a new contribution to one of the many ongoing conversations in the field.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 3: What Are Some Other Ways to Get Ideas

[3.1: What is a Brainstorm](#)

[3.2: What is Clustering?](#)

[3.3: What is Freewriting?](#)

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### 3.1: What is a Brainstorm

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Brainstorming allows you to quickly generate a large number of ideas. You can brainstorm with others or you can brainstorm by yourself, which sometimes turns into freewriting. To effectively brainstorm, write down whatever ideas come to mind. Sometimes it works better to write down each idea on a separate piece of paper. It also helps to ask yourself some questions:

1. What do I care about or what am I interested in?
2. What do I know that I could teach others?
3. What irritates me?

In order to capture more of your thoughts, you may want to brainstorm a few times until you have enough ideas to start writing.

#### Examples

Imagine you are in a class. Your instructor says you will have to write a paper on your favorite free-time activity, and that you must also persuade your reader to try it.

First ask yourself: *What do I care about?* or *What am I interested in?*

It is easiest to write about a topic that you are interested in. This could be anything from gardening to ice skating, or from writing poetry to playing the piano. Your list, in this example, would then read:

1. gardening
2. ice skating
3. writing poetry
4. playing the piano

At this stage, every idea is good since you are trying to come up with as many ideas as possible.

Second, ask yourself: *What do I know that I could teach others?*

You may be able to teach someone else something that you really enjoy. Good for you! If you cannot, don't worry; you are still just brainstorming. Perhaps you teach swimming lessons or t-ball, or maybe you bake really well and are able to offer some of your insights. Your list, in this example, would then read:

1. swimming lessons
2. t-ball
3. baking

Anything is fine. You are still brainstorming.

Let's think of another example. How about the common situation in which the instructor wants you to write about "something you care about" or an "issue you have"?

Again start by asking yourself a question. Ask yourself, *What irritates me?*

Everyone has things that irritates them, some small and others larger. An example of something small that's irritating could be people in your dorm who leave trails of toothpaste by the sink and never clean up after themselves. A personal example can be useful as a bridge to a larger issue that will be your topic — in this case it could be community living and personal responsibility.

In academic writing with a less personal slant, the source of irritation is often another writer/theorist with whom you disagree. Your "irritation" then would lead to an effective piece about why you have a better conception of what's really going on. A less direct version of this would be a writer/theorist who makes some good points but lacks something in his/her argument that you can add to the "conversation."

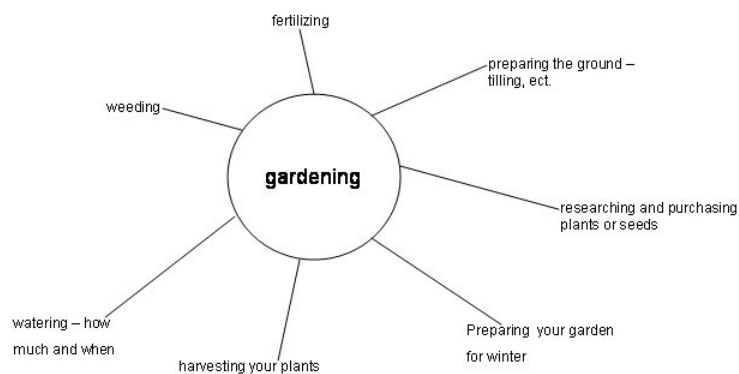
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## 3.2: What is Clustering?

Clustering is a process in which you take your main subject idea and draw a circle around it. You then draw lines out from the circle that connect topics that relate to the main subject in the circle. Clustering helps ensure that all aspects of the main topic are covered.

After using the brainstorm example, let's say you decided on gardening as your topic. Your main idea of gardening would be in the center of your page circled. Anything else that you want to say about gardening you would connect to the circle with lines. You can also add more lines to extend the ideas that relate to thoughts around the circle. When finished, your clustering might look like the following:



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### 3.3: What is Freewriting?

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Freewriting helps generate ideas and set them in motion. To begin, start writing without worrying about spelling or grammatical errors. You should write your ideas naturally and spontaneously so that you can record many ideas quickly. Do not look back at what you wrote until you are satisfied that you have written enough. An easy way to freewrite is to set a time limit and then begin writing. You can write anything at all, and in the end, you will often find some quality ideas scattered throughout your writing.

Example

1. I set my kitchen timer for a specific amount of time. Let's say 5 minutes.
2. I just begin writing without worrying about what I am putting onto the page.

Things I like to do. Watching TV is a great way to unwind after a long day. Playing video games is too. I like talking to my friend Steph on the phone, but I get annoyed when she doesn't call me back. I like shopping. My favorite store is JC Penney. They have everything that you need there. I can buy clothing, luggage, things I need for my kitchen, wall coverings. I love that store. I like going to the theater. Last year, I saw *The West Side Story*. It was amazing. For some reason, I always look forward to fall and spring yard work. I don't know if it is the sense of accomplishment I feel when the yard is ready for the season or what, but I really do enjoy it. There are so many things that need to be done each year too. In the spring, you need to be sure to fertilize before

*A sample free write.*

3. The timer went off, so I stop writing.
4. At this point, I review what I have written and decide which point(s) to elaborate on.

With these simple writing tips, you should be able to find a topic and begin the process of writing the assigned paper. Established authors use brainstorming, clustering, and freewriting, so you're in good company when you use these techniques to help you overcome writer's block or writing anxiety. If none of these work for you, try to come up with your own strategy. What works for someone else may not work for you. After all, these prewriting strategies are just ways to put your ideas on the paper so you can develop them at a later time. Try to enjoy the process of writing instead of seeing writing only as the chore of finishing an assignment your instructor has given you. Done this way, writing might become a pleasure that can also improve your critical thinking ability.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 4: How Do I Make an Outline

#### 4.1: Outline

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## 4.1: Outline

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Developing an outline, such as the examples below, can be helpful because you can keep an overview of what you want to say, check whether you have covered everything, and find what is out of scope and should be excluded. The outline can grow during the writing process as new points come to mind.

### Outline Example I

1. Introduction and Thesis
2. Brief description of issues that arise when reading “Hamlet” II. Issues of feminism uncovered through reading “Hamlet”
3. What other scholars have discovered about feminism in “Hamlet”
4. Which of these discoveries was most evident to me and how
5. Ideas of feminism that I uncovered on my own III. How uncovering ideas of feminism in “Hamlet” has led me to better understand what Shakespeare thought of the role women played in society IV.
6. Conclusion

*A sample outline.*

### Outline example II

1. Mixed marriages
2. States this issue briefly, why I am interested in exploring this, and whether this issue exists in my culture II. Issues of mixed marriage within your culture.
  - Is it acceptable to get married to a person who is a different religion?
  - Is it acceptable to get married to a person who is a different race?
  - What are the advantages or disadvantages of mixed marriages?
3. Personal experiences
  - An example from my own life or my family.
  - An example from the news. IV.
4. Conclusion

*A sample outline.*

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 5: Researching

- 5.1: Introduction to Researching
- 5.2: Determine the Role of Research in Your Writing
- 5.3: Finding Scholarly Sources
- 5.4: Evaluating Scholarly Sources
- 5.5: Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources
- 5.6: Evaluating Web Sources
- 5.7: Consider Your Project
- 5.8: Integrating Scholarly Sources
- 5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism

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## 5.1: Introduction to Researching

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Research can be an intimidating but rewarding process. It allows you to gain additional knowledge on a topic, assemble outside support, and provide credibility for your assertions. Creating a research paper can be divided into three main steps: finding sources, evaluating sources, and integrating sources. This section will provide instruction on each of these steps, along with additional links and information to guide you through the research process.

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## 5.2: Determine the Role of Research in Your Writing

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Depending upon the purpose of the assignment, research can be used to accomplish many things.

Whether you are writing to inform, persuade, or critique, research should be used in conjunction with your own ideas to support your thesis and your purpose. Do not let the research speak for itself. You, the writer of the document, are the most important voice. You are using outside sources to support your thesis. Therefore, let your comments, connections, objections, etc. play the strongest role in your paper. When you quote or paraphrase an outside source, always bring the paper back to your thoughts.

It is essential to use outside sources that are going to back up your argument. In many cases, researching will reveal evidence that might relate to the topic but does not support your side of the argument. Many assignments will ask you to acknowledge the other side of the argument, so be sure to research your topic thoroughly and from many angles.

For some assignments, outside research may not be necessary. Thus, in determining the necessary amount of research needed, first evaluate the topic of the assignment. For example, a paper that is based solely on one's opinion will likely require much less research than one that covers a highly scientific subject. To be sure, always ask your instructor for specific instructions.

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## 5.3: Finding Scholarly Sources

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Before you begin your search, it is important to know that sources are divided into two categories: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include original documents created by an author or group of authors such as historical documents, literary works, or lab reports. They also include any field research you conduct on your own such as interviews, experiments, or surveys. Secondary sources are sources written about primary sources and include scholarly books and articles, reviews, biographies, and textbooks.

Most often in academic writing, you will want to consult scholarly secondary sources along with any primary sources available. A scholarly source would be one that has been written by a professional in the field; the person may hold a doctoral degree or have a great amount of expertise in the field you are studying. Oftentimes, an author's credentials will be listed as a footnote within the source, but if not, an Internet search may reveal whether the writer can be determined to be a scholarly author or one that has done a vast amount of research on the topic. The author of the source will always be an important consideration, as your view of the quality of the article may change depending upon the author's credibility. In addition, you must ask yourself whether your source is scholarly.

In many fields, there will be a number of academic journals or publications that deal with publishing scholarly articles related to the subject. By discovering and accessing these journals, you can be sure that the piece from which you are quoting is a scholarly source. Many universities pay fees in order to provide their students with access to these journals in their electronic form, and an even greater number of university libraries will shelve current and back issues of these journals.

Furthermore, conducting an Internet search of these journals and articles may prove fruitful. Search engines such as Google offer the option of searching "Google Scholar" in order to access only these scholarly articles. Finding these sources online, depending on the journal and the site, may require that you pay a fee to view the article. This is where university libraries come in handy, as they offer free access to the same materials. If you cannot access a university library, some clever hunting of the Internet may still yield what you are looking for at no cost.

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## 5.4: Evaluating Scholarly Sources

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Now that you have found your sources, you must evaluate them. Evaluating sources becomes a major component of researching because the materials chosen will reflect upon *your* reputation. Aside from being able to find informative sources, a good researcher is also able to quickly assess the credibility of information. Through practice, this skill will come.

When setting out to write a research paper, there is a vast pool of information available, including books, newspapers, periodicals, reference works, and government documents. Included in this can be your own empirical data, obtained in interviews and surveys, but you will probably not need to use it all. As important as it is to be able to find sources specific to your topic, it is equally vital to be able to correctly assess each source's credibility — that is, how trustworthy, accurate, and verifiable the sources are. Due to the vast amount of information available on the Internet, it presents an especially interesting challenge in determining the credibility of sources. However, even when evaluating print sources, the same criticism should be maintained.

You must also be aware of the author's possible bias. Even the most credible sources may exhibit forms of bias, as most authors' past experiences will come into play. Bias is most likely to occur in controversial topics such as politics or religion, but is still likely to be present whenever an opinion is voiced. The author's beliefs and experiences can thus affect the objectivity of the text. Another case may be when the author or publisher has ties to a special interest group that may allow him or her to see only one side of the issue. Lastly, make sure to evaluate how fairly the author treats the opposing viewpoints. Complete objectivity is very difficult to attain in writing, but try to find sources that are not incredibly subjective. Nonetheless, the most important thing is simply to be aware of possible biases so that you are not misled.

Here are four approaches to assessing the credibility of the sources you find.

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## 5.5: Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources

The fact that it's in print doesn't automatically make it a reliable source. When evaluating print sources ask yourself these questions:

### Book

- **How old is it?** Research projects will have different requirements as to how old your sources can be. For example, when dealing with contemporary issues or a current controversy, using outdated sources will likely provide inaccurate information. For example, a book on euthanasia published in 1978 probably isn't the best choice. While the book may contain useful information for other projects, it does not make sense to use it when there are more current materials available.
- **Who is the publisher?** Books published by a university press undergo significant editing and review to increase their validity and accuracy. When assessing a book published by a commercial publisher, be aware of vanity presses (companies that authors pay to publish their works, rather than vice versa). Also be cautious about using books labeled as "self-published" or books that are published by specific organizations (such as a corporation or a nonprofit group).
- **Is the author objective?** Check biographical information included in the book, as well as other sources, to gather information about the author's background as a way of determining his or her stance on a particular issue. In addition, find out about his or her previous works, past professional experience, affiliations with groups or movements, current employment, and degrees or other credentials.

### Periodical

- **Is it a scholarly journal or a magazine?** Scholarly journals are almost always characterized by no advertisements, longer articles, and the requirement that authors cite the sources they use in writing their articles. Articles submitted to scholarly journals undergo substantial scrutiny by other professionals as a way to increase the clarity and accuracy of the information contained in them. Most scholarly journals are not sold on news-stands, but rather are circulated primarily among the academic community. In contrast, magazines are available for purchase; they tend to contain shorter articles, generally don't require writers to cite their sources, and contain advertising. Therefore, while magazines may contain relevant information, the content may not always be entirely accurate.
- **How old is it?** As noted above, dated material can sometimes be inaccurate. Always ask your instructor if you're uncertain about how old is too old.
- **Newspaper article: What do you know about the paper that publishes it?** Some newspapers have a discernible political slant, which can often be found by skimming through the headlines or by seeing how others regard the newspaper. For example, *The Los Angeles Times* is considered a more progressive news source, while its neighbor *The Orange County Register* is considered to have a libertarian slant.

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## 5.6: Evaluating Web Sources

For most academic research, teachers will require that students use scholarly sources. For this there are a number of “academic databases” that will always provide credible sources. These sites generally require some form of a subscription in order to access them; however, many colleges provide complimentary access to students. Once logged into the site, users are able to search and sort the articles by criterion such as date, subject, author, and more importantly, whether or not they have been peer reviewed and are scholarly. Examples of these sites include, but are not limited to: EBSCO, JSTOR, and Proquest. Links to these “gated websites” can generally be found on your school’s web page. Nevertheless, always ask what databases are available to you as a student.

While the rest of the Internet has a wide range of easily accessible and useful information, discretion must be maintained. Because anyone can put information on the Internet, make it your first priority to know who is behind the sites you find. Individuals? Nonprofit groups? Corporations? Academics? Advocacy groups? Federal, state, or local government? Small businesses or single vendors? Depending on your topic, you may want to avoid dot-com web sites; for many, their primary purpose is commerce, and that can significantly affect what they publish. Of course, other websites can also have agendas. This can lead to false or misleading information. Therefore, it is best to consult a number of sources so that those with agendas will stand out.

Ask yourself:

- **By whom was the website created?** Be cautious if there is no author. Try looking for “about this site” or check the homepage. Does the website discuss the qualifications of the author(s)? Does it give contact information such as an email address or telephone number?
- **By whom is the website sponsored?** Determine whether the website is sponsored by a special interest group. By learning about the affiliated groups, much can be ascertained about the credibility of the author and web site. Also look at the domain name. This will tell you by whom the site is sponsored. For example: educational (.edu), commercial (.com), nonprofit (.org), military (.mil), or network (.net).
- **Is the website relevant?** Decide whether the information is something that can actually be used in the paper or, at the very least, gives a helpful background. If what is found cannot be used, move on to something else.
- **Does the website contain any errors?** Can the definitions, figures, dates, and other facts presented on the website be verified in other sources? Look for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and content errors. If there appears to be more than one or two content errors, move on.
- **Is the website relatively unbiased?** As it is noted above, carefully examining the source behind the website can lead to clues as to what kind of bias and agenda the site may contain. Once the source has been deemed valid, continue to remain alert, especially if the topic is controversial. Look for websites that discuss multiple points of view. Take note of the language used, and avoid sites that seem to exhibit characteristics of bias and/or inaccurate information.
- **Are there advertisements on the Web page?** Do these particular advertisements reflect a possible bias toward the subject matter?
- **What appears to be the website’s purpose?** Think about why the site was created. Is its purpose to inform, persuade, or sell a product to the reader? For whom was the site created? Who is the intended audience? If you are not included in the intended audience, carefully consider whether or not the information is relevant to your research.
- **Is the website comprehensive?** A valuable website will cover a topic in-depth and lead to additional sources.
- **Does the website provide references?** Determine whether the references themselves are authoritative.
- **How old is the website?** A website that has remained on the Internet a long time may be better trusted than one that was added a month ago. Make sure that the information is not outdated. When was the site last updated? Credible websites will garner ongoing attention by their creators to make sure that the content is as up-to-date as possible.
- **Has the website received any awards?** Websites that have received awards may have better reputations.
- **Is the website user-friendly?** Does the website download quickly? Can you read all the text? Does any text appear too small, in strange characters, or in a font that is illegible? How easy is it to navigate through the website? Is the content accessible? The information presented should be clear, precise, and easy to understand. Avoid using sites that make use of overly scientific and/or technological terms that are difficult to understand. If it cannot be clearly understood, it may lead to misinterpretation and thus incorrect information in your work.

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## 5.7: Consider Your Project

How you evaluate a source will differ depending on the project you're working on. When determining whether a source is credible, biased, or relevant, it is equally important to consider how the source will be used.

For example, [Phillip Morris](#) has a web site that touts the company's programs to curb smoking among young people. Obviously, information from a tobacco company and cigarette marketing giant can be considered biased. You must ask yourself whether their program is effective and whether the content of the site can be trusted and in what context.

Should you never use that source? You might want to if you were writing a paper that examined the smoking rates of 10 – 13 year olds. What role might the Phillip Morris site play in your paper? Does the site display information that contradicts the company's advertising campaigns? Would the campaign website be effective in your argument? It all depends on what side of the argument is going to be supported in your research project.

Audience. Purpose. Argument. These intents should be considered since they affect how sources should be evaluated.

When faced with assessing a large number of sources in a short period of time, the quickest way to cover the essential points is to remember this acronym: ADAM

- **A** How old is this source? For almost every topic, search for the most current sources that can be found.
- **D** Does the source go in-depth, or does it just skim over the surface? Does it feature the many details and long discussions that are expected from academic sources, or does it just seem to cover the main ideas? Always use substantive sources.
- **A** Who is the author? What is known about his/her qualifications? Is he/she really an expert? Can any bias be seen? What is his/her purpose?
- **M** Follow the money. Is the source coming from a place that's trying to "sell" something? Is there advertising where this source appears that might affect what will be printed?

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## 5.8: Integrating Scholarly Sources

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To better understand the process of researching, it should be recognized that there are sources of information all around us. We commonly use them in situations ranging from a conversation with a friend to an online discussion. The difference in academic research is that this “casual conversation” turns into a discussion with the readers of your paper. Therefore, it may help to think of doing research and using sources of information as just another way to enhance your conversation with the audience.

Even before you learn the rules of citation, recognize that you already know quite a bit about how to work with sources. It can be helpful here to think of sources as “other voices.” Sources are used when you reference an idea that was heard in a conversation. They are used when considering what to buy — whether the source is an advertisement, a slogan you can’t get out of your head, the fact that a friend recommended a product, or that you’ve looked up price quotes and shopped around. You become knowledgeable about making decisions by piecing together the information from many sources. Sources are part of our lives; they are all around us and are a part of how we breathe life into the words that express what we think.

In research writing, it is similar in the sense that the same act of interacting with other voices is present, and only another layer is added. Because writing is being done, you’re also presenting the sources in an organized way, so that your sources are used in a way that supports your point of view. This means that any and all sources that remotely relate to the topic can’t be thrown in; instead, pick and choose the best sources for your purposes, and use them strategically for effect.

Sources are capable of playing a variety of roles in your writing. Sometimes sources are used as examples; sometimes they present evidence. Sources can also be used to present a counterargument. Other times, they are used only to be built upon and refined. Nevertheless, it should be realized that sources can serve multiple purposes in a paper.

This is nothing new. To relate this to an everyday situation, try this: Spend a week paying attention to the conversations and discussions you have. Listen for sources used and try to discern for what reasons they were used. You’ll often hear people cite the news or refer to a game when talking about sports. You’ll hear friends quote conversations they’ve had with other friends. You will hear people discussing important issues with the participants in that discussion providing reasons (evidence) — facts and opinions, but often a mix of the two -for why they feel the way they do.

In writing, the natural act of conversing with and referring to others is taken one step further. Knowing in advance that you’ll be writing for an audience, sources (other voices) will be looked at while exploring an idea and planning how to appeal to those readers, using terms and conventions that they will recognize. However, do not let this part of the research process get in the way of doing what comes naturally. Research is about curiosity and interest. It is about having something to say and finding the evidence to support it. That is the basis of research and working with sources. Thus, the technicalities and rules of research, while important, should not discourage you from doing research and effectively using sources.

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## 5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism

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After using other sources to gain information for a report or paper, you might decide to use that information in your paper. If the ideas expressed in your paper are not your original thoughts, you must cite where you obtained that information. If you do not cite where you obtained your information, you are [plagiarizing](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn1](#). Plagiarizing is an extreme offense. If you are caught plagiarizing in school you usually will receive a failing grade on the assignment, if not in the entire course. You could also risk being expelled from school. If you are caught plagiarizing in the workplace, it could likely end up costing you your job. If you are a researcher and plagiarize in a scientific paper, your university may lose funding. To avoid the risk of plagiarism, make sure that you cite copied information! The most common forms of citation are [direct quotations](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn2](#) and [summarizing](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn3](#) or [paraphrasing](#). After a direct quote or at the end of a summarized or paraphrased thought, you should cite the author and page number of your source. Information on how to cite sources can be found in The Writer's Handbook: [Summary](#) and [Citations](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn5](#). If you are using other sources in your report and are unsure whether or not you need to use citations, it is better to be safe than sorry, so cite the information.

The two most common standards for citing are [MLA](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn6](#) (Modern Language Association) and [APA](#)[5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism#\\_ftn7](#) (American Psychological Association). Each is specific to the field in which the research is done. For example, if you are researching for a psychology class, it is most likely going to be cited in APA format. On the other hand, MLA is used in the liberal arts and humanities fields. Nonetheless, check with the teacher, group, or organization for which the research is being done to find out which method you are expected to use.

Using and correctly citing outside sources is hugely important to the ethical portrayal of you as a writer. It shows that you have done your homework, literally. It also shows that you are a thoughtful writer who takes this work or subject seriously, who respects the hard work of others, and who truly contemplates the intricacies of research and discovering truth in writing.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 6: Drafting

- 6.1: Overview of Drafting
- 6.2: Drafting- The Process
- 6.3: During the Drafting Process
- 6.4: Dealing with Writer's Block
- 6.5: Meeting the Minimum Word Count
- 6.6: Title of Your Essay
- 6.7: Final Thoughts on Drafting

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## 6.1: Overview of Drafting

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Drafting is essential to the organization and flow of your paper. Drafting includes prewriting[1], editing[2], and reviewing[3]. Once your general ideas are down on paper, writing out specific ideas and quotations can make the final writing process much easier. Each step of drafting brings the process a little closer to the final product. Always write down any ideas you have in the drafting process. It is much easier to cut content from your paper than it is to work on adding content. If you collect all your resources, quotations, facts, ideas, and come up with a thesis during the drafting process, your paper will show it. The idea is to provide yourself with as much information as possible in order to create a solid and well thought-out piece. Do less worrying and more writing.

*“Solvitute ambulando. To solve a problem, walk around.”*

–St. Jerome, who spent 30 years at a desk

[\[1\] Planning and Prewriting Link](#)

[\[2\] Editing Link](#)

[\[3\] Reviewing Link](#)

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## 6.2: Drafting- The Process

*“Fiction is based on reality unless you’re a fairy-tale artist. You have to get your knowledge of life from somewhere. You have to know the material you’re writing about before you alter it.”*

–Hunter S. Thompson

How do you start your draft? While the occasional flash of inspiration can lead you to scribble out great work on the back of an envelope with a stubby pencil, paying brief attention not only to ‘what you write’, but ‘how you write’ can inspire you to write differently or even more effectively. If you start drafting from the conclusion, for example, it could be like having a “Guiding Star” for your paper. Or you could leave the introduction and conclusion blank until the end. With that said, you can make up your own approach to create your own way of writing. All the technological tools you have access to make it possible for you to write virtually anytime, anywhere, and however you want. Take advantage of it. Type on your computer, do research on it, record your own voice if the pen is slowing down your thinking. Many people find it helpful to brainstorm; start writing for an extended period of time without stopping, and see what you can come up with. Charting can be a good way to come up with ideas and see connections you may not otherwise notice; when you chart, you write down a topic in the center of the paper. Then write other words or ideas that fit in with the topic. Draw lines that connect the related ideas. Experiment with your approach to writing.

**The first draft:** Prewriting<sup>[1]</sup> will help you with drafting. Additionally, try writing in full sentences, try to find the best possible quotations, try mindmapping, or try writing out all of the data you have gathered. Weave these things together, and you may end up with a nice framework for your paper. Don’t worry about being complete in your drafting. Disorganization and choppiness are fine here; you can smooth that out in later drafts. Drafts are **not** perfect. Drafts may contain grammatical and spelling errors and may lack detail. Rephrasing and expanding ideas may be a part of later drafts.

**The second draft:** The second draft is about organizing your information logically and effectively. If you created a thorough first draft, this should be easy. Organize the main points that you plan to make, find supporting evidence for each point, and spend a few sentences explaining what conclusions you are able to draw from the information. Don’t be afraid to show off. Professors like it when students are able to draw conclusions on their own. Sometimes it weakens your argument to use softeners like “might” “I think” and “maybe,” so keep an eye out for these.

You will want to come up with an overall organizational strategy and stick to it. Parallelism is very attractive in a paper. However, there is also no quick and easy format that works for every topic. You may want to organize things chronologically, with fact and then opinion, or by order of importance.

**The third draft and more:** The third and any subsequent drafts are really about finesse. These are the drafts that will hook your reader and earn you an “A.” Try to write an attention-grabbing introduction, as well as a conclusion that leaves the reader thinking about your paper. If you are still struggling with the overall flow of your paper, go back to your first draft and start rewriting. Often your main point will change by the time you get to this draft, and that is fine. However, you may need to go back to your first draft when this happens.

The elusive “show, don’t tell” line comes into play in this draft. Professors want to be entertained, and they want more than just facts. You need to show the professor that you can think for yourself, that you know what you’re talking about, and that you can write in an engaging style. If you are bored reading the paper, chances are your professor will be, too. Add action verbs, remove passive ones, and use examples. Pretty soon you’ll be ready for a final draft.

Be sure to follow a timeline. Make sure that you start early to have enough time to go through many drafts. If you wait until the day before, you will have time for only one draft!

[\[1\] Rhetoric and Composition, Planning and Prewriting](#)

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## 6.3: During the Drafting Process

Many writers often narrow — or expand — the topic as they write. Overly broad topics can be difficult to manage and can lead to summarization rather than descriptive explanation. Narrowing your topic will provide you with a more workable idea to focus on. Asking questions about what you want to know regarding your topic and what you want your readers to know will help focus your writing. If you choose to narrow your topic, first try to picture a larger context into which your thesis fits. Make a claim which forecasts the main point(s) of your thesis, then deliver the source which supports the argument. During this stage, scan for grammatically weak areas and unsupported claims. You may always add background information, term definitions, literature review, reasons for your assumptions, and counter-arguments to strengthen your own argument.

*“My starting point [in writing] is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice . . . I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I wish to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.”*

—George Orwell

Sometimes you will find that it is easier to write the introduction after you have written the body of your paper. Consider waiting to write the introduction until you have a definite sense of what direction you want your paper to take. Many times, if you write an introduction first, it can limit the information or collaboration of ideas for the bulk of the paper. If you do decide to save the introduction for later, go over what you have written and identify the main point, or points, of your paper. Next, craft an introduction with a thesis statement that forecasts what will follow. Be aware that you need to rework some of the body after you do the introduction. No matter what you choose to write first, it is important to stay on track. Emphasize several points that are related to your thesis by adding more information and going deeper into detail. It is important to gather sufficient information to support your thesis. You may be required to provide a reference or in-text citation, or you may find that you do not yet know enough about your topic, and more research is required. Research may be necessary for multiple reasons: to learn more about the topic, to provide examples for your thesis, or to use as support for your thoughts, opinions, and the overall direction of your paper.

As you draft, do not stop to edit or look up small pieces of information; there will be time for precision later. Luke Sullivan, author of “Hey Whipple, Squeeze This,” suggests that you must “write hot and edit cold.” In other words, write off the top of your head and allow your thoughts to be spontaneous. You never want to leave a good idea out. However, when it comes to polishing the final product, become critical by taking out unnecessary words or ideas that stray from the main message. Do not keep text that distracts or causes misunderstandings. If you have a question, place it in brackets or make a note of it and refer back to it later. First, just get your ideas out without worrying about punctuation or spelling. Similarly, if you notice a big gap which requires more research, skip it and work on other sections. The important thing is to let your ideas keep coming and make progress on the page. No matter how irrelevant your words may appear, keep writing. If you have to stop, be sure to end in a place where it will be easy to pick up from later. Don’t get distracted when your initial drafts aren’t “A” quality work. That’s the reason they are drafts. The important thing is to get your ideas down on paper. You can spend time evaluating them later on.

*“Write 1,000 words a day. That’s only about four pages, but force yourself to do it. Put your finger down your throat and throw up. That’s what writing’s all about.”*

—Ray Bradbury

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## 6.4: Dealing with Writer's Block

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Writer's block can occur at any point during the writing process. You may find yourself sitting down to write when you suddenly realize that you can't think of a single thing to say.

Don't panic! It's a common problem with a variety of solutions. Here are a few...

- Staring at a blank screen can be intimidating. Try writing out your dilemma in the form of a question: "What is it I'm trying to say?" "What are my goals?" Then brainstorm[\[1\]](#) to answer these questions.
- Take a break. Ten minutes away from your work will usually recharge your creativity.
- Review the literature on your topic to see what other people are saying. Even opposing views can be inspiring.
- Bounce ideas off someone else. Speaking about your writer's block with friends, family, and fellow students may help untangle ideas or generate new ones.

[\[1\] en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Rhetoric\\_and\\_Composition/Planning\\_and\\_Prewriting#What\\_is\\_a\\_Brainstorm.3F](https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Rhetoric_and_Composition/Planning_and_Prewriting#What_is_a_Brainstorm.3F)

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## 6.5: Meeting the Minimum Word Count

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If you are having trouble meeting the minimum page length, look over your paper again and see if you can find spots that could use additional detail. Also, look at your assignment sheet again to see if you met the assignment's requirements. It is okay to add more detail to certain sections; for instance, is “a blue car” sufficient, or would “a 2007 Vista Blue Ford Mustang” work better? But be careful not to make your paper too wordy. Remember that quality is more important than quantity. Just adding needless words to add to the word count keeps you from actually developing your ideas and strengthening the content of the paper.

Also see Generating Ideas in the Drafting section of this book.

[6.05: Meeting the Minimum Word Count#\\_ftnref1](#)

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## 6.6: Title of Your Essay

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Coming up with a good title for your essay might seem difficult, but there are several techniques that can help. Although some writers start with a good title and write a paper to fit it, others (and probably most) worry about coming up with a good title after they're finished with the draft. The advantage of waiting until the end to work on the title is that you know exactly what you've written.

Many academic writers prefer a two-part title structure separated by a colon. The “catchy” bit goes before the colon, whereas the latter part is a straightforward description of the paper. For example, “Cutting out the Cut and Paste: Why Schools Should Use Plagiarism Detection Software.”

Here are some tips for coming up with good titles:

- Get inspiration from best-selling books or well-known essays, particularly those closely related to your topic (e.g., “Men are from Mars, Women are from Snickers: Candy Bars and the Obesity Epidemic.”)
- Look through your paper and see if you can identify some “key words” or special phrases that might serve as part of a title (i.e., “Edit this Page: How Wikis Enable Collaborative Writing” or “The Blue Screen of Death: How to Respond to Technical Difficulties During a Presentation.”)
- Consider poetic devices, such as repeating consonant sounds (e.g., “The Cost of Caring”).
- Get inspiration from famous quotations or song lyrics (e.g., “I Shaved My Legs for This?: A Feminist Perspective on Country Music.”)

If you can't come up with a good title right away, shut down your word processor and think about other things for a while. If you just can't come up with anything clever, just remember that a clear and precise title is much better than none at all. A title like “The Use of Skull Imagery in Hamlet” may not sound profound, but at least the reader will know what the paper is about.

*“When you get an idea, go and write. Don't waste it in conversation.”*

—Kenneth Koch

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## 6.7: Final Thoughts on Drafting

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Here's a quick summary of the key guidelines in drafting:

- Don't worry about your audience before you draft. Your audience may dictate the style and tone of your writing, but it is more important to get a good start before adding potential complications to the mix.
- You may need to narrow or expand your topic as you develop your paper.
- If you are stumped about how to start the introduction, it might be helpful to simply skip it and come back to it later. The bigger picture might become clearer as you approach completion.
- While drafting, keep all of your research close at hand. This will prevent the need to stop writing to look something up, which could break your concentration.
- Writing in 30-minute stretches, or longer, will establish momentum, making your job as a writer much easier.
- If you come across a small detail that you are unsure about, simply write yourself a note and come back to it later.
- The first draft will not be perfect. Your priority should be getting your thoughts out on paper (or on-screen). Leave the fine-tuning for later.
- If you must stop writing, be sure to end in a place where you have a good idea of what comes next. You will be able to pick it up again more easily.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 7: Editing

[7.1: Editing and Revising- One and the Same?](#)

[7.2: Sentence Structure](#)

[7.3: Editing Tips](#)

[7.4: Perspectives on Style](#)

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## 7.1: Editing and Revising- One and the Same?

*“Substitute “damn” every time you’re inclined to write “very”; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.”*

–Mark Twain

Although many writers and even some instructors use the terms interchangeably, you may find it helpful to see editing and revising as two different activities. For our purposes, editing means going through a piece of writing and making comments and suggestions about how it could be better—or even whether it’s appropriate at all. Revising, on the other hand, occurs when a writer attempts to make the changes suggested during the editing process.

For example, an editor might suggest that you tweak your introduction to make it better fit the rest of the paper. The actual process of changing the introduction is called revising and comes with own set of difficulties. We talk more about that process in the Revising chapter.

You may be called upon to edit other students’ writing. This process is often called Peer Reviewing and is given a separate chapter in this book. If you’re concerned about how to diplomatically edit someone’s work without being offensive, be sure to read it carefully.

You can (and should) also edit your own work. This simply means going back over what you’ve written and finding ways to improve it. Most writers frequently switch between drafting new sentences and paragraphs and editing ones they’ve already written. In this chapter, we go over some basic editing strategies and some specific things to look for during the editing process.

As previously mentioned, revision concerns large sections of text, while editing concerns individual sentences. Below is a list of potential errors to consider while editing.

- Fragments
- Run-on sentences
- Dangling or misplaced modifiers
- Adjective and adverb use
- Verb usage and tense
- Subject/verb agreement
- Pronoun/antecedent agreement
- Sentence balance
- Comma Use
- Spelling
- Word choice (connotation vs. denotation)
- Format/presentation

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## 7.2: Sentence Structure

*“In my sentences I go where no man has gone before.”*

—George W. Bush.

Use active verbs.

**Be-verbs** (is, am, are, was, were, be, has/have been) indicate condition and often require an extra sentence or clause to be sound. **Active verbs** allow you to compose sharply without numbing the rhythm of your writing. Read your writing with an objective eye and think: “How can I make every sentence and paragraph straightforward and simple?” Below are examples in italics of wordy and confusing verbiage. Below the italics are the same sentences that have been simplified.

The sharp rise in fuel prices is a serious challenge to trucking firms. It makes it hard for them to provide timely service to customers and to meet payroll expenses.

Sharply rising fuel prices **challenge** trucking firms by causing delays in customer service and payroll.

*Primary causes of the rise in fuel prices **are** an issue of confusion for many citizens. They don't know how to fight the rise because they don't know its cause.*

Primary causes of rising fuel prices **elude** many citizens, making them unaware of how to fight the increase.

Name the people. Directly state *who or what group* is acting in your sentences.

Note the contrast in power and clarity among the sentences below

- **Without people:** A citywide ban on indoor smoking in Duluth originally caused a marked drop in bar patronage.
- **With people:** When the Duluth City Council passed a citywide ban on indoor smoking, many people stopped going to bars.

Eliminate wordy phrases. Certain stock phrases are weak and wordy. They can make you sound stuffy or as though you're just trying to fill up space. Use these replacements

- **Because, Since, Why:** the reason for, for the reason that, owing/due to the fact that, in light of the fact that, considering the fact that, on the grounds that, this is why
- **When:** on the occasion of, in a situation in which, under circumstances in which
- **About, Regarding:** as regards, in reference to, with regard to, concerning the matter of, where ABC is concerned
- **Must, Should:** it is crucial that, it is necessary that, there is a need/necessity for, it is important that, it cannot be avoided that
- **Can:** is able to, has the opportunity to, has the capacity for, has the ability to
- **May, Might, Could:** it is possible that, there is a chance that, it could happen that, the possibility exists for

Luckily, Internet users can find numerous web sites about how to eliminate wordiness.

Use Parallelism in sentences. Parallelism sounds difficult but is easy to write or edit. Parallelism uses the same pattern in words and structure to show equal importance or provide balance in sentences John likes reading, his studies, and talking.

Corrected: John likes reading, studying, and talking.

We were asked to calculate scores, record them, and **putting them** on the bulletin board. Corrected: We were asked to calculate scores, record them, and post them on the bulletin board.

Editing Tips

The science class had to dissect frogs or **were experimenting** with gases.

Corrected: The science class had to dissect frogs or experiment with gases.

To check for parallelism, first circle or highlight every **and** or **or** to check for balance in the sentence. List the phrases from your sentence on a separate piece of paper. Example: **reading, his studies, and talking**. Make corrections to your list to create balance: **reading, studying, and talking**.

Once you fix a few sentences, problems with parallelism become easier to recognize and to correct!

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## 7.3: Editing Tips

*“Bad spellers of the world, untie!”*

—Graffito



Figure 11: A pair of glasses sitting on a computer keyboard.

Editing is like going over your writing with a fine-toothed comb, scanning the surface and the depths for errors, misstatements, and a lack of clarity. First, **keep resources close**. Gather your writing handbook, dictionary, thesaurus, handouts, and any other editing resources and *keep them close*. This way, you will not be tempted to guess at the correct way to do something. Instead, use your resources when you need them. Spelling errors can be avoided if you have a dictionary nearby. Don't rely on spell check. It will only correct the spelling, not the proper usage of a word. For example, the word **their** means someone's possession of something. When used in a sentence, "We sat in *their* chairs." On the other hand, **there** is used to express an area or place. When used in a sentence, "We sat over *there*." Looking up these words in a dictionary will prevent unnecessary errors from occurring.

Secondly, **know your errors**. Keep a list of the errors you tend to make next to a corresponding list of corrections. No writer makes unique mistakes all the time; instead, our mistakes are habitual. Know what yours are by looking at your instructor's comments on past papers or by working with a writing tutor. That way, you can enhance your editing strategies by watching specifically for these types of errors. If there are grammar rules you find yourself looking up more frequently than others, write them down for future reference. Thirdly, **break it down**. Edit one thing at a time. Instead of reading your paper through from start to finish once or twice and trying to catch everything, try searching for one thing at a time. For example, you might go through your paper once to tighten up wordiness. Then, read through a second time, while looking for one type of error which you frequently make, such as comma splices. Then, try reading a third time looking for words that may have been misspelled when you ran a spell check. Read a fourth time for another characteristic error, such as subject-verb agreement.

Next, **reduce visual clutter**. Use two pieces of blank paper to cover up everything but one sentence at a time. This forces you to pay closer attention to the words because they are the only thing you see. Normally, our eyes move all over a text as we are reading; this trick will prevent that tendency. Lastly, **work backwards**. Read from the end of your paper to the beginning, one sentence at a time. When we read in the conventional manner—top to bottom or left to right—we tend to read quickly and are constantly leaping ahead without really focusing on the words. We tend to see what isn't there, because we know what it is supposed to say. Reading backwards forces us to slow down, thereby allowing us to catch more errors within individual sentences.

When reviewing your work, it is also important to ensure that the tense you choose remains consistent. **Tense** refers to the relation of details in the past, present, and future. For example, one writer may tell a story about going to the mall in the present tense by

saying, “I **am** walking around the mall and I **see** my third grade teacher.” Another writer may choose to relate this story in the past tense by saying, “I **was** walking around the mall when I **saw** my third grade teacher.” Although it is important to select the tense that best suits the particular context a writer is using, it is equally important to remain consistent with whatever tense is chosen. Inconsistency within tense is extremely confusing for readers. It is important to review your use of tense to ensure that your language is clear. For example, if you were to say “I was walking around the mall and I see my third grade teacher” your audience would be very confused, wondering if you were seeing your teacher in the present or last week. By keeping your tense consistent your reader will always know when you experienced what you’re writing about.

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## 7.4: Perspectives on Style

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*“Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn.”*

—Gore Vidal, American writer

Prescription and description litter these pages and others. Some writers tell you how to write: how your writing should look, sound, and feel. These writers prescribe rules (writer’s handbooks are their bibles). Should you follow them? Prescription can be limiting. In some instances, it may be profitable or necessary to follow a formula (when writing a legal document or a theme for your fifth grade teacher, for example). It is necessary to learn the rules, if only to break them. Rules are not static, however. They evolve. Rules are added, changed, omitted. Current fashion is the only certainty.

Other writers describe how text is actually written. They analyze past and present text, highlighting similarities, differences, and respective efficiency. They define goals and purpose. It may be purposeful to apply rules, yet at other times it may not. But do not allow yourself to become limited by prescription.

Examine your goal and determine the best approach to reach it.

**Why discuss style in a section on editing?** As you write, you make choices. As you edit, you examine the effectiveness of those choices. Some choices are more effective than others and may reinforce your message. It all depends on your goal, your purpose, and your audience. Are you writing a birthday greeting or a dissertation? An instant message or a public address? Your choices determine your text’s effectiveness; they help relate meaning. As you can imagine, there are as many perspectives on style as there are available topics for writing. The following is an attempt to present some of those perspectives.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 8: Reviewing

[8.1: Overview of Reviewing](#)

[8.2: Establishing Criteria](#)

[8.3: Writing Helpful Comments](#)

[8.4: Responding to Criticism](#)

[8.5: Peer Reviews](#)

[8.6: Peer Reviews cont.](#)

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## 8.1: Overview of Reviewing

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*“No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.”*

— H.G. Wells

Sooner or later, someone is going to hand you a piece of writing and ask for your opinion. You may be asked to review another student’s essay as part of your class work. Perhaps a friend or a younger brother or sister has come to you for help. If you develop a reputation for being a good writer, then the chances are good that even your boss might ask you to look over letters or policy statements and offer your professional opinion. In any case, if you really want to do a good job in these situations, you’re going to need reviewing skills. You’re going to need to be able to identify problems, suggest alternatives, and, more importantly, support everything you say with reasonable claims. Furthermore, you must do all this in a convincing way that makes the writer want to make the changes you suggest. You must know what’s wrong with a document, why it’s wrong, and how to fix it.

You’ve probably heard the saying, “A writer is his own worst critic.” Whoever said this undoubtedly suffered from poor self-reviewing skills. After all, it’s easier to spot problems in other people’s writing because our own ego (or pride) doesn’t get in the way. Another problem is that sometimes we get so caught up in what we want to get across in our writing that we don’t pay enough attention to how we’re expressing it — a sentence that makes perfect sense to us might be total gibberish to someone else. Thankfully, these are all problems that can be overcome. You can learn to fairly and accurately review your own work. One way you can get better at self-reviewing is to spend time reviewing other people’s work. Eventually, you’ll develop a knack for spotting errors that will serve you well as you edit and revise your own work.

Writers, particularly new writers, often find that letting other writers review their work is tremendously helpful. Most universities have writing centers, where students can have their essays reviewed for free by experienced student writers or tutors. These tutors can work with you one-on-one to help you improve your writing and earn better grades.

You should realize that reviewing your work, like planning, drafting, or revising, is a recursive process. It is not something a writer does just at the end of his work. For instance, you may want to write an introduction to an essay and have it reviewed by a teacher or classmate before trudging forward. If you’re on the wrong track, you’d be better off knowing about it sooner rather than later — especially if a deadline or due date is looming.

In the academic world, journal articles and books are nearly always “peer reviewed” before they are accepted for publication. Sometimes these reviews are “blind,” meaning that neither the writer nor the reviewers know each other’s identities. This process is meant to make the process fair and ensure that every scholar gets a chance to get her work published. Academic reviewers must evaluate a work, recommend that it be published or rejected, and (hopefully) offer the writer substantial advice about how his work can be improved.

In this chapter, we’ll talk about how to develop the skills you’ll need to become a star reviewer. We’ll start by discussing “criteria,” or the standards you’ll stick to when writing reviews. We’ll talk about what to look for in a document and how to provide the very best advice to the writer. Finally, we’ll talk about how to handle criticism from reviewers who evaluate your work.

*“You write to communicate to the hearts and minds of others what’s burning inside you. And we edit to let the fire show through the smoke.”*

— Arthur Plotnik

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## 8.2: Establishing Criteria

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Let's suppose that you just gave your paper to your roommate and asked her to look it over. You explain that you've been working on the paper for three days and that you really want to earn an A. "I want your honest opinion," you say. "Don't worry about hurting my feelings. What do you think?"

You watch your roommate's face as she reads your paper. She grimaces. Laughs. Yawns.

Finally, she hands you the paper back and says, "This sucks."

This may be the type of "review" you are accustomed to receiving — overly critical and not very helpful. Perhaps you agree that your paper is in trouble and needs help, but without a better understanding of what's wrong, you aren't likely to be able to do much about it. Furthermore, how can you trust your roommate's judgment of your paper? What if it just so happens that your roommate is neurotic about starting sentences with "But," and, seeing such sentences in your paper, decided right there that the paper was terrible?

Ultimately, what makes an evaluation worthwhile is the soundness of its criteria. As a writer, you want to know not just whether someone likes your paper, but also what factors they are taking into consideration when they review your paper. Both the reviewer and the person being reviewed need to be as clear as possible about the criteria that will be used to evaluate the work. Are your reviewers only looking at your grammar, or are they also determining the rationality of your arguments? Does a comma splice make a bigger difference than a rough transition between paragraphs?

All of these matters should be spelled out clearly beforehand, either by the writer or the reviewer. As a writer, what are you personally working on? It's not a bad idea to think about your strengths and challenges as a writer before handing over your paper to a reviewer, or to use work that has been returned to you in the past with feedback. For example, if you're writing a paper for a professor you've had before, and who has made comments on your past work, use those comments to provide your reviewer with a focus. If you are the reviewer in this situation, ask to see the assignment and rubric, if possible. You can also ask the writer for specific guidelines, areas of greatest need, or even anything s/he might know about the grader.

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## 8.3: Writing Helpful Comments

*“There are two kinds of editors, those who correct your copy and those who say it’s wonderful.”*

— Theodore H. White

In the example above, you were not able to gain any insights or knowledge from your roommate letting you know that your paper “sucks.” What you wanted was some kind of feedback that would help you improve your paper, so you could get a good grade. You don’t know if your paper “sucks” because it lacked a strong thesis, if it sucks because your writing strayed from the assignment, or if it sucks because of grammatical errors. You can be a better self- and peer-reviewer than your roommate was. Given the previous example, how hard can it be? When you’re reviewing your own paper or the paper of a friend or classmate, ask yourself a few questions:

### 8.3.1 Organization

1. What are your initial thoughts? What strengths and weaknesses does the paper have? What parts confused you, or might be confusing to other readers? What’s the most important thing that the writer is trying to say?
2. How is the paper you’re reviewing organized? Again, does it start with the broad and move to specifics? Do all sentences support the paragraph’s topic sentence, and do all paragraphs support the thesis? Is there an Introduction that draws in the reader, or does it restate the assignment and become redundant? Is the paper organized in a way that will make sense to readers? Does the writer employ transitions effectively? Does the paper flow from beginning to end?

### 8.3.2 Focus

1. Is the paper focused on the assignment? Does it follow the same thought throughout the paper, or does it jump from subject to subject? Do I feel like I’m still learning about/thinking about the same subject at the end of the paper that I was at the beginning of the paper?
2. Try to paraphrase the thesis of the paper as a promise: In this paper, the writer will... Does the writer fulfill his/her obligation stated in the thesis?
3. What’s the writer’s position on the issue? What words does the writer use to indicate his/her position?

### 8.3.3 Style

1. In what style is the paper written? Does it work for the subject matter and assignment? Will the paper appeal to its intended audience? Is the writing at an appropriate level for the target audience?

### 8.3.4 Development

1. Does the title indicate what the paper is about? Does it catch your interest? Does the opening paragraph draw you in? If not, can you suggest a different approach to catch the readers’ attention?
2. How is the development of the paper carried out? Does it start with a broad subject and then move to something more specific?
3. Does the concluding sentence draw the argument of the paper to a close by bringing together the main points provided in the paper, or does it just end? Does the writer conclude in a memorable way, or does he/she simply trail off? If the ending is too abrupt or too vague, can you suggest some other way to conclude the paper? Does the ending introduce any new topics?

### 8.3.5 Conventions

1. Are common or appropriate writing conventions followed? Are grammar, spelling, punctuation and other mechanics observed?

While reviewing the paper, make notes in the margins of any problems you find. If you believe that developing a paragraph a little bit more would be helpful to the argument, write <more>. If you are unclear of something, write <? not sure>. If you notice a missing comma, insert it in the correct spot, but be sure to set it off somehow so that you or your friend will notice the correction. If another word might work better, write <WC> to indicate inappropriate word choice.

Please note: It is important not to overwhelm your writer with comments. As much as possible, try to avoid repeating similar comments (e.g. don’t correct every single comma error you find). Also, although it can be tempting to make some of the changes you suggest yourself, you never want to rewrite the work you are reviewing.

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## 8.4: Responding to Criticism

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*“I am forced to say that I have many fiercer critics than myself.”*

—Irwin Shaw

Nobody likes to be told that what they are doing isn't right. But what separates good writers from other writers is that good writers are able to take criticism, realizing that nobody is perfect, and use the criticism to help them, either with the assignment at hand, or with writing assignments in the future.

If your roommate tells you that your paper *sucks*, you probably want to ask him or her *why* it sucks. If your roommate says that you are continually writing run-on sentences, ask for advice on how to correct them or look in a writing guide to learn how to fix them. By handling criticism constructively, you'll be more aware of your common errors and less likely to repeat them, or at least will know how to find and correct them the next time you write.

### Peer Review

If, while meeting with a tutor, you learn that you need further development of some of your ideas for clarity, revisit your writing and judge for yourself whether or not you do. Ask yourself if you understand since you are the one who did all of the research and *know* what you mean (probably a good indication that the tutor was right), or if you are comfortable that a reader would understand what you are saying without more information. Remember: as the writer, you're in control of your paper. When people offer criticism, they're usually just trying to help you. Try to keep that in mind. Take the suggestions when you think they make sense, and discard the ones that don't.

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## 8.5: Peer Reviews

### 8.5.1 Sample 1

Here is an example of an essay submitted for peer review. The assignment is to write a paper about anything in nature: a plant, an animal, a natural disaster, anything. Practice reviewing with the steps mentioned above. What would you say to the author?

Untitled

In the backyard of my parent's house survives an ambiance of relaxation. An alluring pool has been my oasis that anticipates the hot, yet hardly tormenting summer days (5). As I look on, the pool's surface resembles a trance that sparkles and fades into my squinting eyes. The gleaming blue and white water magnetizes me and nearly forces my body into my bathing suit, tanning lotion in hand. I race for my beach towels, usually the Budweiser one and the other that is striped with green and blue lines. I then carry a reclining chair and head for the poolside, not far from the diving board, where the sun awaits me. With every third or fourth step gracing the searing cement, I must dip my feet in the pool's merciful and cool dampness.

When I arrive to my destination, with the shaded patio still in view, I unfold the towels and lay comfortably on the reclining chair. Beneath the sun and its warm smile, I feel its soft kiss upon my browning skin. I look to my right and see a competitive game of Scrabble in action amongst my family members. Nearby, my dog moseys on over to see if I will give him a gentle pat, knowing all too well that the sun is beckoning. To my left, I gaze upon the intricately planted landscape. A few stubborn, yellow Tulips tend to show themselves from time to time while sitting under a few hanging baskets that support brave pink and purple perennials. Surrounding them are many other bushes and plants hovering over aesthetic night lamps (3).

To my front are the suspicious and rather bitter neighbors just past the determined fence. The day is spent best without catching eyes with them (4). Behind me is the house that has kept watch over me for more than ten years. With its light gray siding and white shudders, it doesn't pose much of a threat but hardly as great of a caress as the yard I lay in. While there are no trees in our backyard, our neighbor's trees lean over the fence gently as if their branches were hands dipping themselves into holy water. Subtly, I glimpse upon a pair of dragonflies making love in midair. I become slightly jealous of their incessant nature. And no sooner is my comfort found that I bounce away from my chair at the sight of bees and their territorial buzz. More often than not, I am unharmed; however, their intimidating presence remains unpleasant in the heat (5). A gentle breeze will bless my begging and perspiring skin, but when it is callous, the pool invites me for a quick dive (3). The surface of the glistening mirage pierces slightly at my skin raising every hair but altogether swathes my entire body. Cast into an oblivion, my hair swells like that of a mermaid's. Although my lips are sealed, the chlorine finds a way to seep into my tongue (2).

As I surge back to the surface, my nose wrinkles blissfully at the scent of the chicken and steak kabobs savored tenderly (5) with orange bell peppers, white onions, and plump, brown mushrooms (1). They cook patiently on the grill (3). Eager for dinner, I paddle myself to the shallow end of the pool and lead myself up the stairs. The steadfast cement is back at my feet. I quickly grab for my towels and head for the patio table that is secured by the rescuing shade. I faintly hear Led Zeppelin singing from the old, makeshift radio. I crack open a mildly cool High Life that has been sitting on the table for some time and let the sour suds have their way. I grab a Marlboro, tuck it between my lips and strike a fast match at it. As the unrefined smoke dances past my fingers, I slowly breathe contently, gazing up at the tranquil sky, fully aware that this place has dependably masked my outside tides (3).

Sample: Backyard Bathing

Sample Comments: Here, the peer reviewer has made matched remarks to specific sentences and passages in the essay and has included a more detailed global comment last.

1. Describe the scent of the location
2. Good descriptions of the essence of the back yard and pool

3. Good use of personification and imagery
4. Include more description of the neighbors
5. Unnecessary descriptive words, particularly adjectives and adverbs
6. You got some weedy adjectives and adverbs going on. EVERYTHING has been gilded and painted up; this is like the prose equivalent of RuPaul<sup>[1]</sup> (the one on the left). Cut as many adjectives and adverbs out as you can. In fact, I hate to say this, but don't "describe the scent of the location" unless the scent of the location is important/remarkable. Do I care that you ate awesome kabobs? I might, if it's important/remarkable in any way, but so far, no. What this looks like to me is, somebody told you to write a descriptive scene, you thought, "how pointless!", so you wrote a descriptive scene with no point. Is there a reason to describe this backyard pool Eden? Did a murder happen there later on? Is that where you first learned an Important Truth About Life? Are you going to get into a fist fight with the neighbors? Is there, in short, anything interesting at all about it?

<sup>[1]</sup> Ru Paul Picture

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## 8.6: Peer Reviews cont.

### 8.5.2 Sample 2

Here is another example of an essay submitted for peer review on the same topic as Peer Review Sample 1. Again, practice reviewing with the steps mentioned above.

#### The Jalapeno: an Ode.

The jalapeno— is it a tasty cooking element, or a national mystery? As a lover of all things spicy, I find myself asking questions about the nation's most elusive pepper: where did it get its name? Where did it originate from? What makes it so spicy? How and where does it grow? And, most importantly, what kinds of food include the jalapeno? These questions are only natural to ask oneself when faced with the utterly fascinating pepper. However, through some difficult research, mental travel to the wild regions of the past, and a little bribery, the answers can and will be found.

But who to ask? If I lived in Texas I would ask Stacey Snow, Ms. Jalapeno 2005. She was crowned Ms. Jalapeno at the 27th annual Jalapeno festival in Laredo Texas. This festival is featured on the travel channel, and is commonly known as the "hottest weekend of the year." This festival has amazingly unique entertainment: the jalapeno egg toss, the blind jalapeno toss, the jalapeno spitting contest, the "some like it hot" cook off, the land raft race, the three-legged sack race, and a good old fashion game of tug-of-war.

The jalapeno is named after Jalapa, capital of Veracruz, Mexico. However, the jalapeno's popularity is not completely foreign. In 1995 New Mexico named the jalapeno the official state pepper, with chili peppers and pinto beans as the state vegetable. The jalapeno is part of the chili pepper family. The family also includes anaheim, cayenne, poblano, and serrano. The jalapeno is not native to Minnesota; in fact, it is not native to the United States. It is thanks to Christopher Columbus that we have the spicy treat. Still today the pepper is a popular favorite, with Texas producing half of the 14 million gallons of jalapenos produced each year in the United States. Jalapeno flavored potato and tortilla chips weigh in at 17 million pounds produced each year.

The spicy bite in jalapenos can send tears down its consumer's face. This burning sensation is no accident; it is due to a chemical called capsaicinoids. There are five varieties, with capsaicin being the hottest and most famous. The capsaicins in jalapenos give them the burning sensation. When the fire in the mouth sensation occurs, the brain releases endorphins into the blood stream. These act as a natural pain reliever.

The jalapeno plant is pod-like, and usually grows from 2 to 3 feet tall. It is single stemmed and grows upright. Though there are literally countless forms of wild peppers, the jalapeno is considered a domestic plant. The pods are cylindrical, which flourish in semi-arid climates with dry air and irrigation. The plant matures between seventy and eighty days generally producing twenty-five to thirty-five pods per plant.

Jalapeno foods come in many shapes, sizes, and flavors. The most recent jalapeno phenomenon to hit the market is jalapeno jelly. Originally from Lake Jackson Texas, jalapeno jelly was first marketed in 1978. This jelly is often lime-green, with a sweet flavor, and the same consistency as normal jelly. It is fitting that this jelly originated from Texas, because the jalapeno is the official Texas state pepper, along with the chiltepin; not so coincidentally, these are the two peppers used in the states official dish: chili. Though there are many types of hot peppers, the jalapeno distinguishes itself in a number of ways. First, the jalapeno is most often green when mature, and is about 2 inches long with cracks in the stem. The hotness is also immediate after a bite. The thing that makes the jalapeno so different from other foods is the cult phenomena surrounding it. Figurines, websites, and even academic papers have been formed on the jalapeno craze.

Most important to the jalapeno are the recipes. Many wild jalapeno recipes do exist, with jalapeno bread, jalapeno sauce, stuffed jalapenos, chicken and cream cheese with jalapenos, coca-cola ham glaze with jalapeno, jalapeno martini, jalapeno hushpuppies, jalapeno soufflé, jalapeno-basil vinaigrette, and tamale pie being just a select few. Dried

jalapenos are known as chipotles, another common ingredient in many dishes. In Texas, people even go so far as to drink jalapeno coffee and jalapeno tea! Yuck!

70It is safe to say that the jalapeno is both a tasty cooking element and a national mystery. Any time a recipe is made, the jalapeno will be there. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but rest assured, someone, somewhere (probably in Texas), will add a jalapeno to it. However, the day the jalopsicle becomes the most popular frozen treat, consider it the day we have gone too far.

Sample Comments: Here, the peer reviewer has organized her/his comments based on the five criteria and has made specific references to sentences and passages where appropriate.

#### ORGANIZATION

1. After the introduction paragraph, there is not much narrowing. The topic broadly seems to be jalapenos. Perhaps the writer could try picking one specific question and sticking to that.
2. The organization needs to be improved. Perhaps repeating the questions would help, or as previously stated, sticking to the development of one specific question.

#### FOCUS

1. The paper seems to fulfill the assignment very well, but it does jump subject somewhat, particularly between paragraphs 3 and 4. I do like the theme of the jalapeño being presented as a national mystery; perhaps that could become the thesis statement.
2. Unfortunately, the thesis of the paper doesn't seem to exist. The questions in the first paragraph gives the reader an idea of where the paper is headed, but there really is no statement explaining what the writer is trying to prove.
3. Does the author have a position? If he/she does it must be that he/she reveres the jalapeno. There doesn't seem to be much controversy in here for the author to support or oppose.

#### STYLE

1. The title is clever, but could be a little more specific. It isn't so much an ode, but more of an investigation. However, it does catch interest.
2. The style and tone are spot on. For the topic, which is not very serious, the laid back humorous style seems to fit in very well.

#### DEVELOPMENT

1. This paper certainly has plenty of personality. The author has a nice balance of humor and information. However, I find myself getting lost in the middle. Perhaps if the author were to repeat a question at the beginning of each paragraph, the reader could be remembered of what the thesis is.
2. The conclusion is funny, but I don't think it really does its job; I find the last sentence especially confusing and unconnected. Perhaps the author could keep what he/she has, but add in some more review of all the information that is covered.

#### CONVENTIONS

1. The conventions seem to be ok. BUT WHERE ARE THE CITATIONS??? The author needs to develop ethos by sharing where her/his information came from regarding jalapenos.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 9: Revising

[9.1: Overview of Revising](#)

[9.2: Differences Between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading](#)

[9.3: A Change for the Better](#)

[9.4: Introductions](#)

[9.5: Position](#)

[9.6: Scope](#)

[9.7: Body Paragraphs](#)

[9.8: Conclusions](#)

[9.9: Analyze Each Part of Your Paper](#)

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## 9.1: Overview of Revising

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*“Rewriting is when writing really gets to be fun. . . In baseball you only get three swings and you’re out. In rewriting, you get almost as many swings as you want and you know, sooner or later, you’ll hit the ball.”*

–Neil Simon

Successful writers understand that revising is an integral part of the writing process. It is so important that most authors spend the majority of their time revising their texts. That revising is a time-consuming and learned skill surprises many beginning writers because they often describe revision as changing particular words in a sentence or scanning a text for misspelled words or grammatical errors. Such changes correspond more appropriately to the term *editing*. To revise, however, is to significantly alter a piece of writing. While editing can be a part of this process, revising generally involves changes that concern bigger issues, such as content and organization. Alternately, while revising, a writer might notice that an idea needs to be developed more thoroughly, another omitted. Or, the writer might decide that rearranging paragraphs will provide clarity and support for his or her argument, strengthening the paper as a whole. Granted, writers will also change grammar and punctuation while revising, but if that is all they are doing then they are really just editing.

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## 9.2: Differences Between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

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It is important to note that revising, editing, and proofreading are very different processes. Despite the differences, however, they often overlap. They are being separated here for ease of explanation. *Revising*

- Revising is done throughout the writing process, with special emphasis on the first few drafts.
- Focus = big issues
- Audience
- Organization
- Content
- Support
- Conclusion

### Editing

- Editing is done throughout the writing process, with special emphasis on the middle and final drafts.
- Focus = technical issues
- Usage
- Word choice
- Transitions
- Mechanics

### Proofreading

- Proofreading is reserved for the final draft.
- Focus = mechanics and presentation
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Format
- Typographical errors
- Textual inconsistencies

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## 9.3: A Change for the Better

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*“I write one page of masterpiece to ninety-one pages of sh\*t. I try to put the sh\*t in the wastebasket.”*

—Ernest Hemingway

Writing is an intellectually challenging, and draining, activity — writing well, that is. Putting ideas on paper is a good start, but revising those ideas so that they are persuasive, cogent, and form a solid argument is the real work of writing. As you review what you have written, you will undoubtedly see holes in your logic, sentences that confuse rather than clarify, and sentences and paragraphs out of place. Below are some helpful hints to consider as you analyze and transform your paper.

- Take a break. Looking at your paper later will help you see it from the point of view of the audience. A good rule of thumb is to wait at least a day before revising. Often, writers look at their prose a day later and recognize significant flaws they would not have noticed had they written their paper in one night.
- Be your own critic. You are obviously your own best critic. When writing, most people do not (and should not) turn in their first drafts. So take advantage of your first, second, and third drafts to write your opinions in the margins. Highlight the things you really like, and circle the things you would like to change.
- Read and re-read your paper. In the first read-through consider the overall purpose of the paper and whether it is expressed clearly. In the second read-through analyze organization, logical development, and correctness. Often, reading your text aloud reveals awkward phrasing, missing information, weak points, and illogical reasoning.

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## 9.4: Introductions

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When you look over the draft of your paper, the first thing you should focus on is your introduction. Whether it is one paragraph or an entire chapter, the purpose of the introduction is to grab your readers' attention and make them want to know more about your subject. Does it? Make sure you draw your readers in from the beginning and follow with relevant and interesting supportive information. If readers aren't intrigued from the very beginning of the piece, they will quickly become distracted or bored and avoid reading any further. Read your introduction to a friend and judge how compelling it is based on his or her reaction.

What is the difference between a good and a bad introduction? A bad introduction is misleading, rambling, incoherent, boring, or so hopelessly vague that you know less about the topic than you did before you read it. On the other hand, a good introduction gets to the point, gives the reader a reason to keep on reading, and sets the stage for a really exciting performance. An introduction is like a first impression; it is crucial to your image and, once presented, you never get a second opportunity. Your essay's introduction is your reader's first impression of your ability as a writer. Even if you are brilliant and have great ideas, a muddy or boring introduction will turn away many of your readers.

Make sure that you don't beat around the bush in your intro. If you have tedious openers such as "in today's society" or openers that merely relay what the assignment is, change it so that it instead states your argument up front and presents a clear thesis right away, then subtly describe your paper's overall structure. Try summarizing every paragraph into one sentence each, then put them all together to see if your introduction covers each point. Your introduction should state the issue at hand, establish your position regarding it, describe your paper's organization, and identify the scope of your coverage. Let's take each of these in turn.

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## 9.5: Position

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Make sure that your reader knows *your* position on the issue. This should be properly expressed in your thesis, but check your entire introduction for “wishy washy” sentences. Unless you’re only writing a summary, your introduction should make it clear how you feel about the issue at stake.

Avoid sentences or “thesis statements” such as the following:

- Abortion is a very controversial issue in America.
- Capital punishment is both good and bad.
- This paper will present the pros and cons of modern copyright law.

Are these examples stating an issue and taking a position, or merely stating what everyone knows already? Again, your reader should already know that the issue you’re writing about is controversial, otherwise there would be little reason to write about it. Unless you’ve been instructed to merely write a report or summary of an issue, assume that your professor wants you to take a position and defend it with the best evidence you can muster.

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## 9.6: Scope

Besides explaining what your paper is about and your argument, an introduction may also state what you will and won't cover. For instance, let's say your paper is about an issue affecting mothers infected with HIV. Your introduction should reflect this focus, rather than present your paper as a general overview of HIV. If your scope isn't clear, then readers will constantly wonder when you'll address the larger topic—or even assume you simply forgot to do it.

Let's say you wanted to write a paper that argued that Ford makes better cars than Chevrolet. However, your introduction didn't mention Chevrolet at all, but instead had the line: "Ford makes better cars than any other car manufacturer." Your reader would quickly begin to wonder why you're not talking about Toyota or Nissan! Try to anticipate what your reader will expect to see covered, and, if necessary, state it explicitly:

- Although my topic is capital punishment, I will focus on one aspect of that larger issue: the execution of convicts who are mentally ill.
- Although we interviewed over two hundred doctors in our study, we will discuss only three of them in detail here.
- In the following essay, I will be discussing only the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and my claims may or may not apply to Whitman's later editions.

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## 9.7: Body Paragraphs

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As you build support for your thesis in the “body” paragraphs, always ask yourself if you are spending your readers’ time wisely. Are you writing unnecessarily complex and confusing sentences, or using 50 words when 5 would do? If a sentence is already plain and direct, there’s no need to fluff it up. Flowery words and phrases obscure your ideas: when writing, being *concise* is key. For example, why write, “Cats have a tendency toward sleeping most of the day” when you could simply write, “Cats usually sleep most of the day”? How about changing “The 12th day of the month of April” to “April 12th?” Try to pick out such sentences and substitute simpler ones.

But wait—don’t you need to inflate your text so you can meet the minimum word count?

Wouldn’t it be better to use “due to the fact that” for “because” and “in addition to” for “and,” since these phrases use far more words? Answer: NO. Any experienced reader will instantly see through such a pitiful scheme and will likely become irritated by the resulting “flabby” prose. If you are having trouble meeting the minimum word count, a far better solution is to add more examples, details, quotations, or perspectives. Go back to the planning and drafting stage and really ask yourself if you’ve written everything useful about a topic.

Other students worry that their sentences don’t sound smart enough. Compare these two sentences:

- Do not ask what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.
- Do not submit a query concerning what assets and benefits your country can bestow upon you and yours, but rather inquire as to what tasks or activities you yourself can perform and carry out that will be useful for the citizens of your own country.

Although the second sentence is longer and harder to grasp, that doesn’t make it more intelligent. In fact, it’s far more impressive to write a complex thought in simple prose than vice versa.

How about your organization? From sentence-to-sentence, paragraph-to-paragraph, the ideas should flow into each other smoothly and without interruptions or delays. If someone tells you that your paper sounds “choppy” or “jumps around,” you probably have a problem with organization and transitions.

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## 9.8: Conclusions

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After all the work you have exerted on your paper, you want to end with a **good conclusion**. The conclusion and the introduction may be similar but may take several forms. Conclusions may be a simple restatement of your thesis to reestablish what the entire paper is about. They may also sum up your main points, reflect on the information presented, ask a thought provoking question, or present a “call to action,” telling your readers what you want them to do with the information you have presented. Often, this choice will be determined by the genre, audience, or purpose of your paper. Nevertheless, your conclusion should accurately reflect the paper’s subject and provide the reader with closure.

Be sure not to end a paper with new ideas or a thesis you have not already dealt with in the paper.

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## 9.9: Analyze Each Part of Your Paper

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Put yourself in the shoes of your reader. Look at your work through their eyes. Keep in mind that, while you may know something about a topic and write about it with supported research, your audience may be new to the topic. Being specific in your writing helps clarify your message to audiences. Do not assume that your audience already knows what you know.

- Cut unnecessary words. Inexperienced writers should be able to cut 20 percent (or more) of their prose. Look hard at each word, each phrase, and each sentence. Does each and every one help you achieve your purpose? Does each sentence in a paragraph relate to the main idea? If you are like most people, you will find unnecessary repetition rampant in your writing. Pruning the verbiage will result in leaner, tighter, and more forceful writing. Remember E.B. White's mantra: "Omit needless words. Omit needless words. Omit needless words."
- Understand that revising your paper should not be the last thing you do — revision should be ongoing throughout the creation of a document.

After doing all this by yourself, seek help from others. First, find an individual who knows about the assignment, your intended audience, and the purpose of the essay. Then, share it with someone who fits the description of the audience for whom the document is intended. Ask your readers if everything is clear and easily understood, if phrases are worded correctly, if the document is logically sound, etc. If you have other specific concerns — Is the second example effective? Does my conclusion resolve the paper nicely? — ask your readers to direct their attention to those issues.

After you have written your paper, return to the beginning to see how the end relates to the beginning. Have you maintained the same tone and main idea throughout? Does the ending reiterate your main idea without just summarizing what you've already said?

It is also oftentimes helpful to have someone read your paper aloud to you. This will force you to go over the material more slowly and allow you another chance to absorb the content of the paper. When you read your own paper aloud you are more apt to read the paper as you intended it to be read, as opposed to reading what is actually on the page.

After going through the steps above and making changes as necessary, you should feel your paper is nearly complete. The content should be in place, and your text should make your case clearly and forcefully. If you feel this is the case, you are ready to closely edit and proofread your text.

*"Books aren't written; they're rewritten. Including your own. It is one of the hardest things to accept, especially after the seventh rewrite hasn't quite done it."*

—Michael Crichton

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## SECTION OVERVIEW

### Part II: Academic Writing and Analysis

#### 10: Reading Analytically

- 10.1: Reading with a Purpose
- 10.2: 10.2-.2 Key Terms
- 10.3: 10.2-.3 Authorial Intent
- 10.4: 10.2-.4 Radical Noticing- Seeing What Is On the Page
- 10.5: 10.2-.5 Symbols, Patterns, and References
- 10.6: 10.2-.6 Sociocultural Lenses
- 10.7: Reading Analytically
- 10.8: 10.3-.1 Key Terms
- 10.9: 10.3-.2 Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images
- 10.10: 10.3-.3 Tracking Your Reactions
- 10.11: 10.3-.4 Writing Your Summary
- 10.12: 10.3-.5 Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes
- 10.13: 10.3-.6 Original Passage
- 10.14: Summary and Response
- 10.15: 10.4-.1 Summary and Response- TV Show or Movie
- 10.16: 10.4-.2 Digital Media Summary
- 10.17: 10.4-.3 An Analysis of Texts
- 10.18: 10.4-.4 Sample 1
- 10.19: Reading Activities

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 10: Reading Analytically

- 10.1: Reading with a Purpose
- 10.2: 10.2-.2 Key Terms
- 10.3: 10.2-.3 Authorial Intent
- 10.4: 10.2-.4 Radical Noticing- Seeing What Is On the Page
- 10.5: 10.2-.5 Symbols, Patterns, and References
- 10.6: 10.2-.6 Sociocultural Lenses
- 10.7: Reading Analytically
- 10.8: 10.3-.1 Key Terms
- 10.9: 10.3-.2 Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images
- 10.10: 10.3-.3 Tracking Your Reactions
- 10.11: 10.3-.4 Writing Your Summary
- 10.12: 10.3-.5 Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes
- 10.13: 10.3-.6 Original Passage
- 10.14: Summary and Response
- 10.15: 10.4-.1 Summary and Response- TV Show or Movie
- 10.16: 10.4-.2 Digital Media Summary
- 10.17: 10.4-.3 An Analysis of Texts
- 10.18: 10.4-.4 Sample 1
- 10.19: Reading Activities

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## 10.1: Reading with a Purpose

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When audiences see the film *Citizen Kane* today, many view it as long, just barely polychromatic, and possessing so many of the hallmarks of modern film. Many viewers are often forced to watch it in a film class or with an overzealous film student. If nothing else, it is an excellent film to sleep through. But, there is this nagging question that keeps so viewers watching; what is the importance of Rosebud? It was, after all, just a sled given to the main character as a child.

*Citizen Kane*, like any other film, is a text. Rosebud, in turn, is a symbol, and we only know it is significant because Charles Foster Kane, the main character, calls out for it as he dies. The search for the sled's meaning takes an epic turn as a reporter explores Kane's life searching for the answer. Debates often erupt over the symbolic meaning of Rosebud. Is it symbolic of Kane's lost childhood? A joyless adulthood? The emptiness of a life of ambition? The sadness or self-hatred that drove Kane away from relationships and toward his wealth and power? The answers to such simple questions are many.

To truly understand *Citizen Kane* and thus better answer questions about it, one may want to learn more about it. A curious student might start with the Orson Welles the eccentric directorial genius who was a mere 25 years old when Howard Hughes' RKO pictures signed him to a five movie contract. One might also explore what many believe was screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz's decision to base the character of Charles Foster Kane on the powerful newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst. Hearst set out to destroy Mankiewicz's career after the film was released. Stories swirled around the production of the film as well. RKO executives were rightfully concerned about Welles. He had expensive taste, a unique eye, and no experience directing films. When executives would visit the studio, Welles would tell stories and juggle to distract them from what he was actually filming. How might these facts impact the final product that become the most critically hailed film in American history? The discussion quickly becomes one that exposes facts and ideas, critically examines the film, and evaluates the film based on its shortcomings and attributes.

If you watch the film, you might find yourself debating the merits of Welles' cinematography. Others may point out the female characters lack strength and autonomy which points toward sexism among the writers. Still others might argue the film is an argument against the corruptive elements of capitalism in an age of growing communist sympathy particularly in Hollywood. In short, consuming the film's rhetoric provides the opportunity to create a discussion based upon it. This discussion finds permanence in the form of an essay.

An **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 **experience** – 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 **bias** – 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.

Your **perspective** – Related to your purpose, lens refers to the way you focus your attention on particular ideas, images, and language used to convey the author's own perspective

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## 10.2: 10.2-.2 Key Terms

1. **Authorial intent** is the inferred or speculated intention and the bias of a writer. It must be considered in the process of text wrestling analysis.
2. **Analysis** is the cognitive process and/or rhetorical mode of studying constituent parts to demonstrate an interpretation of a larger whole.
3. **Connotation** is the associated meanings of a word, phrase, or idea beyond its 'dictionary' definition; the complex, subjective, and dynamic meanings of a word, phrase, or idea the shift based on interpretive position. Contrast with denotation.
4. **Denotation** is the dictionary definition of a word, phrase, or idea; the standard and objective meaning of a word, phrase, or idea which, theoretically, does not vary based on interpretive position. Contrast with connotation.
5. **Critical reading** is a technique of reading that focuses attention on features of the text to construct an interpretation. (This is in contrast to interpretive methods that rely on research, historical context, biography, or speculation.
6. **Interpretation** is the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. "An interpretation" refers to a specific meaning we build as we encounter a text, focusing on certain ideas, language, or
7. A **motif** is a recurring image or phrase that helps convey a theme. Similar to a symbol, but the relationship between the symbol and the symbolized is more one-to-one than between motif and theme.
8. **Pattern** is a notable sequence; structure or shape; recurring image, word, or phrase found in a piece of rhetoric.
9. **Reference** is a connection a text makes to another text. Can be explicit or implicit; might include allusion, allegory, quotation, or parody. Referencing text adopts some characteristics of the referenced text.
10. A **symbol** is an artifact (usually something concrete) that stands in for (represents) something else (often something abstract).

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## 10.3: 10.2-.3 Authorial Intent

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### Something to think about

In a groundbreaking 1967 essay, Roland Barthes declared that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”<sup>3</sup> In the fifty years since its publication, “The Death of the Author” has greatly influenced the way students, teachers, and academics conduct analysis. Most critics have come to acknowledge that the personal and historical context of the author is entirely irrelevant, as Barthes might seem to suggest we must free ourselves from the trap authorial intent. This is to say, what we have to work with is the text itself, so it doesn’t matter what the author wanted to say, but instead what they did say. Therefore, we should work from the assumption that every choice the author made was deliberate. As a result, their words may provide insight into their beliefs, frustrations, background on the subject, and their education on the subject. These elements are essentially and entirely important reading their word and reaching an understanding of what the author stood to gain or lose in publishing their work.

Moreover, this choice to avoid speculation about the author’s intent or personality is consistent with the theories of textual analysis explored in this chapter’s introduction. Because meaning is always and only constructed through interpretation, we should let go of the idea that the author (or the “secret meanings” the author wrote into a text) is hidden somewhere beneath the surface. There is nothing “hidden” behind the text or in between the lines: there is only the text and those who interpret it.

This idea might seem to contradict one of the central frameworks of this textbook: that unpacking the rhetorical situation is crucial to critically consuming and producing rhetoric. Overlooking authorial intent does not mean that the author’s rhetorical situation is no longer important. Instead, we should simply avoid unproductive speculation: we can consider the author’s occasion, but we shouldn’t try to guess about their motives. For instance, one might argue that Kate Chopin wrote *The Awakening* because she herself toiled through the mundane society life of New Orleans at the turn of the century and she intended to “pull the curtain” on the oppressive life she led. However, in biographical and historical research, there is no evidence that this was the case. So, what was her intent? That is unknown. What is known is that she chose her subject matter carefully, wrote compelling characters, and provided themes that reflected a unique worldview just like any other excellent writer. Moreover, how can we entirely know what her intent was without discussing the novel with her?

The choice to focus on what the author actually wrote, assuming that each word is intentionally chosen, is *part* of the rhetorical situation of analysis. Your audience might also be curious about the author’s intent, but your rhetorical purpose in this situation is to demonstrate an interpretation of the *text* rather than the author.

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## 10.4: 10.2-.4 Radical Noticing- Seeing What Is On the Page

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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 skill but a problematic one.

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*.

**Projection** is efficient—one e-mail 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.

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 a *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, 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.

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## 10.5: 10.2-.5 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:



- 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 waving American flag; the blue curve represents a clear, blue sky (implying safety or wellbeing); 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.
- In *Beowulf*, the Old English epic poem, the monster Grendel symbolizes a fear of the unknown and the intractability of nature.
- In *The Great Gatsby*, the green light at the end of the Buchanans’ dock symbolizes nostalgia and hope.

\* A **motif** is closely related to a symbol, but it is different. A motif is a recurring image, word, or phrase that helps to carry a theme or other abstract idea. For example, William Faulkner’s short story “A Rose for Emily” includes frequent use of the word “dust.” While the dust is not necessarily symbolic of anything, it certainly brings to mind a variety of **connotations**: reading “dust” makes you think of time passing, stagnancy, decay, and so on. Therefore, the motif of “dust” helps contribute to bigger characteristics, like tone and themes.



**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 families through a series of flashbacks, the episode establishes a pattern in chronology: although the families have unique stories, the pattern highlights the similarities of 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.
- Tyehimba Jess, author of *Olio* and *Leadbelly*, painstakingly crafts patterns in his poetry. For instance, his series of sonnets on Millie and Christine McKoy follows not only the conventions of traditional sonnets, but are also interlocking, exemplifying the distinct but overlapping voices of conjoined twins.

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

- C.S. Lewis’ 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.

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## 10.6: 10.2-.6 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. (The Purdue OWL provides some free resources here to introduce students to some of these schools of criticism.)

*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 non-binary or genderqueer characters
2. **Relationships and family:** What sorts of relationships—familial, friendly, romantic, etc.—are portrayed in the text? How do these relationships compare to the relationships of the dominant culture? How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed in parent-child, sibling, romantic, and other relationships in the essay?
3. **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?
4. **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?
5. **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?
6. **Ecologies and the environment:** Does the setting of the text represent a ‘natural’ world? How does the text represent nature, ecosystems, non-human 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?

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, book you read, or other text you’ve encountered; by asking the italicized questions above, determine whether that text seems to be asking for a certain sociocultural perspective.

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## 10.7: Reading Analytically

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### 10.2.1 Analysis

On a basic level, **analysis** refers to the conceptual strategy of “part-to-whole.” Because I grew up playing with LEGOs® (or, more often, the cheap knock-offs), I like to use this analogy: Imagine a castle built of 1000 LEGO bricks. I can look at the entire structure and say, “Oh, that’s a castle”—this is a reasonable interpretation. But to understand how that castle has actually come together, I pull a few of the LEGO bricks from various parts of the structure. I look at those bricks individually, closely examining each side (even the sides that I couldn’t see when they were part of the castle).

When I say, “This is a castle,” I am not analyzing. But next, perhaps I ask myself, “What is each of these blocks *doing* to create what I can clearly interpret as a castle?” This is the process of analysis.



Which bricks to choose, though? As we discussed in Chapter One, attention is always selective: we automate most of our daily experience for the sake of efficiency and survival, so we often overlook the trees when we see the forest—or each LEGO brick when we see the castle.

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 conscientious focus of your attention, or a perspective. Just like reading glasses can bring these words into focus, an analytical perspective 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 critical reading. Importantly, critical reading as a technique is not a magical key to meaning nor a super-secret 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 a repetitive 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 vs. 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.

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## 10.8: 10.3-.1 Key Terms

1. A **Direct quote** is the verbatim use of another author's words. Can be used as evidence to support your claim, or as language to analyze/close-read to demonstrate an interpretation or insight.
2. A **Paraphrase** occurs when the author reiterates a main idea, argument, or detail of a text in their own words without drastically altering the length of the passage(s) they paraphrase. Contrast with summary.
3. **Response** is a mode of writing that values the reader's experience of and reactions to a text.
4. **Summary** is a rhetorical mode in which an author reiterates the main ideas, arguments, and details of a text in their own words, condensing a longer text into a smaller version. Contrast with paraphrase.

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## 10.9: 10.3-.2 Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images

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If you ever watch TV shows with a serial plot, you might be familiar with the phrase “Previously, on .” The snippets at the beginning of an episode are designed to remind the viewer of the important parts of previous episodes—but how do makers of the show determine what a viewer needs to be refreshed on? And why am I watching full episodes if they’ll just tell me what I need to know in the first minute of the next episode?

Typically, the makers of the show choose short, punchy bits that will be relevant in the new episode’s narrative arc. For instance, a “Previously, on The Walking Dead” might have a clip from ten episodes ago showing zombies invading Hershel’s farm if the new episode focuses on Hershel and his family. Therefore, these “previously ons” hook the viewer by showcasing only exciting parts and prime the viewer for a new story by planting specific details in their mind. Summaries like this are driven by purpose, and consequently have a specific job to do in choosing main points.

You, too, should consider your rhetorical purpose when you begin writing summary. Whether you are writing a summary essay or using summary as a tool for analysis, your choices about what to summarize and how to summarize it should be determined by what you’re trying to accomplish with your writing.

As you engage with a text you plan to summarize, you should begin by identifying main points, recurring images, or concerns and preoccupations of the text. (You may find the Engaged Reading Strategies appendix of this book useful.) After reading and rereading, what ideas stick with you? What does the author seem distracted by? What keeps cropping up?

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## 10.10: 10.3-.3 Tracking Your Reactions

As you read and reread a text, you should take regular breaks to check in with yourself to track your reactions. Are you feeling sympathetic toward the speaker, narrator, or author? To the other characters? What other events, ideas, or contexts are you reminded of as you read? Do you understand and agree with the speaker, narrator, or author? What is your emotional state? At what points do you feel confused or uncertain, and why?

Try out the double-column note-taking method. As illustrated below, divide a piece of paper into two columns; on the left, make a heading for “Notes and Quotes,” and on the right, “Questions and Reactions.” As you move through a text, jot down important ideas and words from the text on the left, and record your intellectual and emotional reactions on the right. Be sure to ask prodding questions of the text along the way, too.

| Notes and Quotes | Questions and Reactions |
|------------------|-------------------------|
|                  |                         |

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## 10.11: 10.3-.4 Writing Your Summary

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Once you have read and re-read your text at least once, taking notes and reflecting along the way, you are ready to start writing a summary. Before starting, consider your rhetorical situation: What are you trying to accomplish (purpose) with your summary? What details and ideas (subject) are important for your reader (audience) to know? Should you assume that they have also read the text you're summarizing? I'm thinking back here to the "Previously on..." idea: TV series don't include everything from a prior episode; they focus instead on moments that set up the events of their next episode. You too should choose your content in accordance with your rhetorical situation.

I encourage you to start off by articulating the "key" idea or ideas from the text in one or two sentences. Focus on clarity of language: start with simple word choice, a single idea, and a straightforward perspective so that you establish a solid foundation.

The authors support feminist theories and practices that are critical of racism and other oppressions.

Then, before that sentence, write one or two more sentences that introduce the title of the text, its authors, and its main concerns or interventions. Revise your key idea sentence as necessary.

In "Why Our Feminism Must Be Intersectional (And Ways to Practice It)," Jarune Uwuajaren and Jamie Utt critique what is known as 'white feminism.' They explain that sexism is wrapped up in racism, Islamophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, and other systems of oppression. The authors support feminist theories and practices that recognize intersectionality.

Your next steps will depend largely on the reasons you are summarizing. Has your teacher asked you to summarize objectively, reproducing the ideas of the text without adding your own ideas or reactions? Have they asked you to critique the article, by both showing understanding and then pushing back against the text? Follow the parameters of your assignment; they are an important element of your rhetorical situation.

In most summary assignments, though, you will be expected to draw directly from the article itself by using direct quotes or paraphrases in addition to your own summary.

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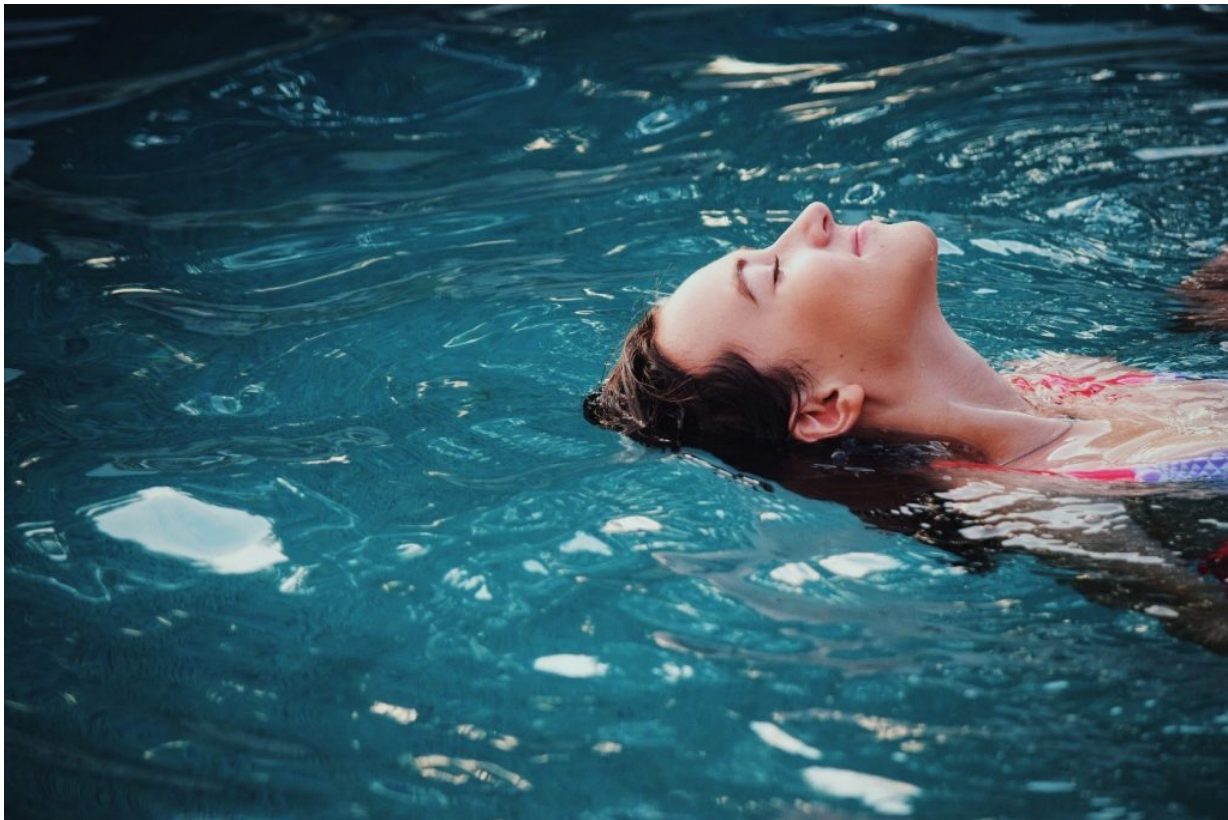
## 10.12: 10.3-.5 Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes

Whether you're writing a summary or broaching your analysis, using support from the text will help you clarify ideas, demonstrate your understanding, or further your argument, among other things. Three distinct methods, which Bruce Ballenger refers to as “The Notetaker’s Triad,” will allow you to process and reuse information from your focus text.<sup>13</sup>

A **direct quote** might be most familiar to you: using quotation marks (“ ”) to indicate the moments that you’re borrowing, you reproduce 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. In a text wrestling essay, you will be expected to use multiple direct quotes: in order to attend to specific language, you will need to reproduce segments of that language in your analysis.

**Paraphrasing** is similar to the process of summary. When we paraphrase, we process information or ideas from another person’s text and put it 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.

Summary, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is useful for “broadstrokes” or quick overviews, brief references, and providing plot or character background. When you summarize, you reword and condense another author’s writing. Be aware, though, that summary also requires individual thought: when you reword, it should be a result of you processing the idea yourself, and when you condense, you must think critically about which parts of the text are most important. As you can see in the example that follows one summary shows understanding and puts the original into the author’s own words; the other summary is a result of a passive rewording, where the author only substituted synonyms for the original.

“On Facebook, what you click on, what you share with your ‘friends’ shapes your profile, preferences, affinities, political opinions and your vision of the world. The last thing Facebook wants is to contradict you in any way” (Filloux).<sup>14</sup>

On Facebook, the things you click on and share forms your profile, likings, sympathies, governmental ideas and your image of society. Facebook doesn’t want to contradict you at all (Filloux).

When you interact with Facebook, you teach the algorithms about yourself. Those algorithms want to mirror back your beliefs (Filloux).

Each of these three tactics should support your summary or analysis: 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, the paraphrase, and the summary each could be used to achieve different purposes.

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## 10.13: 10.3-.6 Original Passage

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.<sup>15</sup>

See the following page for the paraphrased, directly quotes and summary versions of this passage.

### 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” (Ibid. 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.

The examples above also demonstrate additional citation conventions worth noting:

- A parenthetical in-text citation is used for all three forms. (In MLA format, this citation includes the author’s last name and page number.) The purpose of an in-text citation is to identify key information that guides your reader to your Works Cited page (or Bibliography or References, depending on your format).
- If you use the author’s name in the sentence, you do not need to include their name in the parenthetical citation.
- If your material doesn’t come from a specific page or page range, but rather from the entire text, you do not need to include a page number in the parenthetical citation.
- If there are many authors (generally more than three), you can use “et al.” to mean “and others.”
- If you cite the same source consecutively in the same paragraph (without citing any other sources in between), you can use “Ibid.” to mean “same as the last one.”

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## 10.14: Summary and Response

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As you sharpen your analytical skills, you might realize that you should use evidence from the text to back up the points you make. You might use direct quotes as support, but you can also consider using summary.

A **summary** is a condensed version of a text, put into your own words. Summarizing is a useful part of the analytical process because it requires you to read the text, interpret and process it, and reproduce the important points using your own language. By doing so, you are (consciously or unconsciously) making choices about what matters, what words and phrases mean, and how to articulate their meaning.

Often (but not always), **response** refers to a description of a reader's experience and reactions as they encounter a text. Response papers track how you feel and what you think as you move through a text. More importantly, responses also challenge you to evaluate exactly *how* a text acts upon you—to make you feel or think a certain way—using language or images. While a response is not an analysis, it will help you generate ideas for the analytical process.

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## 10.15: 10.4-.1 Summary and Response- TV Show or Movie

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Practice summary and response using a movie or an episode of a television show. (Although it can be more difficult with a show or movie you already know and like, you can apply these skills to both familiar and unfamiliar texts.)

1. Watch it once all the way through, taking notes using the double-column structure above.
  2. Watch it once more, pausing and rewinding as necessary, adding additional notes.
  3. Write one or two paragraphs summarizing the episode or movie as objectively as possible. Try to include the major plot points, characters, and conflicts.
  4. Write a paragraph that transitions from summary to response: what were your reactions to the episode or movie? What do you think produced those reactions? What seems troubling or problematic? What elements of form and language were striking? How does the episode or movie relate to your lived experiences?
- 

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## 10.16: 10.4-.2 Digital Media Summary

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For this exercise, you will study a social media feed of your choice. You can use your own or someone else's Facebook feed, Twitter feed or Instagram feed. Because these feeds are tailored to their respective user's interests, they are all unique and represent something about the user.

After closely reviewing at least ten posts, respond to the following questions in a brief essay:

- What is the primary media etc.)?
- What recurring ideas, themes, topics, or preoccupations do you see in this collection? Provide examples.
- Do you see posts that deviate from these common themes?
- What do the recurring topics in the feed indicate about its user? Why?
- Bonus: What ads do you see popping up? How do you think these have been geared toward the user?

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## 10.17: 10.4-.3 An Analysis of Texts

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" explores a new mother's descent into post-partum depression. It was a frank, honest look into the struggles of mental illness in a time when post-partum depression was poorly understood even by a respected doctor which the woman's husband happens to be.

The story provides readers a glimpse into a poorly understood struggle, and it is told in part because the author believes the lack of understanding of post-partum depression is dangerous for women. In this assignment, you will learn more about that experience and, depending on your instructor, may choose to write an essay about the subject matter. In either respect, reading leads to better writing, and by simply reading and responding to the questions below, you will be much more prepared to write should you need to do so.

So, complete the following for this exercise:

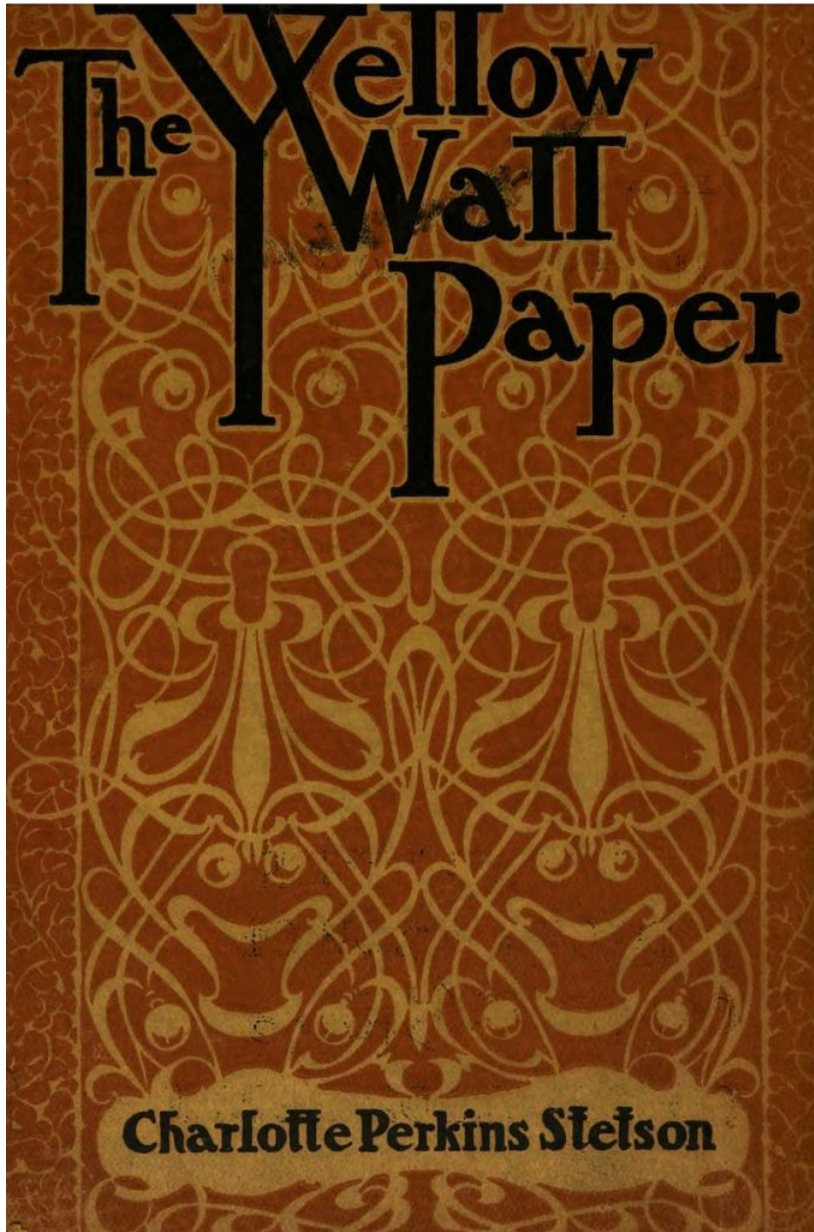
1. Read "The Yellow Wallpaper"
2. Read "Why I Wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper""
3. Research "Symptoms of post-partum depression" using a simple Google search. Look for .gov and .org websites to assure some level of reliability.
4. In a journal entry, address the following questions:
  1. What symptoms of post-partum depression does the narrator present based on your research on the subject?
  2. What was Gilman's purpose in writing "*The Yellow Wallpaper*?"
  3. Analysis and exposition in an essay are never complete until the writer presents an action. What actions should result given what you have learned about post-partum depression? Who institutions, attitudes, or policies should change as a result of this knowledge? What might you change in your life in terms of understanding this condition?



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## 10.18: 10.4-.4 Sample 1

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## 10.19: Reading Activities

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## SECTION OVERVIEW

### Part III: Techniques of Description and Narration

#### 11: From Reading to Writing

- 11.1: The Case for Critical Writers
- 11.2: Sample 2
- 11.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913)
- 11.4: Rhetorical Situations
- 11.5: Writing as a Process
- 11.6: Chapter Vocabulary
- 11.7: The Yellow Wallpaper

#### 12: From Reading to Writing

- 12.1: 11 From Reading to Writing
- 12.2: 12.3-.1 Introduction
- 12.3: 12.3-.2 Body
- 12.4: 12.3-.3 Conclusion
- 12.5: 12.5-.1 Sample 1
- 12.6: 12.5-.2 Sample 2
- 12.7: 12.5-.3 Sample 3
- 12.8: Chapter 11 Endnotes
- 12.9: Structure of an Analytical

#### 13: What is Exposition in Writing

- 13.1: Types of Exposition
- 13.2: Find a Topic, Read, Discuss, and Research
- 13.3: Structure of an Analytical or Expository Essay
- 13.4: Sample Exposition Assignments
- 13.5: Sample Papers
- 13.6: Analytical Essay Checklist Exercise

#### 14: What is Evaluative Writing

- 14.1: Establishing Evaluative Criteria
- 14.2: How to Evaluate
- 14.3: Structure of the Evaluative Essay
- 14.4: Sample Assignments

#### 15: A Brief Guide to the Art of Persuasion and Argument

- 15.1: Basic Argument Essay Structure
- 15.2: Strengthening Your Argument
- 15.3: Sample Essay

## 16: How to use this Book—Pedagogical Background for Students and Teachers

- 16.1: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities
- 16.2: Rhetorical Situations
- 16.3: Assignments and Activities
- 16.4: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities
- 16.5: Rhetorical Situations Applications
- 16.6: Writing as Process
- 16.7: Introductory
  - 16.7.1: Introductory
    - 16.7.1.1: Introductory
      - 16.7.1.1.01: Introductory
- 16.7.1.1.1: Introductory/Pedagogical Vocabulary

## 17: Introduction- Description, Narration, and Reflection

- 17.1: Description and Narration Vocabulary
- 17.2: Techniques
- 17.3: Descriptive Section Vocabulary
- 17.4: Imagery and Experiential Language

## 18: Activities

- 18.1: Specificity Taxonomy
- 18.2: Micro-Ethnography
- 18.3: Imagery Inventory
- 18.4: The Dwayne Johnson Activity
- 18.5: Surprising Yourself- Constraint-Based Scene Description
- 18.6: Image Builder

## 19: Model Texts by Student Authors

- 19.1: Sample 1
- 19.2: Sample 2

## 20: Telling a Story

- 20.1: Vocabulary and ideas to consider as you write narratives.
- 20.2: Telling a Story

## 21: Story Activities

- 21.1: Idea Generation- What Stories Can I Tell?
- 21.2: Idea Generation- Mapping an Autobiography
- 21.3: Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue

## 22: Model Texts by Student Authors

- 22.1: Sample 1
- 22.2: Sample 2
- 22.3: Sample 3

## 23: Reflecting on an Experience

23.1: Reflective Vocabulary

23.2: Techniques

23.3: Reflective Activities

23.4: 22.4-.1 Sample 1

23.5: 22.4-.2 Sample 2

23.6: 22.4-.3 Sample 3

23.7: Assignment

23.8: One Example of a Peer Workshop Process

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 11: From Reading to Writing

11.1: The Case for Critical Writers

11.2: Sample 2

11.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913)

11.4: Rhetorical Situations

11.5: Writing as a Process

11.6: Chapter Vocabulary

11.7: The Yellow Wallpaper

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## 11.1: The Case for Critical Writers

### From Abrams:

In a 2012 article published by *The Washington Post*'s "Answer Sheet" section, curated by Valerie Strauss, John G. Maguire decries the failure of college writing students and their instructors. The article, "Why So Many College Students Are Lousy at Writing—And How Mr. Miyagi Can Help," explains that many students "enter college as lousy writers—and ... graduate without seeming to make much, if any, improvement."<sup>1</sup> The problem? College writing classes don't teach good writing. The article scorns those writing courses which cover "rhetorical strategies, research, awareness of audience, youth civic activism—everything except the production of clear sentences."<sup>2</sup>

Maguire's article advocates for a return to old-school instructional methods—specifically, teaching style and mechanics so that college grads can produce clear, readable sentences. Maguire concludes with a reference to a 1984 film, *The Karate Kid*. (If you haven't seen it, the film is an underdog story about an outcast teenager learning martial arts from a caring but mysterious karate master, Mr. Miyagi.) Maguire asserts, "I'm a teacher, and I know what Mr. Miyagi did—he tricked the kid into learning. He got him to do important behaviors first, and didn't reveal where they fit into the overall skill until later." He continues,

[Colleges] should offer new writing courses that assume *students know nothing* about sentences and train new sentence behaviors from the ground up. Be repetitive and tricky—*fool the kids* into doing the right thing. Create muscle memory. Think "wax on, wax off." The kid's goal was to win the karate contest. The student writer's goal should be *mastery of the readable style*.<sup>3</sup>

So, according to Maguire, more teachers should "trick" students into learning grammar and style, only to reveal to the students at some faraway time that they knew how to write all along.

In case you can't already tell, I am very resistant to this article. I introduce it not because I have an axe to grind, but rather because I find it demonstrates essential misconceptions about writing that many people share. I have taken to teaching this text on the first day of class to show my students what they're up against: teachers, readers, parents, *The Washington Post* reporters, and many, many others who assume that (a) there is one "correct" kind of writing, and (b) today's students have no idea how to execute it.

I refer to the perspective in the Strauss and Maguire text as **the complaint tradition**, and it's probably something you've encountered plenty of times. With every generation, some older folks can't wrap their minds around how terrible the following generation is. *Those kids can't write, they spend too much time on their phones, back in my day we used to play outside and movies only cost a nickel*. It's easy to write Maguire off right away here, but let's unpack a couple of key quotes to better understand what we're working against.

"[Colleges] should offer new writing courses that assume *students know nothing* about sentences and train new sentence behaviors from the ground up. Be repetitive and tricky—*fool the kids* into doing the right thing."<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the fact that such an assumption is simply rude, it also overlooks the fact that students actually already know a lot about using rhetoric—they do so on a daily basis, just not necessarily in the same register, style, or medium that Maguire wants.

Designing a course and basing a teaching style on the assumption that "students know nothing" would be a toxic and oppressive practice. As a student, you have dedicated yourself to learning, meaning you acknowledge that you don't know everything. But this is a far cry from "knowing nothing," and what you do know is not inherently less valuable than what Maguire knows.

Furthermore, I do not believe in "repetitive and tricky" teaching that pretends to know what's best for students. Don't get me wrong, I love *The Karate Kid*, but teaching grounded in deceit reinforces the toxic power dynamic mentioned above. It assumes that teachers know best, and that their students deserve no power in their learning environment. Teachers are not "better than" or "above" students: we have had certain experiences that position us to offer help, but that doesn't give us license to lie to you.

Most importantly, though, I believe that pedagogy should aim to be transparent. In order for you to claim the knowledge and skills you gain in a learning community, you need to see how you're building it, be invested in why you're doing certain work, and respond to feedback on your thinking and writing processes.

So Maguire and I have our differences on teaching philosophy; we disagree on the nature of the teacher-student relationship. If it ended there, we might 'agree to disagree.' But Maguire also drastically misunderstands the characteristics of *good writing*.

“The student writer’s goal should be mastery of the readable style.”<sup>6</sup>

Not unrelated to his beliefs on teaching and learning, Maguire’s belief in a monolithic goal of “readable style” is loaded with problematic assumptions about:

1. what the student writer’s goals are, academically, personally, and professionally,
  2. whether “mastery” is a reasonable goal for a foundational college course, and
  3. what “readable” style is.
- Your learning community—you and the people around you—have drastically different futures ahead of you, both in school and beyond. To assume that you all want the same thing out of your writing class is myopic.
  - You will learn plenty about writing in this book or in your class. But let’s be realistic: even professional writers rarely consider themselves masters. Writing, like any art or skill, requires ongoing, lifelong practice and refinement. You will not be a master after 10, 14, or even 28 weeks—but you can always grow and improve.

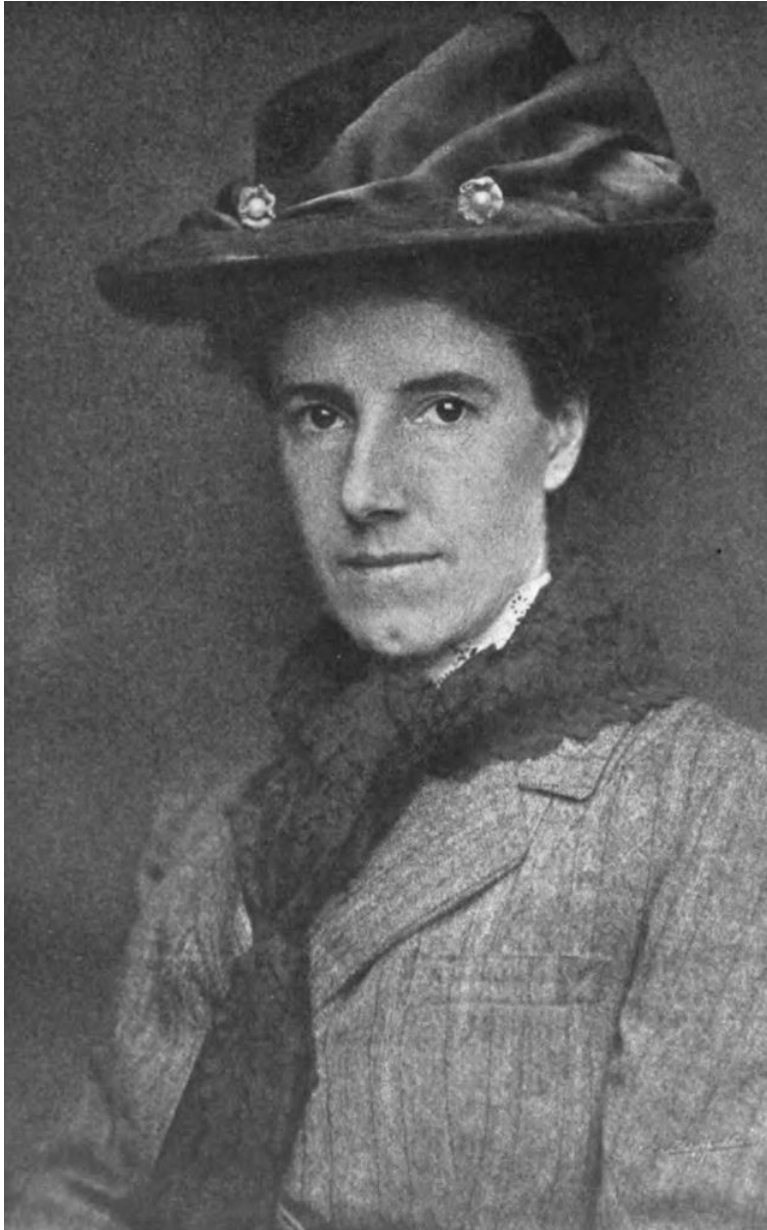
What counts as “clarity” or “quality writing” is *never* static: it is always shifting as you enter new **rhetorical situations**. In short, “good writing” depends on who’s reading, who’s writing, why they’re writing, when and where they’re writing, and what they’re writing about. “Good writing” has different meanings among different people in different places and different times.<sup>7</sup>

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## 11.2: Sample 2

Now read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's brief explanation of why she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"



Charlotte Perkins Gilman circa 1904

This brief letter was meant to address the many inquiries that Gilman received about her story "The Yellow Wallpaper." This letter is meant to explain that although she added little "embellishments and additions", it remains a fully viable account of a woman who fell into madness because of unsound medical advice. Within, she details her nervous breakdowns. She also provides details of the lifestyle she was told to lead in order to keep her nerves at bay: she was given advice to "live as domestic a life as far as possible," to 'have but two hours' intellectual life a day,' and 'never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again' as long as I lived." Of course, this didn't work. Just as "The Yellow Wallpaper" is helpful in providing an in depth look at someone experiencing such a treatment, Gilman's letter is useful in that it was written in a place where she had fully recovered due to not taking her physician's advice. She also notes that a different a physician read her book, and since had ceased prescribing "rest cures."

"Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" 1913. Archived at *The College of Staten Island*, City University of New York, 8 June 1999, [csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/f...der/whyyw.html](https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/f...der/whyyw.html).

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## 11.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913)

### The American Yawp Reader

Charlotte Perkins Gilman won much attention in 1892 for publishing “*The Yellow Wallpaper*,” a semi-autobiographical short story dealing with mental health and contemporary social expectations for women. In the following piece, Gilman reflected on writing and publishing the piece.

Many and many a reader has asked that. When the story first came out, in the *New England Magazine* about 1891, a Boston physician made protest in *The Transcript*. Such a story ought not to be written, he said; it was enough to drive anyone mad to read it.

Another physician, in Kansas I think, wrote to say that it was the best description of incipient insanity he had ever seen, and—begging my pardon—had I been there?

Now the story of the story is this:

For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia—and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still-good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to “live as domestic a life as far as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,” and “never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again” as long as I lived. This was in 1887.

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over.

Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the winds and went to work again—work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite—ultimately recovering some measure of power.

Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*, with its embellishments and additions, to carry out the ideal (I never had hallucinations or objections to my mural decorations) and sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad. He never acknowledged it.

The little book is valued by alienists and as a good specimen of one kind of literature. It has, to my knowledge, saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered.

But the best result is this. Many years later I was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.

Source: *The Forerunner* (October, 1913).

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## 11.4: Rhetorical Situations

Throughout this text, you will be challenged to respond to different rhetorical situations through the act of writing. In other words, you will try to learn more about what “good writing” says and does in different contexts: What makes for a good story? An insightful analysis? A convincing argument? Why does it matter that we write where and when we do? What do different readers want out of a piece of writing?

By exploring and writing within different situations, you will learn skills for specific rhetorical modes, sharpen your critical literacy, and—most importantly—learn to adapt to a variety of writing circumstances that you will encounter both in and out of school. In other words, practice in different rhetorical situations will make you a more critical consumer and producer of rhetoric.

But let’s back up a second. What’s rhetoric?

(These next paragraphs and tables are based on: Empoword: A Student-centered Anthology & Handbook for College Writers by Shane Abrams is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Other sections of this text also refer to this source.)

You may have heard of a rhetorical question before—a question that someone asks you without expecting an answer. What’s the point of asking a question with no answer? To somehow impact the person who hears it, maybe by making them think about an issue in a different way.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, rhetoric is “The art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, esp. the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end.”<sup>8</sup>

| Rhetorical Example                                 | Rhetorical Product                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| An essay on capital punishment <b>tries</b>        | <b>Convince</b> a reader to form a particular opinion on the issue.            |
| A t-shirt with a Boston Sox logo <b>tries</b>      | <b>To rally</b> team spirit and sell t-shirts.                                 |
| Levi’s advertisement in a magazine <b>tries</b>    | <b>To sell</b> you Levi’s and <b>build</b> a brand image.                      |
| Website for Lansing Community College <b>tries</b> | <b>To provide marketing</b> , resources students, faculty, and staff.          |
| A romantic comedy <b>tries</b>                     | <b>To appeal</b> to romantic, idealized ideas about love so as to sell tickets |

Very generally speaking, **rhetoric** refers to a set of strategies that authors use to connect to their readers. More often in this book, though, I use “rhetoric” to refer to any text that makes an appeal to the reader, viewer, or listener with end goal being an action of some kind. Consider some examples that require such a vague definition:

| Rhetorical Example                                      | Rhetorical Product                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| An episode of <i>The Simpsons</i> <b>tries</b>          | <b>To entertain</b> , <b>to tell</b> a story, or <b>to make</b> social commentary. |
| The aforementioned rhetorical question <b>tries</b>     | <b>To stimulate</b> reflection.                                                    |
| Speech to the U.N. on the Syrian Civil War <b>tries</b> | <b>To garner</b> support and humanitarian aid.                                     |

Each of these texts is rhetorical. Texts can be written or spoken; they can be images; they can be video; they can be digital or printed; they can exist for only a moment or for eons. What they try to accomplish can vary widely, from killing time to killing people.

A pattern might be emerging to you: you are perpetually surrounded by rhetoric, but you are not always aware of how it’s acting on you—no one can be. But by developing your rhetorical awareness, you can perceive and interpret texts more diligently, in turn developing skills to think more independently. For that reason, this book encourages you to be both a critical consumer and also a critical producer of rhetoric, specifically in the written form.

In this book, you will explore and work within three rhetorical situations. (The beauty of the rhetorical situation, of course, is that no two writers using this book will have the exact same constraints; nevertheless, you will share similar experiences.) Because many college composition programs value the nonfiction essay form, this textbook focuses on three different kinds of essays: a personal narrative, a textual analysis, and a persuasive research essay. The art of writing these essays, though, is not to become master of any of them. Instead, the goal is to practice interrogating the rhetorical situations and exploring your work to be more effective within them. Because the writing you will do throughout your life take drastically different forms, you should learn ask the right questions about the writing you need to do.

Instead of learning rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), it is more valuable to learn the questions you should ask of your future writing situations and produce texts that are tailored to those situations. Whenever you create a new piece of writing, you should ask, *What will make my writing most effective based on my rhetorical situation?*

Every text comes into being within a specific rhetorical situation and reflects the characteristics and values of that situation. Although there are many ways to break down a rhetorical situation, I use the acronym SOAP for **subject, occasion, audience, and purpose**<sup>9</sup>. These are distinct elements, but they often overlap and inform one another. Let's take a closer look:

**Subject:** The subject, put simply, is what you are writing about. It's the topic, the argument, the main concern of the rhetoric you are producing or consuming. Every text has at least one subject; sometimes, a text will have both an implicit and explicit subject.

**Occasion:** Every piece of rhetoric is located in time and space. The term occasion refers to the socio-historical circumstances that prompt the production of a piece of rhetoric. What is it that makes you write? How does your moment in culture, geography, and history influence your writing? Every text has an occasion; sometimes, that occasion is clearly stated, and other times we have to infer.

**Audience:** The target audience for a piece of rhetoric is the person or group of people for whom you're writing. Although many people will encounter certain texts, every piece of rhetoric is designed with a certain audience in mind. Every text has at least one audience; sometimes that audience is directly addressed, and other times we have to infer

**Purpose:** As I mentioned above, every piece of rhetoric tries to accomplish something. We can state this purpose using an infinitive verb phrase, like "to

entertain,” “to persuade,” “to explain.”  
Every text has at least one purpose;  
sometimes that purpose is obvious, and  
sometimes it is insidious.

Identifying these elements is only step one. What matters more are the implications that each of these elements carries. For each text you create, you should ask *What is my subject? What is my occasion? Who is my audience? What is my purpose?* But you should also ask *How do each of those answers influence the way I will write?*

For instance, the subject of the story of your weekend might change when you’re telling your grandma instead of your friends. Your language will change as your audience changes: if you’re writing a story about giraffes for a classroom of third graders, you’d better use different word choice than if you’re writing a meta-analysis of giraffe population metrics for the Executive Board of the Oregon Zoo.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, you can imagine that writing a blog about standardized testing would be different in 2003 from the same writing in 2017.

Throughout this following chapters, I encourage you to think critically about these rhetorical situations because there is no one version of “good writing.” There is only rhetoric that is effective in its situation. Any such rhetoric is crafted through process.

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## 11.5: Writing as a Process

Good writing is a lot of different things, and those things are largely dependent on rhetorical situation. But how exactly do we produce effective, situationally appropriate writing with an always-moving target?

The answer lies in between writing as product and writing process. The word “writing” itself can be both a noun and a verb: a piece of writing, or the act of writeing. Although your process will eventually lead to a product, I emphasize awareness of process to more deliberately think through the obstacles that you encounter leading up to that final product in that specific situation.

Take a few minutes to think about your own writing process. From the moment a writing project is assigned to the moment you turn the paper in and wash your hands of it completely, what happens? What are the ingredients you’ve found necessary to a successful recipe, so to speak?

Your answer might include the things you see on posters in high school English classrooms — pre-write, research, draft, revise, etc. — but it also likely includes some other factors—procrastination, dance breaks, coffee, existential dread, snacks, etc. You should especially account for the things that make your process unique. One great example is your environment: some writers prefer silence in the library; others listen to music at their desk; still others like working in a coffee shop with conversational hum in the background.

As you challenge yourself with new writing experiences, experiment with your process. By this point in your academic career, you’ve probably already found something that works pretty well for you, and you should give yourself credit for that. But it doesn’t mean you can’t enhance your process. If you’re someone who usually outlines before a draft, try a free-write or a mind-map—or just jumping right into the draft. If you usually listen to music, try a different genre. If you usually fall prey to procrastination, try to bust out an early draft, give yourself a day or two off, and then come back to it.

For all the differences in individual processes, every effective writing process is iterative: unlike the neat diagrams on posters in high school English classrooms, writing requires you to circle back, repeat steps, and bounce around in sequence. It demands that you write, rewrite, rewrite. It asks you to make revisions on every scale of your drafts. Like building muscle, improving your writing (as product) and your writing (as process) require repetition, dedication, and labor over time.

In summary, remember these three key ideas:

1. SOAP and the rhetorical situation.

1. Writing is never “good,” “bad,” “right,” or “wrong” in and of itself: it can only be these things relative to the constraints of the rhetorical situation.

2. Process.

1. Writing is more than just putting words on the page. It begins with a careful consideration of the rhetorical situation and proceeds through recursive idea generation, drafting, and revision. Writing is never truly finished.

3. What to expect from the book.

1. The following chapters will provide you the opportunity to experiment within different rhetorical situations to help you practice for future rhetorical situations.

These chapters will encourage you to work through complex writing and thinking processes to create rhetorically effective essays. These essays anticipate the kind of writing you will do both in school and beyond because they will give you the chance to practice asking the right questions of your rhetorical situation.

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## 11.6: Chapter Vocabulary

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**Audience** is the intended consumers for a piece of rhetoric. *Every* text has at least one audience; sometimes, that audience is directly addressed, and other times we have to infer.

**Complaint Tradition** is the recurring social phenomenon in which a generation complains about the way things have changed since their earlier years. Coined by Leonard Greenbaum.

**Iterative** is literally, a repetition within a process. The writing process is iterative because it is non-linear and because an author often has to repeat, revisit, or reapproach different steps along the way.

**Learning Communities** are networks 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.

A **Medium** is the channel, technology, or form through which rhetoric is constructed and communicated. Different rhetorical situations value different media, and different media value different kinds of rhetoric.

**Mode** is the style and techniques employed by of a piece of rhetoric to achieve its purpose. Different rhetorical situations value different modes, and different modes value different kinds of rhetoric. Compare to genre.

**Occasion** the socio-historical circumstances that prompt the production of a piece of rhetoric, determined by personal experiences, current events, language, and culture. Every text has an occasion.

**Process** is a complex and multifaceted sequence that results in a product. As applied in “writing process,” non-linear and iterative. Contrast with product.

**Product** is the end result of a creative process. Often shows little evidence of the process that created it.

**Purpose** is the intended result of a piece of rhetoric. Can be stated using an infinitive verb phrase (“to entertain,” “to persuade,” “to explain”). Every text has at least one purpose, sometimes declared explicitly, and other times implied or hidden.

**Rhetoric** is a combination of textual strategies designed to do something to someone. In other words, ‘rhetoric’ refers to language, video, images, or other symbols (or some combination of these) that informs, entertains, persuades, compels, or otherwise impacts an audience.

**Rhetorical Situation** the circumstances in which rhetoric is produced, understood using the constituent elements of subject, occasion, audience, and purpose. Each element of the rhetorical situation carries assumptions and imperatives about the kind of rhetoric that will be well received. Rhetorical situation will also influence mode and medium.

**Subject** is the topic, focus, argument, or idea explored in a text.

**Text** is any artifact through which a message is communicated. Can be written or spoken; digital, printed, or undocumented; video, image, or language. Every text is rhetorical in nature. See rhetoric.

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## 11.7: The Yellow Wallpaper

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and perhaps—I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind—perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a delicious garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid; but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself,—before him, at least,—and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery, at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering, unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

“You know the place is doing you good,” he said, “and really, dear, I don’t care to renovate the house just for a three months’ rental.”

“Then do let us go downstairs,” I said, “there are such pretty rooms there.”

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I’m really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous willows.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fire-works in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn’t match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don’t mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John’s sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect, and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely, shaded, winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded, and where the sun is just so, I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to sulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps because of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of “debased Romanesque” with delirium tremens—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the cross-lights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all,—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I musn't lose my strength, and has me take cod-liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them anymore,—I am too wise,—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around, just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper did move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why darling!" said he, "our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before."

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better. I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening, when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away."

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug; "she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!"

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready."

Really, dear, you are better!"

"Better in body perhaps"—I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't,—I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions,—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind,—that dim sub-pattern,—but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all

I can.

Indeed, he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for, you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake,—oh, no!

The fact is, I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times looking at the paper! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the color of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even smooch, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her on that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her she may be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town overnight, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not alive!

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home tomorrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will not move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to look out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get me out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it, of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?!"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 12: From Reading to Writing

12.1: 11 From Reading to Writing

12.2: 12.3-.1 Introduction

12.3: 12.3-.2 Body

12.4: 12.3-.3 Conclusion

12.5: 12.5-.1 Sample 1

12.6: 12.5-.2 Sample 2

12.7: 12.5-.3 Sample 3

12.8: Chapter 11 Endnotes

12.9: Structure of an Analytical

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## 12.1: 11 From Reading to Writing

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### From Christopher Manning:

When I started college, I was a decent student in the sciences, an admittedly weak math student, a solid student in languages, and a self-described genius in writing. I had won local writing contests, creative writing awards, and a handful of small plaques describing me as the “English Student of the Year” in my class.

I had writing skills. Serious writing skills. However, when I enrolled in college classes, I was stuck taking Composition I one just like every student. I was lucky enough to enroll in a section taught by a professor who would be vitally important in my future at the small, liberal arts college I attended. He was fair, extraordinarily intelligent, and genuinely decent. However, after he returned my first essay, I was sure he knew absolutely nothing about good writing. The essay was soaked with red ink, and there were comments repeatedly critiquing structure, focus, and clarity, but I did not understand what these comments meant I had to do differently.

When I cornered a friend who lived across the hall from me about why I my professor gave me so many comments, he offered to look at the essay. “Dude,” he said, “this is kind of a mess. I’m not sure what your point is. And it’s really complicated. Make a point and support it. This gets a little crazy.”

It was then that I decided the guy across the hall was clueless about good writing, too. So, I asked a friend who was planning to major in English and was also enrolled in my class. Her response? “It’s okay, I guess. What’s it supposed to be about?” Why, I wondered, were there so many freshman who just didn’t understand good writing?

Finally, I asked someone I knew would truly appreciate my enormous ability as a writer. Their evaluation? “Stop worrying about the grade, and start focusing on the process,” they decided after reading through the essay. “Writing is about writing well, not about getting the right answer. Think about what your professor expects from you as a writer, and then give them what they want.”

It was not the advice I wanted, but it was the advice I definitely needed to hear. For years I had been rewarded but never challenged. College writing required discipline and focus that were not needed in my high school English classes. Over my final year of high school, I thus had abandoned writing basics. I did not complete the reading and research needed to inform myself on the topic, and my citations were sloppy. I needed a proofreader. Most importantly, I realized I struggled to focus solely on my topic, and I too often tried to write about too many other subjects.

These were difficult lessons, but they were too important not to learn.

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## 12.2: 12.3-.1 Introduction

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The very first part of your introduction should have an attention-grabbing device (a hook) to engage your readers. Hooks can be statistics, facts, questions, or unusual details. Don't make general statements such as "it is clear that..." because you are trying to explain something that perhaps your reader doesn't know, so it would not be clear to them. Instead be informative. The introduction will also contain your thesis. Good topic referring to Rhetoric. One can check it at the essays writing companies and already written essays accomplished by writing service writers.

Be creative in your introduction: use an anecdote, a provocative statement, a surprising or insightful quote, or even a shocking statistic. Bring the audience up to speed on the broader aspects of the subject on which you are basing your essay.

Consider starting with a criticism. For example, in Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, people view his research as a key to unlocking human potential, but that's an overstatement. One might consider challenging the more common and popular interpretations of the book as being a "self-help" book.

Consider starting with praise. The book *Outliers* is the first widely read and very honest discussion of the commonly held belief that success in America is only a matter of hard work. The reader is confronted with the reality that even in America, privilege provides opportunities poverty cannot. Such an introduction establishes a viewpoint while introducing an important element of the book.

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## 12.3: 12.3-.2 Body

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Now that you have your specific thesis, along with your sketchy outline, you must support your thesis claim by using concrete evidence and examples. You should exfoliate your thesis. Remember that expository writing assumes that your readers have no prior knowledge regarding your topic, so you must explain things very clearly. Parallelism can be very important in your paper. It can give the readers a feeling of structure and importance. Pick a method of organization and stick with it.

In our example, we would explain in detail how much creativity is involved in gardening. We could write about the style of impressive European or Oriental gardens. Next, we would show how there are a variety of plants. We could write about plants found in different climates. Finally, we would explain the many uses of plants. We could write about floral bouquets and vegetables.

Because exposition's purpose is to inform, you will want to establish common ground with your readers. You should write objectively, which will fulfill the purpose of explaining things.

### **Topic Sentence:**

It may help to use a topic sentence to focus each paragraph and to keep the writer and the reader on point. This is a statement of the point you'll make usually in the introductory paragraph.

### **Support:**

Support should always come from the articles you found in your research, your author research, and through passages from the text. BE SPECIFIC when you refer to any text. Paraphrase with detail, and use direct quotes when necessary. This is very, very important.

### **Developing Paragraphs:**

To develop paragraphs, consider one of the following forms of support for your point of view:

- Use examples and illustrations (exemplification)
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony or authoritative statements and published passages (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story (narrative)
- Define terms in the paragraph. These terms should be important to the topic under discussion.
- Compare and contrast (describe and explain the characteristics of two objects or ideas to draw attention to similarities and differences)
- Evaluate causes and reasons for the occurrences of an issue or condition in the world. What do you or others believe causes anything from car accidents or racism or juvenile diabetes.
- Examine effects and consequences of a particular action or state of being
- Analyze the topic, supporting texts or common beliefs about some aspect of your topic. For examples, tackle a stereotype or a common belief about the topic.

In each paragraph, explain what you believe the support means. Many of you were already doing this in your paragraphs.

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## 12.4: 12.3-.3 Conclusion

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A conclusion wraps up your paper by recalling your main points, but do not use the identical words that you used in your introduction. Conclusions and introductions are like frames, they should tie your whole paper together. You should explain your main points briefly and freshly. Don't be sloppy—this is the last impression you are making.

Some combination of the following is always helpful:

- Refer back to your thesis.
  - Tell us what you ultimately think about the topic under discussion.
  - Tell us what readers can and should take from this discussion in terms of how we view the world, our families, specific populations, etc. Consider addressing these questions: What would you like us to learn from your discussion on the book? What points should we remember? What particular insights on the subject were most important?
  - How can you make your reader remember this essay?
- 

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## 12.5: 12.5-1 Sample 1

Mogan Wietzke

Professor Manning

English 121

6 October 2018

### The Hate U Give

“The Hate U Give” written by Angie Thomas is a young adult novel that won several awards, such as the “William C. Morris Award,” the “Odyssey Award,” the “Coretta Scott King Award,” and the “Michael L. Printz Award” (“The Hate U Give”). The novel encompasses events in the life of Starr Carter, a 16-year-old black female who witnessed the police shooting of her childhood best friend, Khalil. Following Khalil’s death, Starr’s biggest support system is her dad, Maverick; her mom, Lisa; her brother, Seven; her friend, Maya; and her white boyfriend, Chris. Starr code-switches throughout the novel in an effort to fit in, unintentionally, and to stay safe. Code-switching is the “practice of shifting from one language or dialect to another,” or frankly altering the way you portray yourself (Morrison). Starr’s admission of witnessing Khalil’s murder and releasing memories of Natasha’s murder to Chris is significant because she reveals a side of herself that she tries to keep from people who are not like her through code-switching.

According to NPR, young people in modern American society tend to code-switch to fit in with a certain social group. An example of code-switching for group identity in the novel “The Hate U Give” happens when Starr alters the presentation of herself to white people, in an effort to fit in. At Williamson Prep, an (almost) all white school, Starr transforms herself into an entirely new version of herself, eliminating many of her subtle attributes and slang so that she does not appear “ghetto” to her classmates and friends. In chapter five of the novel, Starr presents herself as a different person at Williamson Prep than she is at Garden Heights when she says, “Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friend’s do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her ‘hood.’ Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off, so nobody will think she’s the ‘angry black girl.’ Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is un-confrontational. Basically, Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto” (Thomas 71). Furthermore, Starr and her family also exhibit social group code-switching when they go to the National News interview by dressing nicely, and to ensure that they will be taken seriously by the white society and not viewed as “hood rats,” Lisa tells them “when we get there, don’t touch anything and only speak when somebody speaks to you. It’s ‘yes ma’am’ and ‘yes sir,’ or ‘no ma’am’ and ‘no sir’” (Thomas 282). In these quotes, it is obvious that Starr, just like any other human being trying to fit in, feels as if she needs to represent herself as somebody she is not in order to conform with her classmates and friends, and her family also feels like they need to portray themselves how whites would like to see them. Starr ultimately lives two life’s: Garden Heights Life and Williamson Prep Life. She monitors everything she says and thinks before she says what she does, as she fears her classmates, friends, and teachers will view her as “ghetto.”

In addition, young Americans code-switch subconsciously, without even realizing. In the article “Five Reasons Why People Code-Switch,” Matt Thompson claims that “the most common examples of code-switching were completely inadvertent; folks would slip up in a different language or accent without even realizing it or intending to do it.” In the novel, Starr proclaims that “I don’t have to choose which Starr I am with Chris, maybe without realizing it, I have to an extent” (Thomas 301). This quote confirms the study that more times than not, we This often code-switch without even realizing it, or really intending to. Although Starr thought she was her normal “Garden Heights Starr” with Chris, she realizes that she was still trying to hide her true Starr-self from her white boyfriend as she fears he will think differently of her or even reject her as the two of them were brought up in two opposite atmospheres, living two opposite lifestyles.

Another reason we code-switch is for our own protection, especially from those who hold a superior authority. In the article “Sorry to Bother You, Black Americans and The Power and Peril of Code-Switching,” AT McWilliams suggests that “when black people can be killed for simply being themselves, code-switching presents itself as a form of self-protection.” An example of this form of code-switching occurs in the novel when Khalil and Starr get pulled over by Officer One-Fifteen. Starr recalls the talk she had with her dad when she was 10-years-old about what to do if she was ever approached by a police officer, for her own safety as a black individual. Maverick told her to “keep your hands visible. Don’t make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you”

(Thomas 20). In the same article, AT McWilliams proclaims that black people have been “killed by police for walking to their apartment, carrying a toy gun, staring, and many other harmless acts too ordinary to be worthy of a death.” This claim helps us understand why young Americans, especially African Americans, tend to code-switch in hopes of staying safe and alive during something as simple as a traffic stop by a police officer.

Starr’s admission of witnessing Khalil’s murder to Chris portrays her use of code-switching between the person she is at Garden Heights and the person she is at Williamson Prep around her white friends and classmates. Starr encompasses a fear, one of rejection, and therefore utilizes the act of code-switching. Starr chooses to code-switch, sometimes without even realizing it, in hopes of being accepted, especially by her white classmates and boyfriend, Chris, as they all come from a life opposite of Starr’s and this drives her with fear as she worries that her friends, classmates, and Chris will reject her for who she *really* is. In today’s society, it is acceptable to code-switch due to the many different cultural norms, to be more productive in communications with one another, and to stay safe in situations like one that Starr was faced with.

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## 12.6: 12.5-.2 Sample 2

Bradyn Wood

Professor Manning

English 121

7 October 2018

### Code Switching and the Youth of America

The changing of one's behavior to fit and conform to the cultural/societal norms laid out before them is what "code switching" can be defined as. The practice of code switching is a deeply explored topic in Angie Thomas's realistic-fiction novel, *The Hate You Give*, which revolves around Starr Carter; a teenage, African-American girl who witnesses the death of a childhood friend at the hands of a police officer. Among Starr's many struggles is her connection to two vastly different lives which she believes must be separated until events cause her to come to grips with who she really is. In today's America, the practice of code switching is very apparent for a surplus of reasons, but when relating to our youth, the action is more commonly performed in instances that allow them to fit in, hide something or as an inadvertent action. *The Hate You Give* is able to express why teens feel it is necessary for teens to code switch when they are a part of what feels like two different worlds.

*The Hate You Give* is able to accurately portray why a teenager such as Starr may feel the need to code switch among different groups of people to escape judgement and the feeling of being inferior. Starr Carter was removed from her intercity schooling at Garden Heights by her parents at age ten when her friend Natasha was killed in a drive by shooting. Starr was enrolled at Williamson Prep where she began a new life, with new friends while still being a part of her intercity roots. Throughout the story, Starr will repeatedly refer to herself as either, "Garden Heights Starr" or "Williamson Starr", because she believes she must be two different people if she wants to fit in with the two different groups that are most prevalent in her life. A specific instance of Starr's code switching is her vocabulary which changes depending on the Starr she is trying to be. For example, when Starr is around her Garden Heights friends as well as her family, she will use words like "ain't", "gonna" and "finna" which is very common language for people living in Garden Heights. These words are a contrast to Williamson Starr who is frequently making sure to talk and act like that of her mostly white peers and so that her "ghetto accent" isn't noticed by her friends and boyfriend. To many American teens, it is difficult to fit in especially when bullying and cyberbullying are at an all-time high. In a study conducted by Stage of Life, 95% of students surveyed said to have felt inferior in some way, shape or form and in order for many teens to fit in, they feel the need to change something about themselves that can somehow make them seem less inferior to their peers and we see Starr perform this action because of her fear of being judged by her friends for being an intercity girl.

American teens today are very concerned with hiding aspects of their lives that may lead to people thinking less of them in certain situations which is yet another reason for our youth code switching. During a pivotal scene in the book, Starr reveals to her boyfriend, Chris, the darkest and most life-alerting secrets she has kept hidden from him and her Williamson friends. Starr explains to Chris the death of childhood friend Natasha and Khalil who was recently killed by a white police officer (Thomas 296-301) which the basis of the book revolves around. At this point in the story, Starr has the realization that she has no need to keep secrets from her boyfriend anymore because he loves and cares about her in more ways than she thought. Up until that very point though, Starr feared Chris finding out about her other life. For most of Starr's relationship with Chris she was too afraid of telling him about her other life in fear that he would see her as a totally different person and decide to not be with her anymore. This moment is very important for someone who code switches to attempt to hide something about themselves from people they know. The fear of prejudice and judgement from one's peers is something many teens are facing, so they feel it is right to hide certain aspects of their life to escape said fears, but something good can occur when a situation like in *The Hate You Give* arises, which is when the need for "code switching" is no longer necessary and teens can begin to feel comfortable being themselves and not changing who they are just to hide things they think need to be hidden.

The final reason the teens of America code switch is because something clicks in the brain causing code switching to become an inadvertent action or "Our lizard brains takeover" as comically described by NPR. In the book, Starr is enjoying her brother's graduation party where it so happens her "worlds collided" (Thomas 359). While having fun and dancing, Starr shows codeswitching in a way she wouldn't even had noticed. Starr is showing her boyfriend how to dance along with all the songs her and her Garden Heights world are playing (Thomas 360). Starr doesn't even realize that she is codeswitching in front of her own

family because dancing to certain music and having fun like that isn't something Starr frequently does in front of her Williamson friends and so she is acting as "Garden Heights Starr". Starr naturally defers to how she acts around her family even though her Williamson friends are present. For someone who has had to code switch for as long as Starr has, moments will have clicked like the one discussed where someone will just automatically change their ways without putting much thought to it just because they don't think through what they are doing, they just do what their mind is telling them to do. The repetition of such actions like code switching and in such a long period of performing these actions can cause for people to just automatically act out such actions without internalizing.

Our American youth will do anything to fit in with their peers even if it means throwing away aspects of their lives that make them who they are. Throughout *The Hate You Give*, Starr Carter code switches to fit in, hide personal secrets, and because this is the way of life she has become accustomed to from living two different lives. Hiding, keeping quiet and conforming is the life of our American teens but we are left with the question of what can we do to ensure our youth is comfortable being themselves?

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## 12.7: 12.5-.3 Sample 3

MacKenzi Ferden

Professor Manning

Comp 121

6 October 2018

### Strength in Numbers

In the riveting novel “The Hate U Give”, by Angie Thomas, we are quickly introduced to a young, African-American girl named Starr. Starr is a 16-year-old high school student who goes to an upscale private school called Williamson Prep, where she is one of the only black students, along with her older brother, Seven. However, she comes from a poor, predominantly black neighborhood filled with gangs and drug dealers, called Garden Heights. Starr is faced with a life-altering decision after she has tragically witnessed the unlawful murder of her childhood best friend, Khalil, at the hands of a police officer. Starr finds herself stuck between staying quiet and safe, or taking a risk and speaking out. Throughout it all she has an amazing support system by her side, and Angie Thomas introduces readers to an unbreakable bond between Starr and her loved ones, one that helps Starr overcome all the obstacles that come her way.

After witnessing the murder of her best friend, Starr is burdened with the idea of standing up against the world to get justice for Khalil, while also risking the safety of herself and her family. One of Starr’s biggest supporters during her time of need was her uncle Carlos. Growing up Carlos stepped up and played the father figure role for Starr and her brother, Seven, while their father was in jail. In the following quote Starr explains their relationship, “I was three when Daddy went to prison, six when he got out. A lot of my memories include him, but a lot of my firsts don’t. First day of school, the first time I lost a tooth, the first time I rode a bike without training wheels. In those memories, Uncle Carlos’s face is where Daddy’s should’ve been” (Thomas 58). This helps the audience better understand the love and strong bond built between Starr and her Uncle during the time of her father’s absence. As we continue reading we learn that Carlos is also a police officer, and even works with the officer who shot Khalil. After witnessing Khalil’s death, Starr is very fearful of police officers, and questions whether they’re really there to protect her or whether they target her, and people of her race. However, Carlos is the one thing Starr is sure about when it comes to the police system. Carlos constantly reassures Starr that any decision she makes he will protect her in and encourages her to tell her side of the story to investigators. Because of this, Starr speaks out and tells her side of the story to investigators, but if it weren’t for Carlos and his constant support for her, Starr would’ve never spoken out. Starr eventually opens up to her uncle and informs him that after the officer shot Khalil, he also pointed his gun at her until backup arrived. This news frustrates Carlos and he is eventually put on leave after attacking the officer who shot Khalil. Starr expresses that he shouldn’t have risked his job for her and he tells her, “But I love you more. You’re one reason I even became a cop, baby girl” (Thomas 255). Although Carlos was a cop, he never let that affect the way he supported his niece and he ensured she always felt comfortable speaking out and constantly reminded her she was loved. He was the one person who reminded Starr that not all cops are bad.

Another major key supporter in Starr’s life is her older brother, Seven. Throughout the entire story Seven is known as a protector. Since day one he has always had Starr’s back. Seven tries to maintain the normalcy in Starr’s life, always cracking jokes and taking her to play their monthly basketball game, even during the riots that were taking place in Garden Heights. “Seven bangs his fist against the door... ‘We’re leaving in ten.’... ‘Leaving for what?’ I ask him. ‘Basketball at the park. It’s the last Saturday of the month, right? Isn’t this what we always do?’” (Thomas 142). Seven knows the importance of maintaining simple activities in Starr’s life so she doesn’t get lost in Khalil’s death. Eventually throughout the story we learn that Starr’s best friend, Hailey, is racist, and Starr ends up fighting her. During the fight Hailey’s brother, Remy, tries to push Starr, and Seven jumps in to protect her. “...A blur of dreadlocks charges at us and pushes Remy back. ‘Get your hands off my sister!’ Seven says. And then they’re fighting. Seven throws blows like

nobody's business, knocking Remy upside his head with several good hooks and jabs" (Thomas 342). Seven gives Starr a sense of comfort throughout the entire story. Starr knows he's there at school with her if anything goes wrong, and also knows he's right there with her at home whenever she needs anything. Without Seven, Starr may not have the confidence to stand up for herself, not knowing who would be by her side if she did. Seven physically and emotionally protects Starr throughout the entire story, and always reminds her she is strong, and this hardship won't defeat her.

Lastly, Starr's boyfriend, Chris, is one of the main people who keep Starr sane, in both of her divided worlds. After Khalil's death Starr pushes away many of the important people in her life, including Chris. However, Chris was always there trying to be there for her, even when she didn't want him to be. Starr explains, "I didn't trust you. I didn't want you to just see me as the girl from the ghetto", while Chris counters her comment by stating "You didn't even give me the chance to prove you wrong. I wanna be there for you. You gotta let me in" (Thomas 300). After the decision was made that the officer who killed Khalil wasn't guilty, Starr felt defeated, by Chris was there for her the entire time. "He looks at me and I look at him. My vision blurs. Chris wraps his arms around me and pulls me closer. I bury my face in his shirt. He smells like a perfect combination of Lever soap and Old Spice. The thump of his heart is better than any beat he's ever made. My normal in the flesh" (Thomas 377). At this point, Starr is no longer ashamed of her second world, and lets Chris experience all of it. Without Chris, Starr may have never been able to express herself the way she's always wanted. When the decision was made, riots started taking over Starr's hometown and she wanted to participate in it. "Seven returns to the driver's seat. 'Chris, you want me to take you home?' 'I'm staying.' Chris nods, as if he's settling with himself. 'Yeah, I'm staying... I want everyone to know that decision is bullshit'" (Thomas 390). Chris stuck by Starr's side the entire time, protesting in a neighborhood he was stranger to. Chris respects Starr and her culture and wants her to know that he supports where she comes from, and without him by her side, Starr would probably question many white people and their intentions. He provides Starr with a love and support different than the love from her family, because he doesn't have to love her, he chooses too.

Concluding, Starr's family and friends support her endlessly, all in different ways. They manage to keep her sane and remind her she is loved in her time of anger, doubt and frustration. They all play a key role in the voice she protests with. Starr isn't alone and because of this she feels strong and confident enough to speak out to the world. "Be roses that grow in the concrete" (Thomas Acknowledgements). Starr is the rose, the world against her is the concrete, and the water used to help the rose grow is Starr's support system.

#### Works Cited

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. First ed., New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2017.

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## 12.8: Chapter 11 Endnotes

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1 Strauss.

Maguire, John G., with an introduction by Valerie Strauss. “Why So Many College Students Are Lousy at Writing—and How Mr. Miyagi Can Help.” *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2012, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/04/27/why-so-many-college-students-are-lousy-at-writing-and-how-mr-miyagi-can-help/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/04/27/why-so-many-college-students-are-lousy-at-writing-and-how-mr-miyagi-can-help/).

2 Maguire.

3 Ibid., emphasis added.

4 Greenbaum, Leonard. “The Tradition of Complaint.” *College English*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1969, pp. 174–187. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/374119](http://www.jstor.org/stable/374119).

5 Strauss and Maguire.

6 Ibid.

7 It’s worth noting that most singular definitions of “good writing” are deeply entrenched in racist, sexist, and jingoist prejudice. This is not news to the National Council of Teachers of English, who originally published “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” in 1974, nor to Asao B. Inoue who recently published an outstanding textbook on the matter. Maguire missed that memo, I suppose.

8 “Rhetoric.” Oxford English Dictionary, 2018,

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/165178?rskey=CYNdOm&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

9 Also worth consideration are mode and medium, which are often closely related to SOAP, but not explored in-depth in this book. This acronym comes to me courtesy of Daniel Hershel.

10 Granted, these examples are also in different rhetorical *modes*, but you get the point.

11 Le Guin, 220.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ace, 1987.

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## 12.9: Structure of an Analytical

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 13: What is Exposition in Writing

13.1: Types of Exposition

13.2: Find a Topic, Read, Discuss, and Research

13.3: Structure of an Analytical or Expository Essay

13.4: Sample Exposition Assignments

13.5: Sample Papers

13.6: Analytical Essay Checklist Exercise

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## 13.1: Types of Exposition

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- **Description** – The author explains a particular topic by showing characteristics, features, and examples.
  - **Comparison** – The author shows how two or more topics are alike.
  - **Contrast** – The author shows how two or more topics are different.
  - **Cause and Effect** – The author demonstrates the cause while showing the effects of the cause.
  - **Problem and Solution** – The author explains a problem, then explores possible solutions.
  - **Analytical** – The author evaluates a topic or argument revealing its strengths and weaknesses.
  - **Classification** – The author sorts things into useful categories, makes sure all the categories follow a single organizing principle, and gives examples that fit into each category.
  - **Sequence** – The author lists items or events in numerical or chronological order.
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## 13.2: Find a Topic, Read, Discuss, and Research

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First you must find a specific aspect of a topic that would interest you. This means you will and must read about the topic. You will have to research the topic extensively so that you can explain it—what exposition is all about. Research your topic extensively if necessary. You will probably have to spend quite a bit of time, but remember that the researching can be exciting. The general initial researching may even provide some valuable information that you want to explain. Researching is like exercising: at first it hurts, but with time you become stronger and it's easier to flex your researching muscles. After you have decided upon a topic, you can create a thesis.

When you read, read critically and actively as was discussed in the previous chapter. Question the author's points, consider conflicting viewpoints and support evidence. Analysis and exposition is built upon disagreement. Don't avoid it; explore it with an open mind.

Like reading and writing, writing and talking work in unison. Teachers often observe classes that actively read and then discuss what they have read are often much stronger writers. Moreover, some students find that discussion is an important step in articulating their ideas and galvanizing their viewpoints on a topic.

### Thesis

An expository paper is most easily written when you have a "tight" thesis. This means that the focus of your topic is extremely specific. When your thesis is concise, you can write at length because you know exactly what you should be writing about. But when you have a sloppy, vague thesis, you can become lost and your writing reflects this. This goes back to choosing a topic focus that deals with something specific, and not overly general. A thesis makes a claim regarding your focus and is supported by details and facts. It is written in one or two complete sentences. An example of a thesis would be: "Gardening can be a rewarding hobby because of the creativity involved, the variety of plants, and the many uses of plants."

### Create a Sketchy Outline

After you write your thesis, create a sketchy outline so that you have a game plan for your paper. Your outline should have information that you want to include for each part of your thesis. For our thesis example, we could find lots of information that could support the different parts of gardening. Notice the word *could*—just because we have the information doesn't mean we must use it in the paper. This is a rough outline after all.

### Start Writing

Too often we don't begin writing because we are stuck—don't be, just start writing. You can begin anywhere. Start writing where you feel the most comfortable. When you have your outline, as sketchy as it may be, it reminds you of ideas that you want to include in your paper. Remember though that readers are interested in what YOU have to say—they don't want to read regurgitated quotes and opinions of others, so make sure that your point is being heard.

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## 13.3: Structure of an Analytical or Expository Essay

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The structure of an expository piece consists of first an introduction that contains the most crucial element—the thesis—the main point you wish to convey. After the introduction is the body, in which you clarify the different aspects of the thesis in great detail. The final piece, the conclusion, restates and rephrases (using different words) the thesis and ties up any “loose ends”.

### Thesis Statements

A thesis statement is one of the most important elements of any successful expository essay. A thesis statement controls the subject matter of the essay and states something significant to the reader. It is the one statement that summarizes the main point of the essay and states why the essay is important and worth reading. An essay that lacks a strong thesis will have broad scope and lack focus.

The following are qualities of a well-crafted thesis statement:

1. A thesis statement should identify a specific purpose for the essay.
2. A thesis statement should assert something about the essay, and it should be something with which others can reasonably disagree.
3. A thesis statement should be clear and easily identifiable by a reader.
4. A thesis statement generally comes toward the end of the introduction and is usually the final sentence.
5. A well-focused thesis statement, key to organizing an essay, contains two elements: a clear subject and a clear perspective on the topic.
6. Use a precise topic rather than a generalized topic when writing a thesis. Avoid statements like “I will use my essay to consider. . .” and “This paper will discuss....”
  - o Vague – Ecological disasters are a major concern today.
  - o Precise – Pollution of underground water supplies threatens cities on the American West Coast.

A thesis should have the following characteristics:

- \*It should be simple or complex, **BUT** never compound.
- \*It should be stated positively.
- \*It should be restricted, precise, and unified.
- \*It should not contain figurative language.

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## 13.4: Sample Exposition Assignments

Here are some sample assignments to prepare you for a real exposition paper or essay. Remember that your audience has very little previous knowledge of your topic!

### Sample Assignments

- Write an informative exposition essay the importance of Ernest Hemingway's experiences in one of his short stories.
- Compose a descriptive exposition essay of important twentieth century art work.
- Type an analytical exposition essay that analyzes just how effective your laptop computer is and is not.
- You can also use other subjects to write about, such as an important book, art work, technical innovation, historical incident or even scientific breakthrough.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, Lansing Community College chose "The Hate U Give" as the "One Book, One LCC" college read. Many instructors used the book as the basis for a writing assignment. The following were some of the prompts offered:

Choose ONE of the following prompt questions for you essay. Your thesis should directly answer the first question posed for each prompt.

1. As Starr and Khalil listen to Tupac, Khalil explains what Tupac said "Thug Life" meant. Discuss the meaning of the term "Thug Life" as an acronym and why the author might have chosen part of this as the title of the book. Discuss three or four examples of hateful discourse in our society today and/or from the book. Provide sources for these examples. (Chapter 1, p. 21)
2. Chapter 2 begins with Starr flashing back to two talks her parents had with her when she was young. One was about sex ("the usual birds and bees"). The second was about what precautions to take when encountering a police officer (Chapter 2, p. 24). Have you had a similar conversation about what to do when stopped by the police? In an essay, provide three or four reasons why you believe cops have a right to stop anyone they chose OR why you believe black males are unfairly and disproportionately more likely to be stopped, arrested, and injured or killed by the police.
3. Family provides a thematic element to this story that is rich and complex. Starr has a family that is, to say the least, complicated in its connections and broad in its inclusivity. Where are the boundaries of the family? How do you think Starr would define family? What about Seven? How do you define it? In an essay, provide three or four reasons why you believe Starr's family is either strong or weak in the face of such an event. OR, in an essay, analyze how the book explores the definition of family. Who is and is not family particularly in a community where people know each other? Again, give three or examples from book, other sources, or your experience to support your answer.
4. Chris and Starr have a breakthrough in their relationship – Starr admits to him that she was in the car with Khalil and shares the memories of Natasha's murder (Chapter 17, pp. 296–301). Discuss why Starr's admission and releasing of this burden to Chris is significant. Explore the practice of "code switching" and discuss how you might code switch in different circumstances in your own life. In an essay, provide three or four reasons everyone, especially young people, "code-switch" in modern American society.
5. How and why does the neighborhood react to the grand jury's decision (Chapter 23)? How does Starr use her voice as a weapon, and why does she feel that it is vital that she does? Refer back to "Thug Life" and discuss how the acronym resonates in this chapter. Give three or four reasons for your answer. Consider using examples from recent history when individuals have used their voice to promote that was either good or bad.
6. In what ways does Starr cope with the tragedy of Khalil's death? How do these coping techniques reflect the influences on her life such as family, friends, and media? Provide three or four techniques provided in the book. Also, consider researching this concept.
7. What insights does this novel generate concerning the national debate over police brutality and racial profiling? Does it open new perspectives or explain any inconsistencies? Given what examples of police brutality exist, what changes could impact the frequency of police brutality as it's depicted in the novel? Provide 3 to 4 reasons for you answer.
8. How does Hailey respond to Starr's struggle over Khalil's death? Is this a reflection of society or white privilege as a whole, or can the influence of Hailey's personality be teased out of the way she reacts? What can the character of Hailey tell us about resistance to the Black Lives Matters movement and growing membership in white nationalism? Provide three to four reasons.
9. "The Hate U Give" is ultimately a work of fiction directed toward young adults. The novel uses a very young character suddenly forced to carry the burden of a social issue created by generations preceding her. In an essay, provide 3 or 4 reasons

you believe this books does or does not accurately portray the issue of police brutality.

10. Solve the problem. The media, bloggers, conspiracy theorists, social critics, editorialists, talk show hosts and seemingly everyone else talks incessantly about the problems like police brutality. Talk does nothing to address the simple issue embedded in this books: people are afraid of police, and police are afraid of people. Provide a solution. Try to give 3 or 4 reasons this solution will make people less afraid of police, and police less afraid of people.

The following are examples of analytical essays written for this assignment. Read through each and then assign a grade for each essay using a 4.0 scale.

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## 13.5: Sample Papers

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## 13.6: Analytical Essay Checklist Exercise

For each essay, answer the following questions in groups of 3-4 people. One person should record the answers. One person should keep the group on task. One person should keep track of time. Be prepared to explain your answers.

1. Structure: Was there an introduction, 3-5 body paragraphs, and a conclusion? Was each distinguishable?
2. Could you easily identify a thesis? Was it a strong or weak thesis? Explain your answer.
3. Could you easily identify topic sentences?
4. Was support provided for each main point? Was it effective support?
5. Were outside sources cited with in the essay? (internal documentation)
6. Were outside sources cited on a Works Cited page? (external documentation)
7. Was the introduction engaging and did it provide information helpful in following the essays? Why/why not?

Was the conclusion effective? Why/why not?



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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 14: What is Evaluative Writing

14.1: Establishing Evaluative Criteria

14.2: How to Evaluate

14.3: Structure of the Evaluative Essay

14.4: Sample Assignments

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## 14.1: Establishing Evaluative Criteria

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The key to effective evaluative writing is starting off with a clear and precise assertion. Your main assertion is what you will use to perform the evaluation. You may want to argue that a Chevy Tahoe is better than a Ford Expedition based on its horsepower, gas mileage, capacity, warranty, etc. Other evaluators might argue the difference between their towing capabilities. Whatever the main argument may be for your evaluative essay, make sure that your argument is clear.

- Make sure you have a well presented subject. Without one, you will lose your readers.
- Create a thesis statement. Thesis statements help you stay focused and help your reader to understand what is being evaluated or judged.
- Give only information that is imperative to the decision making process. If it looks like unnecessary information, it probably is.
- Do not be biased when creating an evaluative essay. Give both good and bad examples of the topic.

You are the “expert” in an evaluative essay. Support your opinions with facts, not whims.

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## 14.2: How to Evaluate

A big question you might have is: how do I evaluate my subject? That depends on what your subject is.

If you are evaluating a piece of writing, then you are going to need to read the work thoroughly. While you read the work, keep in mind the criteria you are using to evaluate. The evaluative aspects may be: grammar, sentence structure, spelling, content, usage of sources, style, or many other things. Another thing to consider when evaluating a piece of Evaluation writing is whether the writing appeals to its target audience. Is there an emotional appeal? Does the author engage the audience, or is the piece lacking something? If you can, make notes directly on your work itself so that you remember what you want to write about in your essay.

If you are evaluating anything else, use your head. You **need** to try, use, or test whatever thing you are evaluating. That means you should not evaluate a 2005 Chevrolet Corvette unless you have the \$45,000 (or more) to buy one, or the money to rent one. You also need the know-how of driving a car of that power and a base of knowledge of other cars that you have tested to make a fair comparison.

On the note of comparisons, **only compare things that are reasonably alike**. People don't care to know how a laugh-out-loud comedy like National Lampoons Christmas Vacation compares to Citizen Kane; that is for a different type of essay. Compare comedies to other comedies and dramas to other dramas. That is what people are looking for when reading comparisons in an evaluation essay. However, keep in mind that comparisons are always useful in illustrating an idea and providing context. They give shape and clarity to often complex ideas presented in evaluations.

Whatever you are evaluating, make sure to do so thoroughly. Take plenty of notes during the testing phase so that your thoughts stay fresh in your mind. You do not want to forget about a part of the subject that you did not test.



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## 14.3: Structure of the Evaluative Essay

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### 13.3.1 Introduction

In the introduction of your evaluative essay, you should clearly state the following: – what you are evaluating (the subject – like *Citizen Kane* or *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*) – the purpose of your evaluation – what criteria you are evaluating your subject on (plot, characterization, cinematography etc.) For example, you should not just write that you are judging the acting in the film. You should explain that you are judging the individual performances of actor, the plot of the screenplay, and cinematography. Give the reader background on the subject including the “who, what, when, where, and why” elements of the subject.

### 13.3.2 Body

Be sure to be very descriptive and thorough when evaluating your subject. The more you leave out of the essay, the more unanswered questions your readers are left with. Your goal should be to cover all aspects of the subject and to tell the audience how good or bad it is. Consider, for example, not only what quality the subject possesses, but what is missing. Good evaluations measure the quality or value of a subject by considering what it has and what it lacks.

### 13.3.3 Conclusion

The conclusion for an evaluative essay is pretty straightforward. Simply go over the main points from the body of your essay. After that, make an overall evaluation of the subject. Tell the audience if they should buy it, eat it, use it, wear it, etc. and why. After that is done, your essay is finished.

The conclusion of a review is also an opportunity for some flourish. Think about how you can sum up the best or worst of the experience to send your audience marching toward or away from the subject of your evaluation. Good job!

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## 14.4: Sample Assignments

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Here are some sample assignments to get your brain pumping:

- Film Review. Evaluate a film, any film, based on common film elements. Consider films from the American Film Institute's top 100 list. Carefully consider criteria from this review. One may also choose to review a film that receives a negative evaluation.
  - Consider looking for professional film reviews to provide ideas for criteria.
  - Consider quoting film reviewers from publications like The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and Rolling Stone Magazine as secondary evidence in your essay
- Evaluate technology such as an Iphone, Ipad, a Tesla automobile, cell phone etc. Again consider what criteria you will use to evaluate it. Test its durability, comfort level, apps, storage capacity, ergonomics, screen quality, etc. Compare it with previous technology you or someone else has owned. Also, compare it to a different type of technology such as comparing an Ipad to an Iphone or a Samsung Galaxy.
- Write a restaurant review. Go to a restaurant and evaluate it as a restaurant review.
  - Find reviews from publications like the New York Times or even local reviews to determine what criteria best suit your interests as a restaurant consumer. Then think about how you'll evaluate each element of your criteria.
  - You may also want to read reviews of the restaurant on Yelp.com or other rating websites.
  - Consider quoting/paraphrasing what other reviewers/researchers have said about your chosen restaurant; they may have had a different experience than yours or may provide information about the business/product/service that you were unaware of.
- A Brief Guide to Writing Evaluation Essays
- [Useful Phrases for Use in Evaluative Writing](#)
- Important Elements to Consider

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 15: A Brief Guide to the Art of Persuasion and Argument

[15.1: Basic Argument Essay Structure](#)

[15.2: Strengthening Your Argument](#)

[15.3: Sample Essay](#)

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## 15.1: Basic Argument Essay Structure

### 14.1.1 Introduction

The first paragraph of your argument is used to **introduce your topic** and the issues surrounding it. This needs to be in clear, easily understandable language. Your readers need to know what you're writing about before they can decide if they believe you or not.

Once you have introduced your general subject, it's time to **state your claim**. Your claim will serve as the thesis for your essay. Make sure that you use clear and precise language. Your reader needs to understand exactly where you stand on the issue. The clarity of your claim affects your readers' understanding of your views. Also, it's a good idea to highlight what you plan to cover. Highlights allow your reader to know what direction you will be taking with your argument.

You can also mention the points or arguments in support of your claim, which you will be further discussing in the body. This part comes at the end of the thesis and can be named as *the guide*. The guide is a useful tool for you as well as the readers. It is useful for you, because this way you will be more organized. In addition, your audience will have a clear cut idea as to what will be discussed in the body.

### 14.1.2 Body

#### Background Information

Once your position is stated you should **establish your credibility**. There are two sides to every argument. This means not everyone will agree with your viewpoint. So try to **form a common ground** with the audience. Think about who may be undecided or opposed to your viewpoint. Take the audience's age, education, values, gender, culture, ethnicity, and all other variables into consideration as you introduce your topic. These variables will affect your word choice, and your audience may be more likely to listen to your argument with an open mind if you do.

#### Developing Your Argument

Back up your thesis with logical and persuasive arguments. During your pre-writing phase, outline the main points you might use to support your claim, and decide which are the strongest and most logical. Eliminate those which are based on emotion rather than fact. Your corroborating evidence should be well-researched, such as statistics, examples, and expert opinions. You can also reference personal experience. It's a good idea to have a mixture. However, you should avoid leaning too heavily on personal experience, as you want to present an argument that appears objective as you are using it to persuade your reader.

There are a couple different methods of developing your argument. Two variations of the *basic argument structure* are the **Position Method** and the **Proposal Method**.

### 14.1.3 The Position Method

The **Position Method** is used to try to convince your audience that you are *in the right*, and the other view of your argument is *wrong*.

1. Introduce and define your topic. Never assume that your reader is familiar with the issues surrounding your topic. This is your chance to set up the premise (point of view) you want to use. This is also a good time to present your thesis statement.
2. Background information. Do your research! The more knowledgeable you are, the more concise an argument you will be able to give. You will now be able to provide your reader with the best information possible. This will allow your audience to read your paper with the same knowledge you possess on the topic. Information is the backbone to a solid argument.
3. Development. You have your argument, and you may have even stated your thesis. Now, start developing your ideas. Provide evidence and reasoning.
4. Be prepared to deal with the "Other Side." There will be those who oppose your argument. Be prepared to answer those opinions or points of view with knowledgeable responses. If you have done your homework and know your material, you will be able to address any opposing arguments with ease and authority.
5. In conclusion... Now is the time to drive home your point. Re-emphasize your main arguments and thesis statement.

The **Proposal Method** of argument is used when there is a problematic situation, and you would like to offer a solution to the situation. The structure of the Proposal method is very similar to the above Position method, but there are slight differences.

1. Introduce and define the nature of the problematic situation. Make sure to focus on the actual problem and what is causing the problem. This may seem simple, but many people focus solely on the effects of a problematic situation. By focusing on the actual problem, your readers will see your proposal as a solution to the problem. If you don't, your readers might see your solution as a mere complaint.
2. Propose a solution, or a number of solutions, to the problem. Be specific about these solutions. If you have one solution, you may choose to break it into parts and spend a paragraph or so describing each part. If you have several solutions, you may instead choose to spend a paragraph on each scenario. Each additional solution will add both depth and length to your argument. But remember to stay focused. Added length does not always equal a better argument.
3. Describe the workability of the various solutions. There are a variety of ways that this could be done. With a single-solution paper you could break the feasibility down into short and long term goals and plans. With a multiple-solution essay, you may instead highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the individual solutions, and establish which would be the most successful, based on your original statement of the problem and its causes.
4. Summarize and conclude your proposal. Summarize your solutions, re-state how the solution or solutions would work to remedy the problematic situation, and you're done.

### Dealing with the Opposition

When writing an argument, expect that you will have opposition. Skeptical readers will have their own beliefs and points of view. When conducting your research, make sure to review the opposing side of the argument that you are presenting. You need to be prepared to counter those ideas. Remember, in order for people to give up their position, they must see how your position is more reasonable than their own. When you address the opposing point of view in your essay and demonstrate how your own claim is stronger, you neutralize their argument. By failing to address a non-coinciding view, you leave a reason for your reader to disagree with you, and therefore weaken your persuasive power. Methods of addressing the opposing side of the argument vary. You may choose to state your main points, then address and refute the opposition, and then conclude. Conversely, you might summarize the opposition's views early in your argument, and then revisit them after you've presented your side or the argument. This will show how your information is more reasonable than their own.

#### 14.1.5 Conclusion

You have introduced your topic, stated your claim, supported that claim with logical and reasonable evidence, and refuted your opposition's viewpoint. The hard work is done. Now it's time to wrap things up. By the time readers get to the end of your paper, they should have learned something. You should have learned something, too. Give readers an idea to take away with them. Conclude = to come together or to end (not restate what has already been said in your paper). One word of caution: avoid introducing any new information in your conclusion. If you find that there's another point that you wanted to include, revise your essay. Include this new information into the body of your essay. The conclusion should only review what the rest of your essay has offered.

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## 15.2: Strengthening Your Argument

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### 14.2.1 Phrasing

It is important to clearly state and support your position. However, it is just as important to present all of the information that you've gathered in an objective manner. Using language that is demeaning or non-objective will undermine the strength of your argument. This destroys your credibility and will reduce your audience on the spot. For example, a student writing an argument about why a particular football team has a good chance of “going all the way” is making a strategic error by stating that “anyone who doesn't think that the Minnesota Vikings deserve to win the Super Bowl is a total idiot.” Not only has the writer risked alienating any number of her readers, she has also made her argument seem shallow and poorly researched. In addition, she has committed a third mistake: making a sweeping generalization that cannot be supported.

Use phrasing that does not: Alienate any part of your audience

Make an argument that is poorly researched or shallow

Make an unsupported generalization

Mistakes that could ruin your Argument

### 14.2.2 Objective Language

You should avoid using “I” and “My” (subjective) statements in your argument. You should only use “I” or “My” if you are an expert in your field (on a given topic). Instead choose more objective language to get your point across. Consider the following:

I believe that the United States Government is failing to meet the needs of today's average college student through the under-funding of need-based grants, increasingly restrictive financial aid eligibility requirements, and a lack of flexible student loan options.

“Great,” your reader thinks, “Everyone's entitled to their opinion.”

Now let's look at this sentence again, but without the “I” at the beginning. Does the same sentence becomes a strong statement of fact without your “I” tacked to the front?

The United States Government is failing to meet the needs of today's average college student through the underfunding of need-based grants, increasingly restrictive financial aid eligibility requirements, and a lack of flexible student loan options.

“Wow,” your reader thinks, “that really sounds like a problem.”

A small change like the removal of your “I”s and “my”s can make all the difference in how a reader perceives your argument— as such, it's always good to proof read your rough draft and look for places where you could use objective rather than subjective language.

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## 15.3: Sample Essay

### PGA Tour, Inc. v Casey Martin

Casey Martin was born with a degenerative circulatory disorder that makes his right leg very weak. Casey Martin has shown that he possesses the ability to compete on the PGA tour. He has confessed, “All I ever wanted was the chance to play and to see how good I could be” (Faces 1). Yet it’s been written that “Walking not only causes him pain, fatigue, and anxiety, but also created a significant risk of hemorrhaging, developing blood clots, fracturing his tibia so badly an amputation might be required” (PGA Tour 9). This disorder prevents Martin from walking the golf course. If he is unable to walk due to health reasons, his only option to find out just how good he actually is requires the use of a golf cart. Yet the PGA has rules against the usage of golf carts.

The PGA Tour has a rule saying players must walk the third and final stage of the golf tournament. While in Q School, a qualifying school for professional golfers, Martin submitted a request to be able to use a golf cart throughout the entire tournament. The PGA Tour denied his request. The PGA feels that walking is an integral part of the game, and being allowed to use a golf cart would give the individual an advantage over the rest of the field (Finchem 2). Subsequently, the PGA thought that if Martin used a golf cart it would fundamentally alter the nature of the tournament by giving him an unfair advantage.

Under the American’s with Disabilities Act, Martin filed a lawsuit which reads, “Prohibits discrimination on the basis of employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation and telecommunications” (United States). Martin filed his suit specifically under Title III of the Act which requires public accommodations to make reasonable modifications for the disabled. The PGA Tour, a recreational facility and activity, is considered a public accommodation. Both the lower courts and the Supreme Court agreed with Martin. He had a right to use a motorized golf cart under the ADA because the PGA Tour is a public accommodation, and that it would not fundamentally alter the nature of the tournament. The PGA Tour, Q School, and any “. . . golf courses, including play areas, are places of public accommodation during professional golf tournaments” (PGA Tour 2). Casey Martin was discriminated against because of his disability and because golf course are specifically identified as a public accommodation under Title III of the ADA.

Originally Casey Martin was told by the PGA Tour that they would not accommodate his disability. The PGA feels that the playing field must be the same for every player, and allowing Martin to use a cart would give him an advantage over other players. The PGA argues that walking, and the loss of concentration due to fatigue, is part of the challenge of playing professional golf at its highest level (Finchem 2). The PGA also argues that using a golf cart would take out much of the physical conditioning factor of the sport. The PGA Tour claimed they were not required to allow Casey Martin to use a cart, but in the end it turns out that the PGA was required because the tournament is a public place.

As it is organized, “Any member of the public may enter the Q School by submitting two letters of recommendation and paying a \$3,000 entry fee” (PGA Tour 1). The golfers of the PGA pay to be a part of the PGA, therefore they are considered customers, and would make the PGA a public accommodation. The golfers pay for privileges such as Q School and to compete in the tournaments. Since Martin paid to play professional golf, and also paid his way through his qualifying school, he should not have been discriminated against while competing. The Supreme Court ruled that Martin was a customer of competition when he practices his profession. Martin was a customer to this public accommodation, therefore the PGA Tour should be required to make reasonable modifications, and allow Casey Martin to use his golf cart.

Also, Casey Martin’s use of a golf cart would not “fundamentally alter” the core nature of the tournament. The PGA Tour argues, “While carts have become commonplace for recreational golf, walking had been an integral part of the tournament competition throughout the game’s history. Walking is a fundamental part of tournaments in championship competitions . . .” (Finchem 2). Yet the core nature of golf is aiming for the hole. “The use of carts is not inconsistent with the fundamental character of golf, the essence of which has always been shot-making. The walking rule contained

in petitioner's hard cards is neither an essential attribute of the game itself nor an indispensable feature of tournament golf" (PGA Tour 3). This means that the game of golf is based on where the ball ends up and not on the endurance of walking. Yes golf is a game of strategy where one attempts to put the golf ball in the hole in the fewest strokes possible. But golf is not a mellow version of cross country running. Nor is it based on how far you can walk.

The golfers participating in the PGA Tour tournament do not need the walking stage of golf, because it is not essential to the game of golf. The PGA will argue that it is essential because of the endurance factor. However, walking the distance of the course is not part of the formal rules of golf (DREDF 2). It is the golfer's choice to walk the course. The PGA will argue that weather affects game play. "Using a cart would be somewhat of an advantage all the time and could be a great advantage in many circumstances . . . rain delays . . . the temperature and the humidity are both in the nineties . . ." (Finchem 2). In this case however, the variety of conditions the player would have to deal with would only matter if they were playing a multi-day tournament (DREDF 2). If a tournament is only one day in length, the fatigue factor of walking will generally be minimal compared to the other factors.

In the end, Casey Martin would be enduring enough pain as it is with his disorder. The pain caused by his disorder can be compared to other golfers walking the final stage of the tournament. Martin's disability causes him enough pain going from cart to shot that he would not have an advantage (DREDF 2). The PGA tour argues that it would indeed be unfair because other golfers would be walking, and that Casey Martin would have an advantage over everyone else walking the course. No matter what the PGA believes, the Supreme Court agrees with Martin, ". . . that even with the use of a cart, the fatigue Martin suffers from coping with his disability is greater than the fatigue his able-bodied competitors endure from walking the course" (PGA Tour). Even with the cart, Casey Martin must walk over a mile during an 18-hole round of golf. The combination of Casey Martin's pain and the distance he will still walk would be enough that the other golfers would still have an advantage over him.

All Casey Martin ever wanted to do was to be the best he could possibly be. Does the PGA Tour have the right to shatter Casey Martin's dreams because of a degenerative disorder? In his own words Casey Martin says, "Without the ADA I never would have been able to pursue my dream of playing golf professionally" (Faces 1). With a clarity the PGA should have began with, the Supreme Court agreed that Casey Martin did indeed have the right to pursue his dream.

(This essay is from Stephanie Wolf and has been modified to fit the parameters of this book. Somehow in the editing the Works Cited was lost.)

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 16: How to use this Book—Pedagogical Background for Students and Teachers

16.1: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

16.2: Rhetorical Situations

16.3: Assignments and Activities

16.4: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

16.5: Rhetorical Situations Applications

16.6: Writing as Process

16.7: Introductory

16.7.1: Introductory

16.7.1.1: Introductory

16.7.1.1.01: Introductory

16.7.1.1.1: Introductory/Pedagogical Vocabulary

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## 16.1: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

One major goal of this text: to advocate for student-centered pedagogy that fosters learning communities. Most of the texts that make this section of our reader-rhetoric are actual student work that Abrams encountered over his career as a teacher. This is a deliberate choice which responds to an observed problem: the texts in anthologies are almost always and almost exclusively by professional writers. While this sets, perhaps, a higher standard, it also trains students to think that polished, publishable, and impactful writing is not accessible to them—that it is a different echelon of creativity and mastery. It teaches them that they should imitate the people who write well with the understanding that their writing will never be quite as good.

By the same logic that representations of people of color, different genders, different ability statuses, and so on are important to those who experience oppression, representing student writing in this book allows students to envision themselves in the role of author. This text showcases outstanding student work as evidence that students are very capable of producing beautiful, moving, thorough, thoughtful, and well-informed rhetoric.

To this end, student work is edited as minimally as possible, foregoing stylistic and some mechanical issues. The use of student writing, in addition to its primary objective of representation, also relates to this book's focus on writing as process, not product. Be warned that the student essays included here would not meet some readers' standards of "perfect." They exemplify some strategies very well, but may fall short in other domains. Therefore, it's important to regularly remind students that no text is perfect; no text is free of bias or ideology. The texts might spark discussions; they might serve as exemplars for assignments; they could even serve as focus texts for analysis. Regardless, read critically with your class, unpacking not only the content but also the construction of the rhetoric itself.

Professional authors and teachers know that a piece of writing is never actually finished—that there are always ways to challenge, reimagine, or polish a text. I encourage you to teach both professional and student model texts with this in mind: ask your students: *What does this author do well, and what could they do better? In what ways are they fulfilling the imperatives of the rhetorical situation, and what advice would you give them to improve?*

To support this critical perspective, each text included in the main sections of the book is followed by a "Teacher Takeaway": ideas from college professors reacting to the work at hand. While these takeaways are not comprehensive, they offer a starting point for you and your students to interpret the strengths of a model text.

With Abrams we believe in student-centered curriculum as necessarily invested in learning communities. Opportunities for growth multiply exponentially with the support of their classmates and college resources (like a Writing Center or research librarian).

We build a good deal of time into our classes for community-building for a handful of reasons:

**Writing doesn't exist in a vacuum.** Almost all writing involves an exchange between a writer and their audience. Even on the professional level, the best writing is produced collaboratively, using feedback from a cohort of trusted peers. However, many of our students have been trained to believe that their schoolwork is their business and no one else's—or, at best, that their sole audience is the red- pen-toting teacher. Instead, this text emphasizes collaboration to model real- world writing situations.

**Writing is hard.** Writing is hard because learning is hard: growth only occurs under challenging circumstances. Additionally, whether our students are writing a personal narrative or a research essay, they are putting themselves in a position of vulnerability. While the concept of an entirely "safe space" is largely a myth, it is important that they feel supported by their classmates and their instructor to ensure that this vulnerability is productive.

**Communities are, to some extent, horizontal.** The vertical power dynamic that plagues many college classrooms, where the all-knowing teacher deposits knowledge into their ignorant students, must be dismantled for true learning to take place. Students need to be able to claim the knowledge and skills they build in the classroom, and they can only do so if they feel they have a stake in the mission and operation of the class.<sup>1</sup>

**Communities have shared goals and values, but also diversity within them.** Each member might have a different path to those goals, might have different needs along the way, might have additional individual goals—but there's value in acknowledging the destinations we pursue together.

**Learning communities are not just communities of learners, but also communities *that* learn.** It is crucial to acknowledge that no matter how much planning we do, our communities will have unanticipated strengths, needs, successes, and failures.

Communities that learn *adapt* to their internal idiosyncrasies in order to make shared goals more accessible to everyone. Furthermore, the skills and concepts for building community that your students learn with carry them forth to shape their future communities.

Writers write best among other writers. Learners learn best among other learners.

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## 16.2: Rhetorical Situations

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In this book encourage a deep consideration of writing as a dynamic response to rhetorical situations. We can all acknowledge that different circumstances, different audiences, different subjects require different kinds of writing. This variability demands that we think more expansively and critically about genre, language, style, and medium. It also requires us to acknowledge that there is no monolithic, static, singular model of “good” writing, contrary to what some traditionalists believe—and what many of our students have been trained to believe.

The realization that “good” writing cannot be essentialized is not groundbreaking in the field of rhetoric: indeed, we have known for thousands of years that audience and purpose should influence message and delivery. However, it often is groundbreaking for students today who have learned from both hidden and explicit curricula that certain dialects, styles, or perspectives are valued in academia.

Shifting the paradigm—from “How do I write right?” to “How do I respond to the nuanced constraints of my rhetorical situation?”—requires a lot of unlearning. As your students try to unpack more and more complex rhetorical situations, support them by deliberately talking through the constituent elements of the rhetorical situation and the preferred modes and languages utilized therein. One question to use to turn students’ focus to the rhetorical situation is: How will the subject, occasion, audience, and purpose of this situation influence the way we write?

Why this focus? Our emphasis on rhetorical situations is twofold:

- To sharpen and complicate students’ thinking.** On a more abstract level, Abrams advocates for critical consumption and production of rhetoric as a fundamental goal of composition instruction. If we, as educators, want to empower our students as thinkers and agents within the world, we must equip them with the habits to challenge the texts and ideas that surround them.
- To prepare students for future writing situations.** On a more pragmatic level, we don’t think it’s possible to teach students all of the ways they will need to know how to write in their lives—especially not in a single college term. Instead of teaching rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), I argue for teaching questions about writing situations. Students will be better prepared for future writing situations if they can analyze a rhetorical situation, determine how that situation’s constraints will influence their writing, and produce a text that is tailored to that situation.

We encourage consideration of the many forms that rhetoric take and critical encounters with all kinds of media and rhetoric that permeate our lives. Although you are using this book for a class with “Composition,” in the title, another primary goal of this book is to advocate for critical consumption and production of rhetoric in all its forms. We are centered on the nonfiction essay form (in order to satisfy the typical academic requirements of foundational college courses).

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## 16.3: Assignments and Activities

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Depending on your course schedule and your pedagogical priorities, the content of this book will be too much to teach in one term. Teaching is a game of adaptation: we must be flexible, responding to our constraints and our students' particular needs. To that end, we encourage you to pick and choose the units, assignments, and activities that you find most valuable and tailor those units, assignments, and activities to your class.

All that said, another major goal of this text is to provide support to developing instructors. Especially if this is your first experience teaching, you are more than welcome to use this text to structure and develop your syllabus, conduct activities, and prepare assignments. Rely on this text as much as you find it useful.

Each activity in this text is designed to help practice a discrete skill, but developing writers don't always make that connection right away: be sure to allow for time to debrief to explore what the students can take away from each assignment. Doing so will allow the students to translate skills more easily.

Furthermore, they will also reveal learning that you may not have anticipated, providing for rich in-class discussion.

### Navigation

Feel free to bounce around between Chapters and Sections as appropriate to your course.

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## 16.4: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

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One major goal of this text: to center the student learning experience among a community of learners. Begin by believing that you are capable of outstanding student work and capable of producing beautiful, moving, thorough, thoughtful, and well-informed rhetoric.

Writing is *process*, and a product. Read and react accordingly. Expect that we will learn adapt in order to make shared goals more accessible to everyone.

Why does this matter to you? Because building and sustaining a learning community is a valuable experience which will serve you as a writer, a student, and a citizen.

Furthermore, living writers have more to offer one another than any textbook could. Writers write best among other writers. Learners learn best among other learners.

Although you will learn writing skills from this book, engaging in a learning community will allow you test and sharpen those skills.

At the same time, your future writing situations, whatever they may be, will be among complex discourse ecologies—specific groups of readers and writers with specific tastes, interests, and expectations. In this way, working within a learning community teach you to more actively evaluate your rhetorical situation.

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## 16.5: Rhetorical Situations Applications

In this book, you'll notice a focus on rhetorical situations, which are explained more thoroughly in the General Introduction. Put simply, the act of writing is a response to a rhetorical situation, and no two situations are the same. Think about the differences and similarities between the following kinds of writing:

A letter to your grandmother about your first semester in college  
An editorial advocating for immigration reform

An e-mail to a craigslist user about the futon you want to buy

A flyer for a Super Smash Bros. tournament in the Student Union

Different circumstances, different audiences, and different subjects require different kinds of writing. These differences ask writers to think critically about genre, language, style, and medium. More importantly, it means that there is no one method for creating “good” writing, no one-size-fits-all, step-by-step guide to success, despite what some of your previous teachers may have claimed.

Because you and each member of your learning community has a vastly different future ahead of you, it would be impossible to teach you all the ways you will need to write throughout your lives—especially not in a single college term. Instead of learning rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), it is more valuable to learn the questions you should ask of your future writing situations and produce texts that are tailored to those situations.

In this book, you will explore and work within several rhetorical situations. Because many college composition programs value the nonfiction essay form, this textbook focuses on three different kinds of essays: a personal narrative, a textual analysis, and a persuasive research essay. The goal of writing these essays, though, is not to become a master of any of them. Instead, the goal is to practice interrogating the rhetorical situations and tailoring your work to be more effective within them.

As you learn more about rhetorical situations, think about the many forms that rhetoric takes. We hope the learning experiences included in this book and your class should be applied to the other sorts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening you do throughout your life: how can you bring the same thoughtfulness to a Facebook status, an online news article, a class syllabus, a conversation in the dining hall, or a Socratic discussion in class?

Throughout this text, you will be challenged to respond to different rhetorical situations through the act of writing. In other words, you will try to learn more about what “good writing” says and does in different contexts: What makes for a good story? An insightful analysis? A convincing argument? Why does it matter that we write where and when we do? What do different readers want out of a piece of writing?

By exploring and writing within different situations, you will learn skills for specific rhetorical modes, sharpen your critical literacy, and—most importantly—learn to adapt to a variety of writing circumstances that you will encounter both in and out of school. In other words, practice in different rhetorical situations will make you a more critical consumer and producer of rhetoric.

But let's back up a second. What's rhetoric?

You may have heard of a rhetorical question before—a question that someone asks you without expecting an answer. What's the point of asking a question with no answer? To somehow impact the person who hears it, maybe by making them think about an issue in a different way.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, rhetoric is “The art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, esp. the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end.”

Very generally speaking, rhetoric refers to a set of strategies that authors use to connect to their readers.

Let's consider some examples that require such a vague definition:

Each of these texts is rhetorical. Texts can be written or spoken; they can be images; they can be video; they can be digital or printed; they can exist for only a moment or for eons. What they try to accomplish can vary widely, from killing time to killing people.

A pattern might be emerging to you: you are perpetually surrounded by rhetoric, but you are not always aware of how it's acting on you. But by developing your rhetorical awareness, you can perceive and interpret texts more diligently, in turn developing skills to

think more independently. For that reason, this book encourages you to be both a critical consumer and also a critical producer of rhetoric, specifically in the written form.

In this book, you will explore and work within four rhetorical situations. The non-fiction essay, personal narrative essay, textual analysis, and the persuasive research.

| Rhetorical Example                                        | Rhetorical Product                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| An essay on capital punishment <b>tries</b>               | <b>To convince</b> a reader to form a particular opinion on the issue. |
| A t-shirt with the Boston Red Sox logo <b>tries</b>       | <b>To rally</b> team spirit.                                           |
| A Levi's advertisement in a magazine <b>tries</b>         | <b>To sell</b> you Levi's and to build a brand image                   |
| A website for Portland Community College <b>tries</b>     | <b>To provide</b> resources for students, faculty, and staff           |
| An episode of <i>The Simpsons</i> <b>tries</b>            | <b>To entertain</b> to tell a story, or to make social commentary.     |
| The aforementioned rhetorical question <b>tries</b>       | <b>To stimulate</b> reflection.                                        |
| A speech to the U.N. on the Syrian Civil War <b>tries</b> | <b>To garner support</b> and humanitarian aid.                         |

The goal of writing these essays, though, is not to become master of any of them. Instead, the goal is to practice interrogating the rhetorical situations and exploring within your work to become more effective, impacting the writing you will do throughout your life.

Instead of learning rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), it is more valuable to learn the questions you should ask of your future writing situations and produce texts that are tailored to those situations. Whenever you create a new piece of writing, you should ask: *What will make my writing most effective based on my rhetorical situation?*

Every text comes into being within a specific rhetorical situation and reflects the characteristics and values of that situation. Although there are many ways to break down a rhetorical situation, I use the acronym SOAP for subject, occasion, audience, and purpose. This acronym comes to us via Abrams courtesy of Daniel Hershel.

These are distinct elements, but they often overlap and inform one another. Let's take a closer look:

Identifying these elements is only step one. What matters more are the implications that each of these elements carries. For each text you create, you should ask: *What is my subject? What is my occasion? Who is my audience? What is my purpose?* But you should also ask: *How do each of those answers influence the way I will write?*

For instance, the subject of the story of your weekend might change when you're telling your grandma instead of your friends. Your language will change as your audience changes: if you're writing a story about giraffes for a classroom of third graders, you'd better use different word choice than if you're writing a meta-analysis of giraffe population metrics for the Executive Board of the Oregon Zoo. Similarly, you can imagine that writing a blog about standardized testing would be different in 2003 from the same writing in 2017.

Throughout this book, we encourage you to think critically about these rhetorical situations because there is no one version of "good writing." There is only rhetoric that is effective in its situation. Any such rhetoric is crafted through process.

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## 16.6: Writing as Process

Good writing is a lot of different things, and those things are largely dependent on rhetorical situation. But how exactly do we produce effective situationally appropriate writing with an always-moving target? The word “writing” itself can be both a noun and a verb: a piece of writing, or the act of writing. Awareness of process helps writers deliberately think through the process and techniques that leading up to that final product in that specific situation.

Take a few minutes to think about your own writing process. From the moment a writing project is assigned to the moment you turn the paper in and wash your hands of it completely, what happens? What are the ingredients you’ve found necessary to a successful recipe, so to speak?

Your answer might include the things you see on posters in high school English classrooms— pre-write, research, draft, revise, etc.—but it also likely includes some other factors—procrastination, dance breaks, coffee, existential dread, snacks, etc. You should especially account for the things that make your process unique. One great example is your environment: some writers prefer silence in the library; others listen to music at their desk; still others like working in a coffee shop with conversational hum in the background.

As you challenge yourself with new writing experiences, experiment with your process. By this point in your academic career, you’ve probably already found something that works pretty well for you, and you should give yourself credit for that. But it doesn’t mean you can’t enhance your process. If you’re someone who usually outlines before a draft, try a free-write or a mind-map—or just jumping right into the draft. If you usually listen to music, try a different genre. If you usually fall prey to procrastination, try to bust out an early draft, give yourself a day or two off, and then come back to it.

For all the differences in individual processes, every effective writing process is iterative: unlike the neat diagrams on posters in high school English classrooms, writing requires you to circle back, repeat steps, and bounce around in sequence. It demands that you write, rewrite, rewrite. It asks you to make revisions on every scale of your drafts. Like building muscle, improving your writing (as product) and your writing (as process) require repetition, dedication, and labor over time.

In summary, remember these three key ideas:

1. **SOAP and the rhetorical situation.** Writing is never “good,” “bad,” “right,” or “wrong” in and of itself: it can only be these things relative to the constraints of the rhetorical situation.
2. **Process.** Writing is more than just putting words on the page. It begins with a careful consideration of the rhetorical situation and proceeds through recursive idea generation, drafting, and revision. Writing is often unfinished although projects are complete.
3. **What to expect from the book.** It will provide you the opportunity to experiment within different rhetorical situations to help you practice for future rhetorical situations.

Alongside the work you do in class, the book will encourage you to work through complex writing and thinking processes to create rhetorically effective essays. These essays anticipate the kind of writing you will do both in school and beyond because they will give you the chance to practice asking the right questions of your rhetorical situation.

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## 16.7: Introductory

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## 16.7.1: Introductory

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### 16.7.1.1: Introductory

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### 16.7.1.1.01: Introductory

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### 16.7.1.1.1: Introductory/Pedagogical Vocabulary

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## Definitions

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Audience</b>             | The intended consumers for a piece of rhetoric. <i>Every</i> text has at least one audience; sometimes, that audience is directly addressed, and other times we have to infer.                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Iterative</b>            | Literally, a repetition within a process. The writing process is iterative because it is non-linear and because an author often has to repeat, revisit, or re-approach different steps along the way.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Learning Community</b>   | 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.                                          |
| <b>Medium</b>               | The channel, technology, or form through which rhetoric is constructed and communicated. Different rhetorical situations value different media, and different media value different kinds of rhetoric.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Mode</b>                 | The style and techniques employed by of a piece of rhetoric to achieve its purpose. Different rhetorical situations value different modes, and different modes value different kinds of rhetoric. Compare to genre.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Occasion</b>             | The socio-historical circumstances that prompt the production of a piece of rhetoric, determined by personal experiences, current events, language, and culture. Every text has an occasion.                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Process</b>              | A complex and multifaceted sequence that results in a product. As applied in “writing process,” non-linear and iterative. Contrast with product.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Product</b>              | The end result of a creative process. Often shows little evidence of the process that created it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Purpose</b>              | The intended result of a piece of rhetoric. Can be stated using an infinitive verb phrase (“to entertain,” “to persuade,” “to explain”). Every text has at least one purpose, sometimes declared explicitly, and other times implied or hidden.                                                                                       |
| <b>Rhetoric</b>             | A combination of textual strategies designed to do something to someone. In other words, ‘rhetoric’ refers to language, video, images, or other symbols (or some combination of these) that informs, entertains, persuades, compels, or otherwise impacts an audience.                                                                |
| <b>Rhetorical Situation</b> | The circumstances in which rhetoric is produced, understood using the constituent elements of subject, occasion, audience, and purpose. Each element of the rhetorical situation carries assumptions and imperatives about the kind of rhetoric that will be well received. Rhetorical situation will also influence mode and medium. |
| <b>Subject</b>              | The topic, focus, argument, or idea explored in a text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Text</b>                 | Any artifact through which a message is communicated. Can be written or spoken; digital, printed, or undocumented; video, image,                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

or language. Every text is rhetorical in nature. See rhetoric.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 17: Introduction- Description, Narration, and Reflection

[17.1: Description and Narration Vocabulary](#)

[17.2: Techniques](#)

[17.3: Descriptive Section Vocabulary](#)

[17.4: Imagery and Experiential Language](#)

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## 17.1: Description and Narration Vocabulary

| Vocab Words                 | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Narration</b>            | A rhetorical mode involving the construction and relation of stories. Typically integrates description as a technique.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Reflection</b>           | A rhetorical gesture by which an author looks back, through the diegetic gap, to demonstrate knowledge or understanding gained from the subject on which they are reflecting. May also include consideration of the impact of that past subject on the author's future—"Looking back in order to look forward."                       |
| <b>Rhetorical Situation</b> | The circumstances in which rhetoric is produced, understood using the constituent elements of subject, occasion, audience, and purpose. Each element of the rhetorical situation carries assumptions and imperatives about the kind of rhetoric that will be well received. Rhetorical situation will also influence mode and medium. |

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## 17.2: Techniques

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Storytelling is one of few rituals that permeates all cultures. Indeed, there's nothing quite as satisfying as a well-told story. But what exactly makes for a well-told story?

Of course, the answer to that question depends on your rhetorical situation: your audience, your socio-historical position, and your purpose will determine how you tell your story. Perhaps your story is best told in traditional writing; maybe it is a story best told orally, among friends or family; it could even be a story that uses images or technology. By creating your own story in this unit, you will be negotiating a distinct rhetorical situation. As you learn techniques and concepts for effective storytelling, so too will you practice asking the critical questions of any rhetorical situation. Also we believe that storytelling and developing a clear voice are vital for success as writers in most situations.

The following section explores three useful rhetorical tools —description, narration, and reflection—that often contribute to effective storytelling. Each section will provide techniques and activities to help you decide which stories you can tell and the ways in which you can tell them. The assignment at the end of this section, a descriptive personal narrative essay, encourages you to synthesize all three rhetorical tools to share one of your stories in writing.

### 16.2.1 Describing a Scene or Experience

We have been programmed to overlook tiny but striking details: the slight gradation in color of cement on the bus stop curb; the hum of the air conditioner or fluorescent lights; the weight and texture of a pen in the crook of the hand. These details, though, make experiences, people, and places unique. By focusing on the particular, we can interrupt automatization.<sup>1</sup> We can become radical noticers by practicing good description.

In a great variety of rhetorical situation, description is an essential rhetorical mode. Our minds latch onto detail and specificity, so effective description can help us experience a story, understand an analysis, and nuance a critical argument. Each of these situations requires a different kind of description; this chapter focuses on the vivid, image-driven descriptive language that you would use for storytelling.

We believe storytelling is the place you will bring yourself to writing and develop your voice as a writer. Some instructors have traditionally thought that narrative has little place in academic writing. As students you should determine your instructors' position on this issue.

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## 17.3: Descriptive Section Vocabulary

| Vocab Words                     | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Constraint-Based Writing</b> | A writing technique by which an author tries to follow a rule or set of rules in order to create more experimental or surprising content, popularized by the Oulipo school of writers.                                                                                      |
| <b>Description</b>              | A rhetorical mode that emphasizes eye-catching, specific, and vivid portrayal of a subject. Often integrates imagery and thick description to this end.                                                                                                                     |
| <b>De-Familiarion</b>           | A method of reading, writing, and thinking that emphasizes the interruption of automatization. Established as “остранение” (“estrangement”) by Viktor Shklovsky, de-familiarization attempts to turn the everyday into the strange, eye-catching, or dramatic. <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>Ethnograby</b>               | A study of a particular culture, subculture, or group of people. Uses thick description to explore a place and its associated culture.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Figurative Language</b>      | Language which implies a meaning that is not to be taken literally. Common examples include metaphor, simile, personification, onomatopoeia, and hyperbole.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Imagery</b>                  | Sensory language; literal or figurative language that appeals to an audience’s imagined sense of sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Thick Description</b>        | Economical and deliberate language which attempts to capture complex subjects (like cultures, people, or environments) in written or spoken language. Coined by anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Gilbert Ryle.                                                           |

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## 17.4: Imagery and Experiential Language

Strong description helps a reader experience what you've experienced, whether it was an event, an interaction, or simply a place. Even though you could never capture it perfectly, you should try to approximate sensations, feelings, and details as closely as you can. Your most vivid description will be that which gives your reader a way to imagine being themselves as of your story.

Imagery is a device that you have likely encountered in your studies before: it refers to language used to 'paint a scene' for the reader, directing their attention to striking details. Here are a few examples:

Bamboo walls, dwarf banana trees, silk lanterns, and a hand-size jade Buddha on a wooden table decorate the restaurant. For a moment, I imagined I was on vacation. The bright orange lantern over my table was the blazing hot sun and the cool air currents coming from the ceiling fan caused the leaves of the banana trees to brush against one another in soothing crackling sounds.

The sunny midday sky calls to us all like a guilty pleasure while the warning winds of winter tug our scarves warmer around our necks; the City of Roses is painted the color of red dusk, and the setting sun casts her longing rays over the Eastern shoulders of Mt. Hood, drawing the curtains on another crimson- grey day.

Flipping the switch, the lights flicker—not menacingly, but rather in a homey, imperfect manner. Hundreds of seats are sprawled out in front of a black, worn down stage. Each seat has its own unique creak, creating a symphony of groans whenever an audience takes their seats. The walls are adorned with a brown mustard yellow, and the black paint on the stage is fading and chipped.(All three of these examples came from Abram's students.)

You might notice, too, that the above examples appeal to many different senses. Beyond just *visual* detail, good imagery can be considered sensory language: words that help me see, but also words that help me taste, touch, smell, and hear the story. Go back and identify a word, phrase, or sentence that suggests one of these non- visual sensations; what about this line is so striking?

Imagery might also apply figurative language to describe more creatively. Devices like metaphor, simile, and personification, or hyperbole can enhance description by pushing beyond literal meanings.

Using imagery, you can better communicate with your reader. To the best of your ability, avoid clichés (stock phrases that are easy to ignore) and focus on the particular (what makes a place, person, event, or object unique). To practice creating imagery, try the Imagery Inventory exercise and the Image Builder graphic organizer in the Activities section.

### 16.4.1 Thick Description

( The term “thick description” was coined by Gilbert Ryle and adopted into the field of anthropology by Clifford Geertz.

Ryle, Gilbert. *Collected Essays (1929-1968)*, vol. 2, Routledge, 2009, 479+. Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973.)

If you're focusing on specific, detailed imagery and experiential language, you might begin to feel wordy: simply piling up descriptive phrases and sentences isn't always the best option. Instead, your goal as a descriptive writer is to make the language work hard. Thick description refers to economy of language in vivid description.

While good description has a variety of characteristics, one of its defining features is that every word is *on purpose*, and this credo is exemplified by thick description.

Thick description as a concept finds its roots in anthropology, where ethnographers seek to portray deeper context of a studied culture than simply surface appearance. In the world of writing, thick description means careful and detailed portrayal of context, emotions, and actions. It relies on specificity to engage the reader. Consider the difference between these two descriptions:

The market is busy. There is a lot of different produce. It is colorful.

Or.

Customers blur between stalls of bright green boc choy, gnarled carrots, and fiery Thai peppers. Stopping only to inspect occasional citrus, everyone is busy, focused and industrious.

Notice that, even though the description on the right is longer, its major difference is the specificity of its word choice. The author names particular produce, which brings to mind a sharper image of the selection, and uses specific adjectives. Further, though, the words themselves do heavy lifting—the nouns and verbs are descriptive too! “Customers blur” both implies a market (where we would expect to find “customers”) and also illustrates how busy the market is (“blur” implies speed), rather than just naming it as such.

This type of Effective thick language is often not written the first time. You may have to stop and consider which details to include when you revise.

Consider the following examples of thick description:

I had some strength left to wrench my shoulders and neck upward but the rest of my body would not follow. My back was twisted like a contortionist's. Shaking off the idiotic urge to knock, I turned the brass knob in my trembling hands and heaved open the thick door. The hallway was so dark that I had to squint while clumsily reaching out to feel my surroundings so I wouldn't crash into anything.

Snow-covered mountains, enormous glaciers, frozen caves and massive caps of ice clash with heat, smoke, lava and ash. Fields dense with lush greenery and vibrant purple lupine plants butt up against black, barren lands scorched by eruptions. The spectacular drama of cascading waterfalls, rolling hills, deep canyons and towering jagged peaks competes with open expanses of flat, desert-like terrain.

Where do you see the student authors using deliberate, specific, and imagistic words and phrases? Where do you see the language working hard?

### 16.4.2 Unanticipated and Eye-catching Language

In addition to our language being deliberate, we should also strive for language that is unanticipated. You should control your language, but also allow for surprises—for you and your reader! Doing so will help you maintain attention and interest from your reader because your writing will be unique and eye-catching, but it also has benefits for you: it will also make your writing experience more enjoyable and educational.

How can you be surprised by your own writing, though? If you're the author, how could you not know what you're about to say? To that very valid question, I have two responses:

1. **On a conceptual level:** Depending on your background, you may currently consider drafting to be thinking-*then*-writing. Instead, you should try thinking-*through*-writing: rather than two separate and sequential acts, embrace the possibility that the act of writing can be a new way to process through ideas. You must give yourself license to write before an idea is fully formed—but remember, you will revise, so it's okay to not be perfect. (We highly recommend Anne Lamott's “Shitty First Drafts.”)
2. **On a technical level:** Try out different activities—or even invent your own—that challenge your instincts. Rules and games can help you push beyond your previous ideas.

Constraint-based writing is one technique like this. It refers to a process which requires you to deliberately work within a specific set of writing rules, and it can often spark unexpected combinations of words and ideas. The most valuable benefit to constraint-based writing, though, is that it gives you many options for your descriptions: because first idea  $\neq$  best idea, constraint-based writing can help you push beyond instinctive descriptors.

When you spend more time thinking creatively, the ordinary can become extraordinary. The act of writing invites discovery. Try the Dwayne Johnson activity to see what happens if you think more about your idea.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 18: Activities

[18.1: Specificity Taxonomy](#)

[18.2: Micro-Ethnography](#)

[18.3: Imagery Inventory](#)

[18.4: The Dwayne Johnson Activity](#)

[18.5: Surprising Yourself- Constraint-Based Scene Description](#)

[18.6: Image Builder](#)

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## 18.1: Specificity Taxonomy

Good description lives and dies in particularities. It takes deliberate effort to refine our general ideas and memories into more focused, specific language that the reader can identify with.



A taxonomy is a system of classification that arranges a variety of items into an order that makes sense to someone. You might remember from your biology class the ranking taxonomy based on Carl Linnaeus' classifications, pictured here.



Gustav Freytag is credited with this particular model, often referred to as “Freytag’s pyramid.” Freytag studied the works of Shakespeare and a collection of Greek tragic plays to develop this model in *Die Technik des Dramas* (1863).

To practice shifting from general to specific, fill in the blanks in the taxonomy below. After you have filled in the blanks, use the bottom three rows to make your own. As you work, notice how attention to detail, even on the scale of an individual word, builds a more tangible image.

|                | More General      | General   | Specific              | More Specific                              |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example</b> | Animal            | Mammal    | Dog                   | Great Dane                                 |
| <b>1a</b>      | Organism          | .         | Conifer               | Douglas Fir                                |
| <b>1b</b>      |                   | Airplane  |                       | Boeing 757                                 |
| <b>2a</b>      |                   | Novel     |                       | <i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i> |
| <b>2b</b>      | Clothing          |           | Blue Jeans            |                                            |
| <b>3a</b>      | Medical Condition |           | Respiratory Infection |                                            |
| <b>3b</b>      | School            | College   |                       |                                            |
| <b>4a</b>      | Artist            |           | Pop Singer            |                                            |
| <b>4b</b>      | Structure         | Building  |                       | White House                                |
| <b>5a</b>      |                   | Coffee    | Starbucks Coffee      |                                            |
| <b>5b</b>      |                   | Scientist |                       | Sir Isaac Newton                           |
| <b>6a</b>      |                   |           |                       |                                            |
| <b>6b</b>      |                   |           |                       |                                            |
| <b>6c</b>      |                   |           |                       |                                            |

Compare your answers with a classmate. What similarities do you share with other students? What differences? Why do you think this is the case? How can you apply this thinking to your own writing?

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## 18.2: Micro-Ethnography

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An ethnography is a form of writing that uses thick description to explore a place and its associated culture. By attempting this method on a small scale, you can practice specific, focused description.

Find a place in which you can observe the people and setting without actively involving yourself. (Interesting spaces and cultures students have used before include a poetry slam, a local bar, a dog park, and a nursing home.) You can choose a place you've been before or a place you've never been: the point here is to look at a space and a group of people more critically for the sake of detail, whether or not you already know that context.

As an ethnographer, your goal is to take in details without influencing those details. In order to stay focused, go to this place alone and refrain from using your phone or doing anything besides note-taking. Keep your attention on the people and the place.

- Spend a few minutes taking notes on your general impressions of the place at this time. Use imagery and thick description to describe the place itself. What sorts of interactions do you observe? What sort of tone, affect, and language is used? How would you describe the overall atmosphere?
- Spend a few minutes “zooming in” to identify artifacts—specific physical objects being used by the people you see. Use imagery and thick description to describe the specific artifacts. How do these parts contribute to/differentiate from/relate to the whole of the scene?

After observing, write one to two paragraphs synthesizing your observations to describe the space and culture. What do the details represent or reveal about the place and people?

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## 18.3: Imagery Inventory

Visit a location you visit often—your classroom, your favorite café, the commuter train, etc. Isolate each of your senses and describe the sensations as thoroughly as possible. Take detailed notes in the organizer below, or use a voice-recording app on your phone to talk through each of your sensations.

|       | Sensation |
|-------|-----------|
| Sight |           |
| Sound |           |
| Touch |           |
| Smell |           |
| Taste |           |

Now, write a paragraph that synthesizes three or more of your sensory details. Which details were easiest to identify? Which make for the most striking descriptive language? Which will bring the most vivid sensations to your reader's mind?

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## 18.4: The Dwayne Johnson Activity

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This exercise will encourage you to flex your creative descriptor muscles by generating unanticipated language.

Begin by finding a mundane object. (A plain, unspectacular rock is my go-to choice.) Divide blank piece of paper into four quadrants. Set a timer for two minutes; in this time, write as many describing words as possible in the first quadrant. You may use a bulleted list. Full sentences are not required.

Now, cross out your first quadrant. In the second quadrant, take five minutes to write as many new describing words as possible without repeating anything from your first quadrant. If you're struggling, try to use imagery and/or figurative language.

For the third quadrant, set the timer for two minutes. Write as many uses as possible for your object.

Before starting the fourth quadrant, cross out the uses you came up with for the previous step. Over the next five minutes, come up with as many new uses as you can.

After this generative process, identify your three favorite items from the sections you didn't cross out. Spend ten minutes writing in any genre or form you like—a story, a poem, a song, a letter, anything—on any topic you like. Your writing doesn't have to be about the object you chose, but try to incorporate your chosen descriptors or uses in some way.

Share your writing with a friend or peer, and debrief about the exercise. What surprises did this process yield? What does it teach us about innovative language use?

***Remember: Writing invites discovery: the more you look the more you see! Objects aren't boring. The ordinary can be described creatively and dramatically for a purpose. Suspend judgment: Your first idea may not be your best.***

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## 18.5: Surprising Yourself- Constraint-Based Scene Description

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This exercise asks you to write a scene, following specific instructions, about a place of your choice. There is no such thing as a step-by-step guide to descriptive writing; instead, the detailed instructions that follow are challenges that will force you to think differently while you're writing. The constraints of the directions may help you to discover new aspects of this topic since you are following the sentence-level prompts even as you develop your content.

Bring your place to mind. Focus on “seeing” or “feeling” your place. For a title, choose an emotion or a color that represents this place to you. For a first line starter, choose one of the following and complete the sentence:

- You stand there...
- When I'm here, I know that...
- Every time...
- I [see/smell/hear/feel/taste]...
- We had been...
- I think sometimes...

After your first sentence, create your scene, writing the sentences according to the following directions:

- Sentence 2: Write a sentence with a color in it.
- Sentence 3: Write a sentence with a part of the body in it.
- Sentence 4: Write a sentence with a simile (a comparison using like or as)
- Sentence 5: Write a sentence of over twenty-five words.
- Sentence 6: Write a sentence of under eight words.
- Sentence 7: Write a sentence with a piece of clothing in it.
- Sentence 8: Write a sentence with a wish in it.
- Sentence 9: Write a sentence with an animal in it.
- Sentence 10: Write a sentence in which three or more words alliterate; that is, they begin with the same initial consonant: “She has been left, lately, with less and less time to think....”
- Sentence 11: Write a sentence with two commas.
- Sentence 12: Write a sentence with a smell and a color in it.
- Sentence 13: Write a sentence without using the letter “e.”
- Sentence 14: Write a sentence with a simile.
- Sentence 15: Write a sentence that could carry an exclamation point (but don't use the exclamation point).
- Sentence 16: Write a sentence to end this portrait that uses the word or words you chose for a title.

Read over your scene and mark words/phrases that surprised you, especially those rich with possibilities (themes, ironies, etc.) that you could develop.

On the right side of the page, for each word/passage you marked, interpret the symbols, name the themes that your description and detail suggest, note any significant meaning you see in your description.

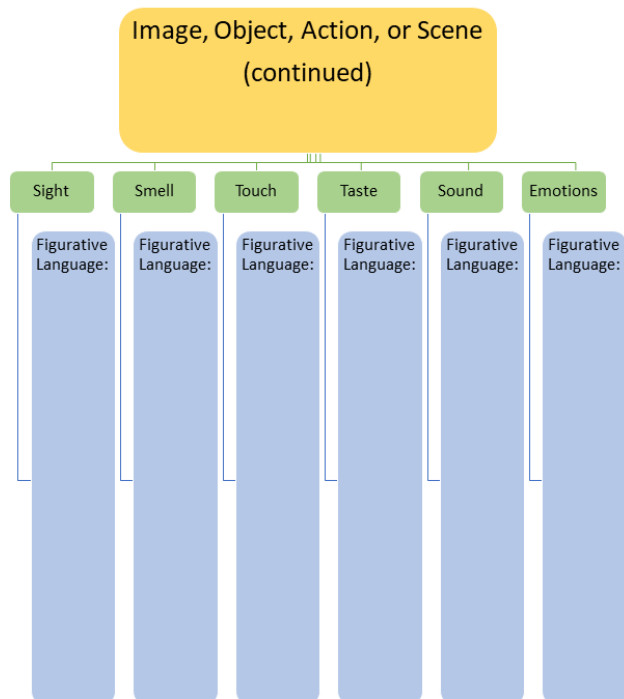
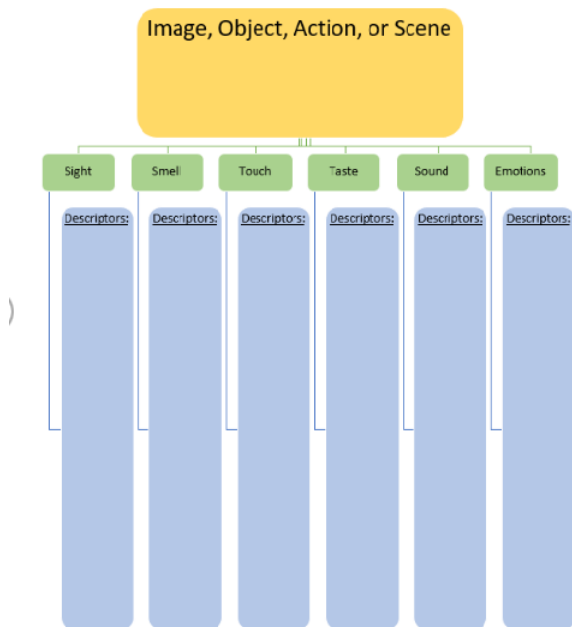
On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the scene you have created as a more thorough and cohesive piece in whatever genre you desire. You may add sentences and transitional words/phrases to help the piece flow.

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## 18.6: Image Builder

This exercise encourages you to experiment with thick description by focusing on one element of your writing in expansive detail. Read the directions below, then use the graphic organizer on the following two pages or write your responses as an outline on a separate piece of paper.

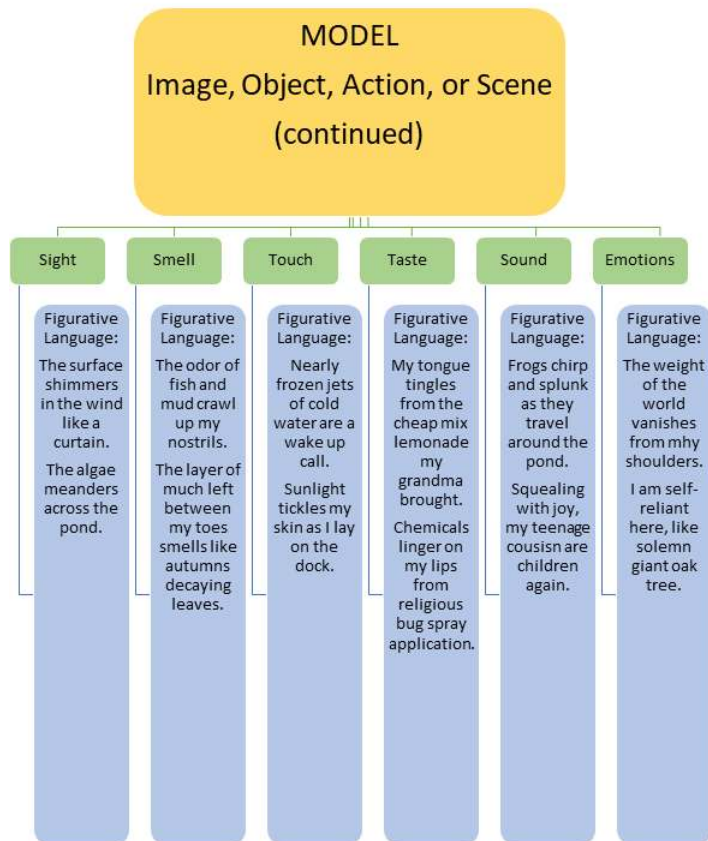


## MODEL

Image, Object, Action, or  
Scene:

The pond at my grandparent's  
house in Vermont.

| Sight                                                                        | Smell                                    | Touch                                                                                                           | Taste                                                                                                                                                                   | Sound                                                                                                                                     | Emotions                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Descriptors:<br>reflective<br>shimmering<br>partially<br>covered in<br>algae | Descriptors:<br>mucky<br>earthy<br>fishy | Descriptors:<br>just above<br>frozen cold<br>squishy mud<br>at the<br>bottom<br>warm<br>sunshine on<br>the dock | Descriptors:<br>accidental<br>gulps of<br>water taste<br>like algae<br>oversweet<br>Country<br>Time<br>lemondade<br>on the dock<br>traces of bug<br>spray on my<br>lips | Descriptors:<br>"Peeper"<br>frogs<br>chirping<br>tractor in<br>the distance<br>rumbling<br>splashes and<br>laughter<br>from my<br>cousins | Descriptors:<br>relaxation<br>warmth<br>independ-<br>ence |



Identify one image, object, action, or scene that:

1. Identify one image, object action or scene that you want to expand in your story. Name this element in the big, yellow bubble.
2. Develop at least three describing words for your element, considering each sense independently, as well as emotional associations. Focus on particularities. (Adjectives will come most easily, but remember that you can use any part of speech.)
3. Then, on the next page, create at least two descriptions using figurative language (metaphor, simile, personification, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, etc.) for your element, considering each sense independently, as well as emotional associations. Focus on particularities.
4. Finally, reflect on the different ideas you came up with.
  1. Which descriptions surprised you? Which descriptions are accurate but unanticipated?
  2. Where might you weave these descriptions in to your current project?
  3. How will you balance description with other rhetorical modes, like narration, argumentation, or analysis?
5. Repeat this exercise as desired or as instructed, choosing a different focus element to begin with.
6. Choose your favorite descriptors and incorporate them into your writing.

If you're struggling to get started, check out the example on the pages following the blank organizer.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 19: Model Texts by Student Authors

[19.1: Sample 1](#)

[19.2: Sample 2](#)

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## 19.1: Sample 1

### Innocence Again

Chris Chan, Portland State University, 2014. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

I have always loved the sea since I was young; the smell of saltiness in the air invigorates me and reminds me of the times spent with my family enjoying Sundays at the beach. In Singapore, the sea was always murky and green but I continued to enjoy all activities in it. When I went to Malaysia to work, I discovered that the sea was clear and blue and without hesitation, I signed up for a basic diving course and I was hooked. In my first year of diving, I explored all the dive destinations along the east coast of Malaysia and also took an advanced diving course which allowed me to dive up to a depth of thirty meters. Traveling to a dive site took no more than four hours by car and weekends were spent just enjoying the sea again.

Gearing up is no fun. Depending on the temperature of the water, I might put on a shorty, wetsuit or dry-suit. Then on come the booties, fins and mask which can be considered the easiest part unless the suit is tight—then it is a hop and pull struggle, which reminds me of how life can be at times. Carrying the steel tank, regulator, buoyancy control device (BCD) and weights is a torture. The heaviest weights that I ever had to use were 110 pounds, equivalent to my body weight; but as I jump in and start sinking into the sea, the contrast to weightlessness hits me. The moment that I start floating in the water, a sense of immense freedom and joy overtakes me.

Growing up, we have to learn the basics: time spent in classes to learn, constantly practicing to improve our skills while safety is ingrained by our parents. In dive classes, I was taught to never panic or do stupid stuff: the same with the lessons that I have learned in life. Panic and over-inflated egos can lead to death, and I have heard it happens all the time. I had the opportunity to go to Antarctica for a diving expedition, but what led to me getting that slot was the death of a very experienced diver who used a dry suit in a tropic climate against all advice. He just overheated and died. Lessons learned in the sea can be very profound, but they contrast the life I live: risk-taker versus risk-avoider. However, when I have perfected it and it is time to be unleashed, it is time to enjoy. I jump in as I would jump into any opportunity, but this time it is into the deep blue sea of wonders.

A sea of wonders waits to be explored. Every journey is different: it can be fast or slow, like how life takes me. The sea decides how it wants to carry me; drifting fast with the currents so that at times, I hang on to the reef and corals like my life depends on it, even though I am taught never to touch anything underwater. The fear I feel when I am speeding along with the current is that I will be swept away into the big ocean, never to be found. Sometimes, I feel like I am not moving at all, kicking away madly until I hyperventilate because the sea is against me with its strong current holding me against my will.

The sea decides what it wants me to see: turtles popping out of the seabed, manta rays gracefully floating alongside, being in the middle of the eye of a barracuda hurricane, a coral shelf as big as a car, a desert of bleached corals, the emptiness of the seabed with not a fish in sight, the memorials of death caused by the December 26 tsunami—a barren sea floor with not a soul or life in sight.

The sea decides what treasures I can discover: a black-tipped shark sleeping in an underwater cavern, a pike hiding from predators in the reef, an octopus under a dead tree trunk that escapes into my buddy's BCD, colorful mandarin fish mating at sunset, a deadly box jellyfish held in my gloved hands, pygmy seahorses in a fern—so tiny that to discover them is a journey itself.

Looking back, diving has taught me more about life, the ups and downs, the good and bad, and to accept and deal with life's challenges. Everything I learn and discover underwater applies to the many different aspects of my life. It has also taught me that life is very short: I have to live in the moment or I will miss the opportunities that come my way. I allow myself to forget all my sorrow, despair and disappointments when I dive into the deep blue sea and savor the feelings of peacefulness and calmness. There is nothing around me but fish and corals, big and small. Floating along in silence with only the sound of my breath—inhale and exhale. An array of colors explodes in front of my eyes, colors that I never imagine I will discover again, an underwater rainbow as beautiful as the rainbow in the sky after a storm. As far as my eyes can see, I look into the depth of the ocean with nothing to anchor me. The deeper I get, the darker it turns. From the light blue sky to the deep navy blue, even blackness into the void. As the horizon darkens, the feeding frenzy of the underwater world starts and the watery landscape comes alive. Total darkness surrounds me but the sounds that I can hear are the little clicks in addition to my breathing. My senses overload as I cannot see what is around me, but the sea tells me it is alive and it anchors me to the depth of my soul. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the

era of manhood... In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man in spite of real sorrows.... The sea and diving have given me new outlook on life, a different planet where I can float into and enjoy as an adult, a new, different perspective on how it is to be that child again. Time and time again a I enter into the sea, I feel innocent all over again.

*Teacher takeaway: One of the more difficulty aspects of writing a descriptive essay is to move beyond itself to think through writing. This author intersperses metaphors and analogies to let the reader gain access and derive meaning. The essay could benefit from a more structured system of organization and clearer unifying points.*

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## 19.2: Sample 2

By Kiley Yoakum, Portland Community College, 2016. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

Her vision was tunneled in on his face. His eyes were wet and his mouth was open as if he was trying to catch his breath. He leaned in closer and wrapped his arms around her face and spoke to her in reassuring whispers that reminded her of a time long ago when he taught her to pray. As her vision widened the confusion increased. She could not move. She opened her mouth to speak, but could not. She wanted to sit up, but was restrained to the bed. She did not have the energy to sob, but she could feel tears roll down her cheek and didn't try to wipe them away. The anxiety overtook her and she fell back into a deep sleep.

She opened her eyes and tried to find reality. She was being tortured. Her feet were the size of pumpkins and her stomach was gutted all the way up her abdomen, her insides exposed for all to see. She was on display like an animal at the zoo. Tubes were coming out of her in multiple directions and her throat felt as if it were coated in chalk. She was conscious, but still a prisoner. Then a nurse walked in, pulled on one of her tubes, and sent her back into the abyss.

Eventually someone heard her speak, and with that she learned that if she complained enough she would get an injection. It gave her a beautiful head rush that temporarily dulled the pain. She adored it. She was no longer restrained to the bed, but still unable to move or eat. She was fed like baby. Each time she woke she was able to gather bits of information: she would not be going back to work, or school.

She began to heal. They removed a tube or two and she became more mobile. She was always tethered to a machine, like a dog on a leash. The pain from the surgeries still lingered and the giant opening in her stomach began to slowly close. The couch was her safe haven. She came closer to dying during recovery than she had in the coma. The doctors made a mistake. She began to sweat profusely a shiver all at the same time. She vomited every twenty minutes like clockwork. It went on like that for days and she was ready to go. She wanted to slip back into her sleep. It was time to wake up from this nightmare. She pulled her hair and scratched her wrists trying to draw blood, anything to shake herself awake.

She sat on a beach remembering that nightmare. The sun beat down recharging a battery within her that had been running on empty for far too long. The waves washed up the length of her body and she sank deeper into the warm sand. She lay on her back taking it all in. Then laid her hand on top of her stomach, unconsciously she ran her fingers along a deep scar.

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 20: Telling a Story

20.1: Vocabulary and ideas to consider as you write narratives.

20.2: Telling a Story

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## 20.1: Vocabulary and ideas to consider as you write narratives.

| Vocab Words             | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Characteri-zation       | The process by which an author builds characters; can be accomplished directly or indirectly.                                                                                                                |
| Dialogue                | A communication between two or more people. Can include any mode of communication, including speech, texting, e-mail, Facebook post, body language, etc.                                                     |
| Dynamic Character       | A character who noticeably changes within the scope of a narrative, typically as a result of the plot events and/or other characters. Contrast with static character.                                        |
| Epiphany                | A character's sudden realization of a personal or universal truth. See dynamic character.                                                                                                                    |
| Flat Character          | A character who is minimally detailed, only briefly sketched or named. Generally less central to the events and relationships portrayed in a narrative. Contrast with round character.                       |
| Mood                    | The emotional dimension which a reader experiences while encountering a text. Compare with tone.                                                                                                             |
| Multimedia / Multigenre | A term describing a text that combines more than one media and/or more than one genre (e.g., an essay with embedded images; a portfolio with essays, poetry, and comic strips; a mixtape with song reviews). |
| Narration               | A rhetorical mode involving the construction and relation of stories. Typically integrates description as a technique.                                                                                       |
| Narrative Pacing        | The speed with which a story progresses through plot events. Can be influenced by reflective and descriptive writing.                                                                                        |
| Narrative Scope         | The boundaries of a narrative in time, space, perspective, and focus.                                                                                                                                        |
| Narrative Sequence      | The order of events included in a narrative.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Plot                    | The events included within the scope of a narrative.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Point-Of-View           | The perspective from which a story is told, determining both grammar (pronouns) and perspective (speaker's awareness of events, thoughts, and circumstances).                                                |
| Round Character         | A character who is thoroughly characterized and dimensional, detailed with attentive description of their traits and behaviors. Contrast with flat character.                                                |
| Static Character        | A character who remains the same throughout the narrative. Contrast with dynamic character.                                                                                                                  |
| Tone                    | The emotional register of the text. Compare with mood.                                                                                                                                                       |

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## 20.2: Telling a Story

### 19.2.1 Plot Shapes and Form

Plot is one of the basic elements of every story: put simply, plot refers to the actual events that take place within the bounds of your narrative, we can identify “plot” as the primary subject of a descriptive personal narrative.

Three related elements to consider are scope, sequence, and pacing.

### 19.2.2 Scope

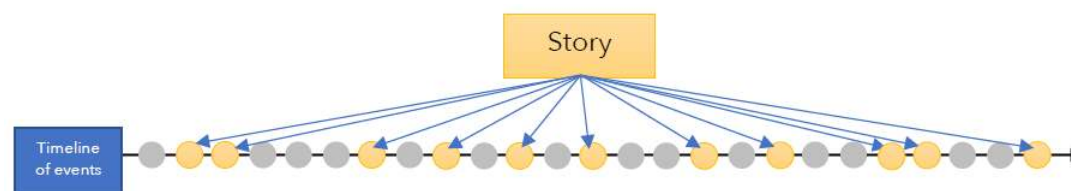
The term scope refers to the boundaries of your plot. Where and when does it begin and end? What is its focus? What background information and details does your story require? I often think about narrative scope as the edges of a photograph: a photo, whether of a vast landscape or a microscopic organism, has boundaries. Those boundaries inform the viewer’s perception. In this example, the scope of the left photo allows for a story about a neighborhood in San Francisco. In the middle, it is a story about the fire escape, the clouds. On the right, the scope of the story directs our attention to the birds. In this way, narrative scope impacts the content you include and your reader’s perception of that content in context.

The way we determine scope varies based on rhetorical situation, but generally many developing writers struggle with a scope that is too broad: writers often find it challenging to zero in on the events that drive a story and prune out extraneous information.

Consider, as an example, how you might respond if your friend asked what you did last weekend. If you began with, “I woke up on Saturday morning, rolled over, checked my phone, fell back asleep, woke up, pulled my feet out from under the covers, put my feet on the floor, stood up, stretched...” then your friend might have stopped listening by the time you get to the really good stuff. Your scope is too broad, so you’re including details that distract or bore your reader. Instead of listing every detail in order like this:



... you should consider narrowing your scope, focusing instead on the important, interesting, and unique plot points (events) like this:



You might think of this as the difference between a series of snapshots and a roll of film: instead of twenty-four frames per second video, your entire story might only be a few photographs aligned together.

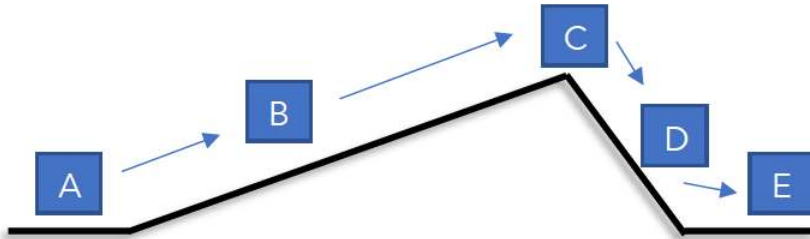
It may seem counterintuitive, but we can often make more impact by digging into a few events rather than trying to relate every idea or event.

The most impactful stories are often those that represent something, so your scope should focus on the details that fit into the bigger picture. To return to the previous example, you could tell me more about your weekend by sharing a specific detail than every detail. “Brushing my teeth Saturday morning, I didn’t realize that I would probably have a scar from wrestling that bear on Sunday” reveals more than “I woke up on Saturday morning, rolled over, checked my phone, fell back asleep, woke up, pulled my feet out from under the covers, put my feet on the floor, stood up, stretched...” Not only have you foregrounded the more interesting event, but you have also foreshadowed that you had a harrowing, adventurous, and unexpected weekend.

### 19.2.3 Sequence and Pacing

The order of the events and the amount of time you give to each event, respectively—will determine your reader’s experience. There are an infinite number of ways you might structure your story, and the shape of your story is worth deep consideration. Although the traditional forms for narrative sequence is not your only options, let’s take a look at a few tried-and-true shapes your plot might take.

You might recognize Freytag’s Pyramid from other classes you’ve taken:

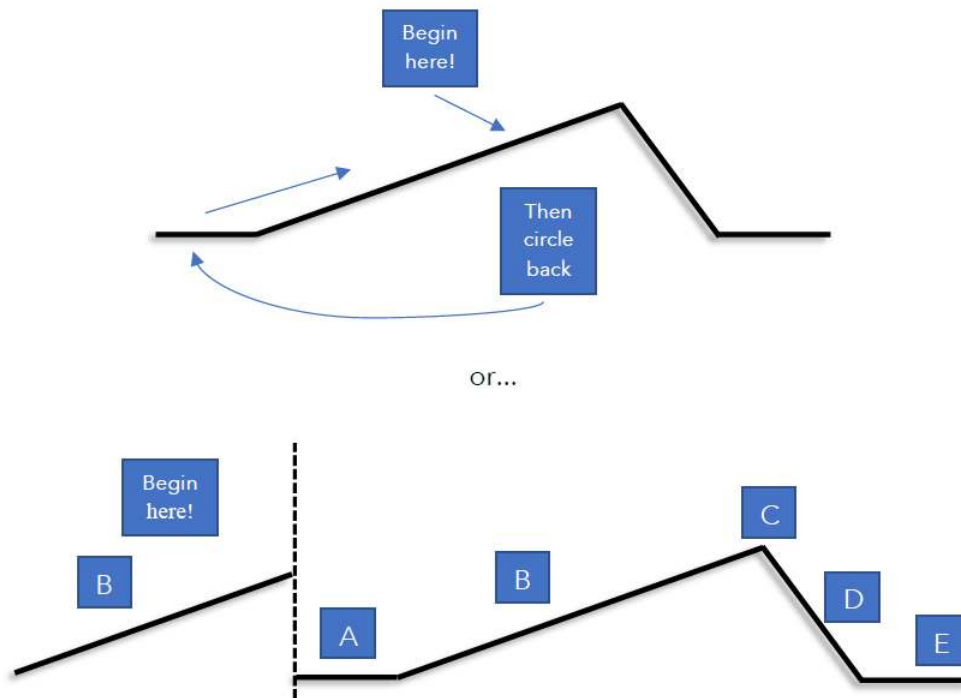


1. Exposition: Here, you’re setting the scene, introducing characters, and preparing the reader for the journey.
2. Rising action: In this part, things start to happen. You (or your characters) encounter conflict, set out on a journey, meet people, etc.
3. Climax: This is the peak of the action, the main showdown, the central event toward which your story has been building.
4. Falling action: Now things start to wind down. You (or your characters) come away from the climactic experience changed—at the very least, you are wiser for having had that experience.
5. Resolution: Also known as *dénouement*, this is where all the loose ends get tied up. The central conflict has been resolved, and everything is back to normal, but perhaps a bit different.

This narrative shape is certainly a familiar one. Many films, TV shows, plays, novels, and short stories follow this track. But it’s not without its flaws. You should discuss with your classmates and instructors what shortcomings you see in this classic plot shape. What assumptions does it rely on? How might it limit a storyteller? Sometimes, I tell my students to “Start the story where the story starts”—often, steps A and B in the diagram above just delay the most descriptive, active, or meaningful parts of the story. If nothing else, we should note that it is not necessarily the best way to tell your story, and definitely not the only way.

Another classic technique for narrative sequence is known as *in medias res*—literally, “in the middle of things.” As you map out your plot in pre-writing or experiment with during the drafting and revision process, you might find this technique a more active and exciting way to begin a story.

In the earlier example, the plot is chronological, linear, and continuous: the story would move smoothly from beginning to end with no interruptions. *In medias res* instead suggests that you start your story with action rather than exposition, focusing on an exciting, imagistic, or important scene. Then, you can circle back to an earlier part of the story to fill in the blanks for your reader. Using the previously discussed plot shape, you might visualize it like this:



You can experiment with your sequence in a variety of other ways, which might include also making changes to your scope: instead of a continuous story, you might have a series of fragments with specific scope (like photographs instead of video). Instead of chronological order, you might bounce around in time or space, or in reverse. Some narratives reject traditional narrative sequence.

Or

Lost in my thoughts. I shuddered as he train ground to a full stop in the middle of an intersection. I was surprised, jarred by the unannounced and abrupt jerking of the car. I sought clues for our stop outside the window. All I saw were pigeons as started and clueless as I.

### 19.2.4 Point-of-View

The position from which your story is told will help shape your reader's experience, the language your narrator and characters use, and even the plot itself. You might recognize this from *Dear White People* Volume 1 or *Arrested Development* Season 4, both Netflix TV series. Typically, each episode in these seasons explores similar plot events, but from a different character's perspective. Because of their unique vantage points, characters can tell different stories about the same realities.

This is, of course, true for our lives more generally. In addition to our differences in knowledge and experiences, we also interpret and understand events differently. In our writing, narrative position is informed by point-of-view and the emotional valences I refer to here as tone and mood.

Point-of-view (POV): the perspective from which a story is told. This is a grammatical phenomenon—i.e., it decides pronoun use—but, more importantly, it impacts tone, mood, scope, voice, and plot.<sup>18</sup>

Although point-of-view will influence tone and mood, we can also consider what feelings we want to convey and inspire independently as part of our narrative position.

Tone: the emotional register of the story's language. What emotional state does the narrator of the story (not the author, but the speaker) seem to be in? What emotions are you trying to imbue in your writing?

Mood: the emotional register a reader experiences<sup>19</sup>. What emotions do you want your reader to experience? Are they the same feelings you experienced at the time?

Typically, you will tell your story from the first-person point-of-view, but personal narratives can also be told from a different perspective; as you're developing and revising your writing, try to inhabit different authorial positions: What would change if you used the third person POV instead of first person? What different meanings would your reader find if you told this story with a different tone—bitter instead of nostalgic, proud rather than embarrassed, sarcastic rather than genuine?

Furthermore, there are many rhetorical situations that call for different POVs. So, as you evaluate which POV will be most effective for your current rhetorical situation, bear in mind that the same choice might inform your future writing.

### 19.2.5 Building Characters

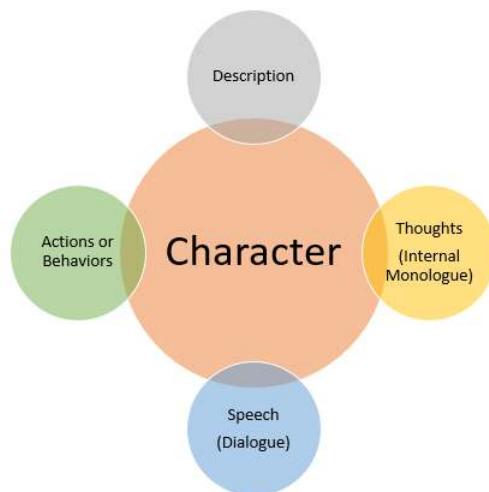
Whether your story is fiction or nonfiction, you should spend some time thinking about characterization: the development of characters through actions, descriptions, and dialogue. Your audience will be more engaged with and sympathetic toward your narrative if they can vividly imagine the characters as real people.

Like description, characterization relies on specificity. Consider the following contrast in character descriptions:

My mom is great. She is an average-sized brunette with brown eyes. She is very loving and supportive, and I know I can rely on her. She taught me everything I know.

In addition to some of my father's idiosyncrasies, however, he is also one of the most kind-hearted and loving people in my life. One of his signature actions is the 'cry-smile,' in which he simultaneously cries and smiles any time he experiences a strong positive emotion (which is almost daily). 20

How does the "cry-smile" detail enhance the characterization of the speaker's parent?



To break it down to process, characterization can be accomplished in two ways:

1. **Directly**, through specific description of the character—What kind of clothes do they wear? What do they look, smell, sound like?

Or

1. **Indirectly**, through the behaviors, speech, and thoughts of the character— What kind of language, dialect, or register do they use? What is the tone, inflection, and timbre of their voice? How does their manner of speaking reflect their attitude toward the listener? How do their actions reflect their traits? What's on their mind that they won't share with the world?

Thinking through these questions will help you get a better understanding of each character (often including yourself!). You do not need to include all the details, but they should inform your description, dialogue, and narration.

Your most important characters should be round the added detail will help your reader better visualize, understand, and care about them.

Less important characters should take up less space and will therefore have less detailed characterization.

Even though all of us are always changing, some people will behave and appear the same throughout the course of your story. Static characters can serve as a reference point for dynamic characters to show the latter's growth.

Most likely, you will be a dynamic character in your personal narrative because such stories are centered around an impactful experience, relationship, or place. Dynamic characters learn and grow over time, either gradually or with an

Dialogue – communication between two or more characters.

Think of the different conversations you've had today, with family, friends, or even classmates. Within each of those conversations, there were likely pre-established relationships that determined how you talked to each other: each its own rhetorical situation. A dialogue with your friend is different from one with your family. These relationships can influence tone of voice, word choice (such as using slang, jargon, or lingo), what details we share, and even what language we speak.

As we've seen above, good dialogue often demonstrates the traits of a character or the relationship of characters. From reading or listening to how people talk to one another, we often infer the relationships they have. We can tell if they're having an argument or conflict, if one is experiencing some internal conflict or trauma, if they're friendly acquaintances or cold strangers, even how their emotional or professional attributes align or create opposition.

Often, dialogue does more than just one thing, which makes it a challenging tool to master. When dialogue isn't doing more than one thing, it can feel flat or expository, like a bad movie or TV show where everyone is saying their feelings or explaining what just happened. For example, there is a difference between "No thanks, I'm not hungry" and "I've told you, I'm not hungry." The latter shows frustration, and hints at a previous conversation. Exposition can have a place in dialogue, but we should use it deliberately, with an awareness of how natural or unnatural it may sound. We should be aware how dialogue impacts the pacing of the narrative. Dialogue can be musical and create tempo, with either quick back and forth, or long drawn out pauses between two characters. Rhythm of a dialogue can also tell us about the characters' relationship and emotions.

We can put some of these thoughts to the test using the exercises in the Activities section of this chapter to practice writing dialogue.

### 19.2.6 Choosing a Medium

Narration, as you already know, can occur in a variety of media: TV shows, music, drama, and even Snapchat Stories practice narration in different ways. Your instructor may ask you to write a traditional personal narrative (using only prose), but if you are given the opportunity, you might also consider what other media or genres might inform your narration. Some awesome narratives use a multimedia or multi-genre approach, synthesizing multiple different forms, like audio and video, or nonfiction, poetry, and photography.

In addition to the limitations and opportunities presented by your rhetorical situation, choosing a medium also depends on the opportunities and limitations of different forms. To determine which tool or tools you want to use for your story, you should consider which medium (or combination of media) will help you best accomplish your purpose. Here's a non-comprehensive list of storytelling tools you might incorporate in place of or in addition to traditional prose:

- Images
- Poetry
- Video
- Audio recording
- "Found" texts (fragments of other authors' works reframed to tell a different story)
- Illustrations
- Comics, manga, or other graphic storytelling
- Journal entries or series of letters
- Plays, screenplays, or other works of drama
- Blogs and social media postings

Although each of these media is a vehicle for delivering information, it is important to acknowledge that each different medium will have a different impact on the audience; in other words, the medium can change the message itself.

There are a number of digital tools available that you might consider for your storytelling medium, as well.

[Link to NCH.com for Audio Editing and Engineering](#)

[Link to VideoScribe.co for Whiteboard Video Creation \(Free Trial\)](#)

[Link to PiktoChart.com for Infographic Maker](#)

[Link to Pixton.com for Comic and Graphic Narrative Software \(Free, Paid Upgrade\)](#)

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 21: Story Activities

21.1: Idea Generation- What Stories Can I Tell?

21.2: Idea Generation- Mapping an Autobiography

21.3: Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue

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## 21.1: Idea Generation- What Stories Can I Tell?

You may already have an idea of an important experience in your life about which you could tell a story. Although this might be a significant experience, it is most definitely not the only one worth telling. (Remember: question your first ideas—are they best?)

Just as with description, good narration isn't about shocking content but rather about effective and innovative writing. In order to broaden your options before you begin developing your story, complete the organizer on the following pages.

Then, choose three of the list items from this page that you think are especially unique or have had a serious impact on your life experience. On a separate sheet of paper, free-write about each of your three list items for no less than five minutes per item.

### List 5 places that are significant to you (real, fiction, or imaginary)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

### List 10 People who have influenced your life in some way (positive or negative, acquainted or not, real or fictional)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

### List 10 ways that you identify yourself (roles, adjectives, or names)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

**List 3 obstacles you've overcome to be where you are today**

1)

2)

3)

**List 3 difficult moments – tough decisions, traumatic or challenging experiences, or troubling circumstances**

1)

2)

3)

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## 21.2: Idea Generation- Mapping an Autobiography

This exercise will help you develop a variety of options for your story, considered especially in the context of your entire life trajectory.

First, brainstorm at least ten moments or experiences that you consider influential— moments that in some way impacted your identity, your friendships, and your worldview— for the better or for the worse. Record them and then, rate those experiences on a degree of “awesomeness,” “pleasurably,” or something else along those lines, on a scale of 0 – 10, with 10 being the hands down best moment of your life and 0 being the worst.

Next, plot those events on the graph paper on the back of this page. Each point is an event; the x-axis is your age, and the y-axis is the factor of positivity. Connect the points with a line.

Finally, circle three of the events/experiences on your graph. On a clean sheet of paper, free-write about each of those three for at least four minutes. (Abrams based this activity on one from Lily Harris.)



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## 21.3: Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue

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Abrams Thanked Alex Dannemiller for his contributions to this subsection.

### 20.3.1 The Overheard

1. Go to a public space and eavesdrop on a conversation. (Try not to be too creepy—be considerate and respectful of the people.) You don't need to take avid notes, but observe natural inflections, pauses, and gestures. What do these characteristics imply about the relationship between the speakers?
2. Jot down a fragment of striking, interesting, or weird dialogue.
3. Now, use that fragment of dialogue to imagine a digital exchange: consider that fragment as a Facebook status, a text message, or a tweet. Then, write at least ten comments or replies to that fragment.
4. Reflect on the imaginary digital conversation you just created. What led you to make the choices you made? How does digital dialogue differ from real-life dialogue?

### 20.3.2 Beyond Words

As you may have noticed in the previous exercises, dialogue is about more than just what the words say: our verbal communication is supplemented by inflection, tone, body language, and pace, among other things. With a partner, exchange the following lines. Without changing the words, try to change the meaning using your tone, inflection, body language, etc.

- “Can we talk about it?”
- “What do you want from me?”

After each round, debrief with your partner; jot down a few notes together to describe how your variations changed the meaning of each word. Then, consider how you might capture and relay these different deliveries using written language— what some writers call “dialogue tags.” Dialogue tags try to reproduce the nuance of our spoken and unspoken languages (e.g., “he muttered,” “she shouted in frustration,” “they insinuated, crossing their arms”).

### 20.3.3 Using Images to Tell a Story

Even though this textbook focuses on writing as a means to tell stories, you can also construct thoughtful and unique narratives using solely images, or using images to supplement your writing. A single photograph can tell a story, but a series will create a more cohesive narrative. To experiment with this medium, try the following activity.

1. Using your cell phone or a digital camera, take at least one photograph (of yourself, events, and/or your surroundings) each hour for one day.
2. Compile the photos and arrange them in chronological order. Choose any five photos that tell a story about part or all of your day.
  - How did you determine which photos to remove? What does this suggest about your narrative scope?
  - Where might you want to add photos or text? Why?

To consider models of this kind of narrative, check out this

[Link to AlJazeera.com for Al Jazeera's “In Pictures” Series](#)

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 22: Model Texts by Student Authors

22.1: Sample 1

22.2: Sample 2

22.3: Sample 3

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## 22.1: Sample 1

### Under the Knife

Essay by Joey Butler, Portland Community College, 2016.

The white fluorescent lights mirrored off the waxed and buffed vinyl flooring. Doctors and nurses bee-lined through small congregations of others conversing. Clocks were posted at every corner of every wall and the sum of the quiet ticking grew to an audible drone. From the vinyl floors to the desks where decade old Dell computers sat, a sickly gray sucked all the life from the room. The only source of color was the rainbow circle crocheted blanket that came customary for minors about to undergo surgery. It was supposed to be a token of warmth and happiness, a blanket you could find life in; however, all I found in the blanket was an unwanted pity.

Three months ago doctors diagnosed me with severe scoliosis. They told me I would need to pursue orthopedic surgery to realign my spine. For years I endured through back pain and discomfort, never attributing it to the disease. In part, I felt as if it was my fault, that me letting the symptoms go unattended for so long led it to become so extreme. Those months between the diagnosis and the surgery felt like mere seconds. Every day I would recite to myself that everything would be okay and that I had nothing to worry about. However, then minutes away from sedation, I felt like this bed I was in—only three feet off the ground—would put me six feet under.

The doctors informed me beforehand of the potential complications that could arise from surgery. Partial paralysis, infection, death, these words echoed throughout the chasms of my mind. Anxiety overwhelmed me; I was a dying animal surrounded by ravenous vultures, drool dripping awaiting their next meal. My palms were a disgusting swamp of sweat that gripped hard onto the white sheets that covered me. A feeling of numbness lurked into my extremities and slowly infected its way throughout my body.

The vinyl mattress cover I was on felt like a porcelain toilet seat during a cold winter morning. It did not help my discomfort that I had nothing on but a sea blue gown that covered only the front and ankle high socks that seemed like bathroom scrubbers. A heart rate monitor clamp was tightly affixed onto my index finger that had already lost circulation minutes ago. The monitor was the snitch giving away my growing anxiety; my heart rate began to increase as I awaited surgery. Attached to the bed frame was a remote that could adjust almost every aspect of the bed. I kept the bed at an almost right angle: I wanted to be aware of my surroundings.

My orthopediatrician and surgeon, Dr. Halsey, paced in from the hallway and gave away a forced smile to ease me into comfort. The doctor shot out his hand and I hesitantly stuck out mine for the handshake. I've always hated handshakes; my hands are incredibly sweaty and I did not want to disgust him with my soggy tofu hands. He asked me how my day was so far, and I responded with a concise "Alright." Truth was, my day so far was pretty lackluster and tiring. I had woken up before the birds had even begun to chirp, I ate nothing for breakfast, and I was terrified out of my mind.

This Orthopedic Surgeon, this man, this human, was fully in charge of the surgery. Dr. Halsey and other surgeons deal with one of the most delicate and fragile things in the world—people's lives. The amount of pressure and nerves he must face on an everyday basis is incredible. His calm and reserved nature made me believe that he was confident in himself, and that put me more at ease.

An overweight nurse wheeled in an IV with a bag of solution hooked to the side. "Which arm do you prefer for your IV?" she inquired.

Needles used to terrify me. They were tiny bullets that pierced through your skin like mosquitos looking for dinner, but by now I had grown accustomed to them. Like getting stung by a bee for the first time, my first time getting blood taken was a grueling adventure.

"Left, I guess," I let out with a long anxiety-filled sigh.

The rubber band was thick and dark blue, the same color as the latex gloves she wore. I could feel my arm pulse in excitement as they tightly wrapped the rubber band right above my elbow.

"Oh, wow! Look at that vein pop right out!" The nurse exclaimed as she inspected the bulging vein.

I tried to distract myself from the nurse so I wouldn't hesitate as the IV was going in. I stared intently at the speckled ceiling tiles. They were the same ones used in schools. As my eyes began to relax, the dots on the ceiling started to transform into different shapes and animals. There was a squirrel, a seal, and a do—I felt pain shock through my body as the IV needle had infiltrated into my arm.

Dr. Halsey had one arm planted to the bottom end of the bed frame and the other holding the clipboard that was attached to the frame. "We're going to pump two solutions through you. The first will be the saline, and the second will be the sedation and anesthesia." The nurse leaned over and punched in buttons connected to the IV. After a loud beep, I felt a cooling sensation run down my arm. I felt like a criminal, prosecuted for murder, and now was one chemical away from finishing the cocktail execution. My eyes darted across the room; I was searching for hope I could cling to.

My mother was sitting on a chair on the other side of the room, eyes slowly and silently sweating. She clutched my father's giant calloused hands as he browsed the internet on his phone. While I would say that I am more similar to my mother than my father, I think we both dealt with our anxiety in similar ways. Just like my father, I too needed a visual distraction to avoid my anxiety. "I love you," my mother called out.

All I did was a slight nod in affirmation. I was too fully engulfed by my own thoughts to even try and let out a single syllable. What is my purpose in life? Have I been successful in making others proud? Questions like these crept up in my mind like an unwanted visitor.

"Here comes the next solution," Dr. Halsey announced while pointing his pen at the IV bags. "10...", he began his countdown.

I needed answers to the questions that had invaded my mind. So far in life, I haven't done anything praiseworthy or even noteworthy. I am the bottom of the barrel, a dime a dozen, someone who will probably never influence the future to come. However, in those final seconds, I realize that I did not really care.

"9" Dr. Halsey continued the countdown. I've enjoyed my life. I've had my fun and shared many experiences with my closest friends. If I'm not remembered in a few years after I die, then so be it. I'm proud of my small accomplishments so far.

"8 " Although I am not the most decorated of students, I can say that at least I tried my hardest. All that really mattered was that I was happy. I had hit tranquility; my mind had halt I was out even before Dr. Halsey finished the countdown. I was at ease.

Teacher takeaways: The scope is specifically limited to the hours leading up to the surgery and employs slow deliberate pacing too. However, some of the details don't advance the narrative and the essay feels bloated.

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## 22.2: Sample 2

### Breathing Easy

An anonymous student author, 2016. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

Most people's midlife crises happen when they're well into adulthood; mine happened when I was twelve. For most of my childhood and into my early teen years, I was actively involved in Community Theater. In the fall of 2010, I was in the throes of puberty as well as in the middle of rehearsals for a production of *Pinocchio*, in which I played the glamorous and highly coveted role of an unnamed puppet. On this particular day, however, I was not onstage rehearsing with all the other unnamed puppets as I should've been; instead, I was locked backstage in a single-stall bathroom, dressed in my harlequin costume and crying my eyes out on the freezing tile floor, the gaudy red and black makeup dripping down my face until I looked like the villain from a low-budget horror movie.

The timing of this breakdown was not ideal. I don't remember exactly what happened in the middle of rehearsal that triggered this moment of hysteria, but I know it had been building for a long time, and for whatever reason, that was the day the dam finally broke. At the time, I had pinpointed the start of my crisis to a moment several months earlier when I started questioning my sexuality. Looking back now, though, I can see that this aspect of my identity had been there since childhood, when as a seven-year-old I couldn't decide if I would rather marry Aladdin or Princess Jasmine.

Up until the age of 16, I lived in Amarillo, Texas, a flat, brown city in the middle of a huge red state. Even though my parents had never been blatantly homophobic in front of me, I grew up in a conservative religious community that was fiercely cis-heteronormative. My eighth-grade health teacher kicked off our unit on sex education with a contemptuous, "We aren't going to bother learning about safe sex for homosexuals. We're only going to talk about normal relationships." Another time, when I told a friend about a secret I had (unrelated to my sexuality), she responded with, "That's not too bad. At least you're not gay," her lips curling in disdain as if simply saying the sinful word aloud left a bad taste in her mouth.

I laid in a crumpled mess on that bathroom floor, crying until my head throbbed and the linoleum beneath me became slick with tears and dollar-store face paint. By the time my crying slowed and I finally pulled myself up off the floor, my entire body felt weighed down by the secret I now knew I had to keep, and despite being a perfectionist at heart, I couldn't find it within myself to care that I'd missed almost all of rehearsal. I looked at my tear-streaked face in the mirror, makeup smeared all over my burning cheeks, and silently admitted to myself what I had subconsciously known for a long time: that I wasn't straight, even though I didn't know exactly what I was yet. At the time, even thinking the words "I might be gay" to myself felt like a death sentence. I promised myself then and there that I would never tell anyone; that seemed to be the only option.

For several years, I managed to keep my promise to myself. Whereas before I had spent almost all of my free time with my friends, after my episode in the bathroom, I became isolated, making up excuses anytime a friend invited me out for fear of accidentally getting too comfortable and letting my secret slip. I spent most of middle school and the beginning of high school so far back in the closet I could barely breathe or see any light. I felt like the puppet I'd played in that production of *Pinocchio*—tied down by fear and shame, controlled by other people and their expectations of me rather than having the ability to be honest about who I was.

Just as I ended up breaking down in that theater bathroom stall when I was twelve, though, I eventually broke down again. My freshman year of high school was one of the worst years of my life. Struggling with mental illness and missing large portions of school as I went in and out of psychiatric hospitals was hard enough, but on top of all of that, I was also lying about a core part of my identity to everyone I knew. After a particularly rough night, I sat down and wrote a letter to my parents explaining that I was pansexual (or attracted to all genders and gender identities). "I've tried to stop being this way, but I can't," I wrote, my normally-neat handwriting reduced to a shaky chicken scratch as I struggled to control the trembling of my hands. "I hope you still love me." With my heart pounding violently in my chest, I signed the letter and left it in the kitchen for them to find before locking myself in my room and pretending to go to sleep so I wouldn't have to deal with their initial response.

By some amazing twist of fate, my parents did not have the horrible reaction I'd been dreading for the past two years. They knocked on my door a few minutes after I'd left the letter for them, and when I nervously let them in, they hugged me and told me that they loved me no matter what; my dad even said, "Kid, you couldn't have picked a better family to be gay in."

For the first time in years, I felt like I could breathe again. My fear of rejection was still there—after all, I still had to come out to most of my friends and extended family—but it seemed so much more manageable knowing I had my parents on my side. It took me several years to fully come out and get to a point where I felt comfortable in my own identity. A lot of people, even those who had known and loved me since I was a baby, told me that they couldn't be friends with me or my family anymore because of my "sinful lifestyle."

As painful as it was each time I was shunned by someone I thought was my friend, I eventually gained enough confidence in myself and my identity to stop caring as much when people tried to tear me down for something I know is outside of my control.

Now, as a fully out-of-the-closet queer person, I still face discrimination from certain people in my life and from society as a whole. However, I've learned that it's a lot easier to deal with judgment from external forces when you surround yourself with people who love and support you, and most importantly, when you have love for yourself, which I'm glad to say I now do.

Even though it was terrifying at first, I'm glad I broke the promise I made to myself in that backstage bathroom, because no matter what struggles I might face, at least I know I'm able to be open about who I am.

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## 22.3: Sample 3

### Visions

Essay by an anonymous student author, 2014. Reproduced with permission from the author.

Before I got sober I never paid attention to my dreams. I don't even remember if I had dreams. In the end I was spiritually broken, hopeless, scared and desperate. My life was dedicated to blotting out my miserable existence using copious amounts of booze and drugs. The substances stopped working. Every night was intoxicated tear soaked erratic fits of despair until I passed out. Only to wake up the next morning and begin the vicious cycle all over. Bending and writhing my way out of a five year heroin and alcohol addiction was just as scary. I was in jail. I had no idea how to live. I had no purpose in life. Then the dreams came back. Some of them were terrifying. Some dreams had inspiration. There is one dream I will never forget.

*I am standing in a room full of people. They are all sitting looking up at me. I am holding a hand drum. My hands are shaking and I am extremely nervous. An old woman enters the room and walks up to me. The old woman is about half my height. She is barefoot and wearing a long green wool dress. She is holding a walking stick and is draped in animal furs. She has long flowing hair that falls over the animal furs. The old woman looks at all the people in the room. Then she looks at me and says, "It's okay, they are waiting, sing." My heart is racing. I strike the hand drum with all my courage. I feel the heartbeat of the drum. It's my heartbeat. I begin to sing, honoring the four directions. After each verse I pause and the old woman pushes me forward "It's okay," she says, "Sing." I am singing louder now. The third verse is powerful. I am striking the drum with all my strength. Many people singing with me. My spirit is strong. During the fourth verse sparks are flying from the contact between the beater stick and my drum. I am striking the drum with all our strength. We are all singing together. The room is shaking with spirit. The old woman looks over at me and smiles.*

I woke up. My heart was racing. I took a deep breath of recirculated air. I could taste the institution. I looked over and saw my cellmate sleeping. I remembered where I was. I knew what I had to do. I had to get sober and stay sober. I had to find my spirit. I had to sing.

Before I got sober I never paid attention to my dreams. I don't even remember if I had dreams. In the end I was spiritually broken, hopeless, scared and desperate. My life was dedicated to blotting out my miserable existence using copious amounts of booze and drugs. The substances stopped working. Every night was intoxicated tear soaked erratic fits of despair until I passed out. Only to wake up the next morning and begin the vicious cycle all over. Bending and writhing my way out of a five year heroin and alcohol addiction was just as scary. I was in jail. I had no idea how to live. I had no purpose in life. Then the dreams came back. Some of them were terrifying. Some dreams had inspiration. There is one dream I will never forget.

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I woke up. My heart was racing. I took a deep breath of recirculated air. I could taste the institution. I looked over and saw my cellmate sleeping. I remembered where I was. I knew what I had to do. I had to get sober and stay sober. I had to find my spirit. I had to sing.

At six months of sobriety I was out in the real world. I was living on the Oregon Coast and I was attending local AA meetings. I was still lost but had the dream about singing with the drum in the back of my mind. One day an oldtimer walked into the meeting and sat down. He introduced himself, "My name is Gary, and I am an alcoholic from Colorado." We all respond, "Welcome Gary." Gary intrigued me. He was wearing old jeans, a sweatshirt and a faded old native pride hat with an eagle feather embroider on the front. Beneath the hat he wore round eyeglasses which sat on top of his large nose, below his nose was a bushy mustache. He resembled an Indian version of Groucho Marx. Something felt familiar about his spirit. After the meeting Gary walked up and introduced himself to me. I invited him to our native recovery circle we have on Wednesday nights.

Gary came to our circle that Wednesday. We made plans to hang out after the meeting. Gary is Oglala Lakota. He is a pipe carrier for the people. We decide to hold a pipe ceremony in order to establish connectedness and unite with one heart and mind. To pray and get to know each other. We went down to the beach and lit a fire. It was a clear, warm night. The stars were bright. The fire was crackling and the shadows of the flames were bouncing off the clear night sky. I took my shoes off and felt the cool soft sand beneath my feet and between my toes. The ocean was rumbling in the distance. Gary started digging around in his bag. The firelight bounced off his glasses giving a twinkle in his eye as he gave me a little smile. He pulled out a hand drum. My heart

stopped. He began to sing a song. I knew that song. He was honoring the four directions. My eyes began to water and a wave of emotion flooded over me. I looked up to the stars with gratitude. I asked Gary if he would teach me and he shrugged.

I began to hang around Gary a lot. I would just listen. He let me practice with his drum. He would talk and I would listen. Sometimes he would sing and I would sing along. We continued to go to our native recovery circle. It was growing in attendance. Gary would open the meeting by honoring the four directions with the song and we would smudge down. I would listen and sometimes sing along.

I had a year of sobriety when I got my first drum making supplies. I called Gary and he came over to help me make it. Gary showed me how to prep the hide. How to stretch the hide over the wooden hoop and how to lace it up in the back. I began to find purpose in the simple act of learning how to create stuff. I brought my drum to our native recovery circle. Around forty people attend our circle now. Many of them young and new still struggling with addiction. We lit the sage to open the meeting.

The smoke began to rise into the sky. I inhaled the smoky scent deep and could feel the serenity and cleansing property of the sage medicine. I looked around at all the people. They were all looking at me and waiting. Then I looked at Gary. Gary smiled and said, "It's okay, they are all waiting, sing."

At one meeting a young man struggling with alcoholism approaches me and tells me he needs to sing and wants to learn the songs. The next week we open the meeting and light the sage. The young man is standing next to me holding his own drum. His own heartbeat. He looks at all the people. They are all looking at him. He looks at me. I smile and say, "It's okay, they are waiting, sing."

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## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 23: Reflecting on an Experience

23.1: Reflective Vocabulary

23.2: Techniques

23.3: Reflective Activities

23.4: 22.4-.1 Sample 1

23.5: 22.4-.2 Sample 2

23.6: 22.4-.3 Sample 3

23.7: Assignment

23.8: One Example of a Peer Workshop Process

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## 23.1: Reflective Vocabulary

| Vocab Words  | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reflection   | A rhetorical gesture by which an author looks back, through the diegetic gap, to demonstrate knowledge or understanding gained from the subject on which they are reflecting. May also include consideration of the impact of that past subject on the author's future—"looking back in order to look forward." |
| Diegetic Gap | From "diegesis," the temporal distance between a first person narrator narrating and the same person acting in the plot events. i.e., the space between author-as-author and author-as-character.                                                                                                               |

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## 23.2: Techniques

*“Looking back in order to look forward,”*

(Abrams picked up this phrase from Kelly Gallagher. Gallagher, Kelly. *Write Like This*, Stenhouse, 2011).

or

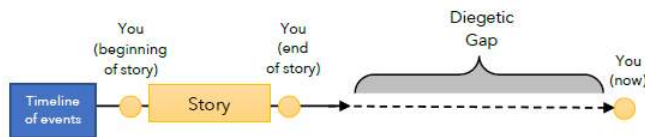
*“I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger.”*

From Faces. “Ooh La La.” Ooh La La, 1973.

As you draft your narrative, keep in mind that your story or stories should allow you to draw some insight that has helped you or may help your reader in some way: reflection can help you relate a lesson, explore an important part of your identity, or process through a complicated set of memories. Your writing should equip both you and your audience with a perspective or knowledge that challenges, nuances, or shapes the way you and they interact with the world. This reflection need not be momentous or dramatic, but will deepen the impression of your narrative.

Reflection relies on what I call the diegetic gap. Diegesis is a term from the field of narratology referring to narration—the story as it is portrayed. In turn, this gap identifies that time has passed between the plot events and your act of writing.

Simply put, the diegetic gap is the distance between you-the-author and you-the-character:



Because we are constantly becoming ourselves, shaped by our relationships and experiences, “you” are a different person at all three points. By looking back at your story, you can cultivate meaning in ways you could not during the events or immediately following them. Distance from an event changes the way we see previous events: time to process, combined with new experiences and knowledge, encourages us to interpret the past differently.

As you’ll see in the upcoming activities, looking back through this gap is a gesture akin to the phrase “When I look back now, I realize that...”

### 22.2.1 Wrap-up vs. Weave

Students often have a hard time integrating reflective writing throughout their narratives. In some cases, it is effective to use reflection to “wrap up” the story; it might not make sense to talk about a lesson learned before the story has played out. However, you should try to avoid the “tacked on” paragraph at the end of your story: if your reflective writing takes over at the end of the story, it should still feel like a part of the narrative rather than an afterthought. In other words, you should only reserve your reflective writing for the last paragraph or two if the story has naturally and fluidly brought us across the diegetic gap to present day.

Instead of a wrap-up, though, student writing often improves by weaving their reflection in with the story itself.

While your weave doesn’t need to be obvious, consider how the author’s choices in this essay enhance both the narrative and your understanding.

### 22.2.2 Spelling it Out vs. Implying Meaning

Finally, you should be deliberate about how overt you should make your reflection. If you are trying to connect with your reader, sharing your story so they might better know you, the world you live in, or even themselves, you need to walk the fine line between subtlety and over-explanation. You need to be clear enough that your reader can generalize and relate.

It is also possible, though, to be too explicit. Take, for example, Charles Perrault’s 1697 publication of a classic folk story, “Little Red Riding Hood.” 33 As with many fairy tales, this story is overtly didactic, stating the following moral after Little Red Riding Hood’s demise:

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well-bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say “wolf,” but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all.

Admittedly, this story is not the kind of narrative you will write if your teacher has assigned a descriptive personal narrative: it is fictional and in third person. For the purposes of studying reflection as a rhetorical gesture, though, “Little Red Riding Hood” does some of the same things that a personal narrative would: it uses a story to deliver a didactic message based on learning from experience.

I encourage you to discuss the misogynist leanings of this moral with your class. For our purposes here, though, let’s consider what Perrault’s “wrap-up” does, rhetorically. With a target audience of, presumably, children, Perrault assumes that the moral needs to be spelled out. This paragraph does the “heavy lifting” of interpreting the story as an allegory; it explains what the reader is supposed to take away from the fairy tale so they don’t have to figure it out on their own. On the other side of that coin, though, it limits interpretive possibilities. Perrault makes the intent of the story unambiguous, making it less likely that readers can synthesize their own meaning.

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## 23.3: Reflective Activities

### 22.3.1 What My Childhood Tastes Like

This exercise is loosely based on Gallagher, pp. 44-45. To practice reflection, try this activity writing about something very important—food. First, spend five minutes making a list of every food or drink you remember from childhood.

Mine looks like this:

- Plain cheese quesadillas, made by my mom in the miniscule kitchenette of our one-bedroom apartment
- “Chicken”-flavored ramen noodles, at home alone after school
- Cayenne pepper cherry Jell-O at my grandparents’ house
- Wheat toast slathered in peanut butter before school
- Lime and orange freeze-pops
- My stepdad’s meatloaf—ironically, the only meatloaf I’ve ever liked
- Cookie Crisp cereal (“It’s cookies—for breakfast!”)
- Macintosh apples and creamy Skippy peanut butter
- Tostitos Hint of Lime chips and salsa
- Love Apple Stew that only my grandma can make right
- Caramel brownies, by my grandma who can’t bake anymore

Then, identify one of those foods that holds a special place in your memory. Spend another five minutes free-writing about the memories you have surrounding that food. What makes it so special? What relationships are represented by that food? What life circumstances? What does it represent about you? Here’s my model; I started out with my first list item, but then digressed—you too should feel free to let your reflective writing guide you.

My mom became a gourmet with only the most basic ingredients. We lived bare bones in a one-bedroom apartment in the outskirts of Denver; for whatever selfless reason, she gave four-year-old the bedroom and she took a futon in the living room. She would cook for me after caring for other mothers’ four-year-olds all day long: usually plain cheese quesadillas (never any sort of add-ons, meats, or veggies—besides my abundant use of store-brand ketchup) or scrambled eggs (again, with puddles of ketchup).

When I was 6, my dad eventually used ketchup as a rationale for my second stepmom: “Shane, look! Judy likes ketchup on her eggs too!” But it was my mom I remembered cooking for me every night—not Judy, and certainly not my father.

“I don’t like that anymore. I like barbecue sauce on my eggs.”

### 22.3.2 Reflection as a Rhetorical Gesture

Although reflection isn’t necessarily its own rhetorical mode, it certainly is a posture that you can apply to any mode of writing. I picture it as a pivot, perhaps off to the left somewhere that opens up the diegetic gap and allows me to think through the impact of an experience. As mentioned earlier, this gesture can be represented by the phrase “When I look back now, I realize that...” To practice this pivot, try this exercise.

Over five minutes, write a description of the person who taught you to tie your shoes, ride a bike, or some other life skill. You may tell the story of learning this skill if you want, but it is not necessary. (See characterization for more on describing people.)

Write the phrase “When I look back now, I realize that...”

Complete the sentence and proceed with reflective writing for another five minutes. What does your reflection reveal about that person that the narrative doesn’t showcase? Why? How might you integrate this “wrap-up” into a “weave”?

### 22.3.3 End-of-Episode Voice-Overs: Reflection in Television Shows

In addition to written rhetoric, reflection is also a tool used to provide closure in many television shows: writers use voiceovers in these shows in an attempt to neatly tie up separate narrative threads for the audience, or to provide reflective insight on what the audience just watched for added gravity or relevance for their lives. Often a show will use a voiceover toward the end of the episode to provide (or try to provide) a satisfying dénouement.

To unpack this trope, watch an episode of one of the following TV shows (available on Netflix or Hulu at the time of this writing) and write a paragraph in response to the questions below:

- Scrubs
- Grey's Anatomy
- The Wonder Years
- How I Met Your Mother
- Ally McBeal
- Jane the Virgin
- Sex and the City

What individual stories were told in the episode? How was each story related to the others? Is there a common lesson at all the characters learned? At what point(s) does the voiceover use the gesture of reflection? Does it seem satisfying, genuine, frustrating?

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## 23.4: 22.4-.1 Sample 1

### Slowing Down

Essay by Beth Harding, Portland State University, 2017. Reproduced with permission from the student author .

I remember a time when I was still oblivious to it. My brother, sister, and I would pile out of the car and race through the parking lot to the store, or up the driveway to the house, never so much as a glance backward. I'm not sure exactly when it happened, but at some point I started to take notice, fall back, slow my pace, wait for him.

My dad wasn't always that slow. He didn't always have to concentrate so hard to just put one foot in front of the other. Memory has a way of playing tricks on you, but I swear that I can remember him being tall, capable, and strong once. When I was real little he could put me on his shoulders and march me around: I have pictures to prove it. I also have fuzzy memories of family camping trips—him taking us to places like Yosemite, Death Valley, and the California coast. What I remember clearly, though, was him driving to and from work every day in that old flatbed truck with the arc welder strapped to the back, going to fix boilers, whatever those were.

My dad owned his own business; I was always proud of that. I'd tell my friends that he was the boss. Of course, he was the sole employee, aside from my mom who did the books. I didn't tell them that part. But he did eventually hire a guy named David. My mom said it was to "be his hands." At the time I wasn't sure what that meant but I knew that his hands certainly looked different than other people's, all knotty. And he'd started to use that foam thing that he'd slip over his fork or toothbrush so he could grip it better. I supposed that maybe a new set of hands wasn't a bad idea.

When I was about 8, he and my mom made a couple of trips to San Francisco to see a special doctor. They said that he'd need several surgeries before they were through, but that they'd start on his knees. I pictured my dad as a robot, all of his joints fused together with nuts and bolts. I wondered if I'd have to oil him, like the tinman. It made me laugh to think about it: bionic dad. That wouldn't be so bad; maybe I could take him to show and tell. To be honest, I was sometimes a little embarrassed by the way he looked when he came to pick me up at school or my friend's house. He wore braces in his boots to help him walk, he always moved so slow, and his hands had all those knots that made them curl up like old grapevines. And then there was that dirty old fanny pack he always carried with him because he couldn't reach his wallet if it was in his pocket. Yeah, bionic dad would be an improvement.

It was around this time that my parents decided to give up the business. That was fine with me; it meant he'd be home all day. Also, his flatbed work truck quickly became our new jungle gym and the stage for many new imaginary games. Maybe it was him not being able to work anymore that finally made it click for me, but I think it was around this time that I started to slow down a bit, wait for him.

He could still drive—he just needed help starting the ignition. But now, once we'd get to where we were going, I'd try not to walk too fast. It had begun to occur to me that maybe walking ahead of him was kind of disrespectful or insensitive. In a way, I think that I just didn't want him to know that my legs worked better than his. So, I'd help him out of the car, offer to carry his fanny pack, and try to walk casually next to him, as if I'd always kept that pace.

I got pretty good at doing other stuff for him, too; we all did. He couldn't really reach above shoulder height anymore, so aside from just procuring cereal boxes from high shelves we'd take turns combing his hair, helping him shave, or changing his shirt. I never minded helping out. I had spent so many years being my dad's shadow and copying him in every aspect that I possibly could; helping him out like this just made me feel useful, like I was finally a worthy sidekick. I pictured Robin combing Batman's hair. That probably happened from time to time, right?

Once I got to high school, our relationship began to change a bit. I still helped him out, but we had started to grow apart. I now held my own opinions about things, and like most kids in the throes of rebellion, I felt the need to make this known at every chance I got. I rejected his music, politics, TV shows, sports, you name it. Instead of being his shadow we became more like reflections in a mirror; we looked the same, but everything was opposite, and I wasted no opportunity to demonstrate this.

We argued constantly. Once in particular, while fighting about something to do with me not respecting his authority, he came at me with his arms crossed in front of him and shoved me. I was taller than him by this point, and his push felt akin to someone not paying attention and accidentally bumping into me while wandering the aisles at the supermarket. It was nothing. But it was also the first time he'd ever done anything like that, and I was incredulous—eager, even—at the invitation to assert myself physically. I shoved him back. He lost his footing and flailed backwards. If the refrigerator hadn't been there to catch him he would have fallen. I still remember the wild look in his eyes as he stared at me in disbelief. I felt ashamed of myself, truly ashamed, maybe for the first time ever. I offered no apology, though, just retreated to my room.

IN those years, with all the arguing, I just thought of my dad as having an angry heart. It seemed that he wasn't just mad at me: he was mad at the world. But to his credit, as he continued to shrink, as his joints became more fused and his extremities more gnarled, he never complained, and never stopped trying to contribute. And no matter how much of an entitled teenaged brat I was, he never stopped being there when I needed him, so I tried my best to return the favor.

It wasn't until I moved out of my parents' house that I was able to really reflect on my dad's lot in life. His body had started to betray him in his mid-20s and continued to work against him for the rest of his life. He was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, the worst case that his specialists had seen, and eventually had surgery on both knees, ankles, wrists, elbows, and shoulders. Not that they helped much. He had an Easter-sized basket full of pills he had to take every day. When I was younger I had naively thought that those pills were supposed to help him get better.

But now that I was older I finally realized that their only purpose was to mitigate pain. I decided that if I were him, I'd be pretty pissed off too.

I was 24 and living in Portland the morning that I got the call. I was wrong about his heart being angry. Turned out it was just weak. With all of those pills he took, I should have known that it was only a matter of time before it would give out; I'm pretty sure he did.

When I think back on it, my dad had a lot of reasons to be angry. Aside from he himself being shortchanged, he had us to consider. I know it weighed on him that he couldn't do normal "dad" stuff with us. And then there was my mom. Their story had started out so wild and perfect, a couple of beautiful longhaired kids that met and fell in love while hitchhiking in Canada. She had moved across the country to marry him. The unfairness that life didn't go as they'd planned, that she'd be a young widow—these are things I know he thought about. But he never mentioned them. He never complained. He never talked about the pain he was in, even though I know now it was constant. I guess at some point he became like the fish that doesn't know it's in water. That, or he just made his peace with it somehow.

It took me a long time to find my own peace in his situation. Our situation. I was angry for myself and my family, but mostly I was angry for him. I was pissed that he had to spend the last twenty something years of his life in that prison he called a body. Eventually though, that anger gave way to other feelings. Gratitude, mostly. I don't think that my dad could have lived a hundred healthy years and taught me the same lessons that I learned from watching him suffer. He taught me about personal sacrifice, the brevity of life, how it can be both a blessing and a curse. All kids are egocentric (I know I definitely was), but he was the first one to make me think outside of myself, without having to ask me to do it. He taught me what compassion and patience looked like. He taught me to slow down.

Teacher take away: This essay uses deft narration. However the mix of simple past tense with simple future situates both the reader and narrator in the past. This means we don't get across the diegetic gap until the last two paragraphs. It is a good example of weaving however.

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## 23.5: 22.4-.2 Sample 2

### Untitled

Essay by Katherine Morris, Portland State University, 2016. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

The sky was white, a blank canvas, when I became the middle school's biggest and most feared bully. The sky was white and my hands were stained red with blood—specifically a boy named Garrett's blood. I was 12 years old, smaller than average with clothes-hanger collar bones but on that day I was the heavyweight champion. It wasn't as if I'd just snapped out of the blue; it wasn't as if he were innocent. He had just been the only one within arms-length at the time when my heart beat so loudly in my ears, a rhythm I matched with my fists. I was dragged off of him minutes later by stunned teachers (who had never seen me out of line before) and escorted to the Principal's Office. They murmured over my head as if I couldn't hear them. "What do you think that was about?" "Who started it?" I was tightlipped and frightened, shaking and wringing my hands, rusting with someone else's blood on them. Who started it?

That particular brawl could have arguably been started by me: I jumped at him, I threw the only punches. But words are what started the fight. Words were at the root of my anger.

I was the kid who was considered stupid: math, a foreign language my tongue refused to speak. I was pulled up to the front of the classroom by my teachers who thought struggling my way through word problems on the whiteboard would help me grasp the concepts, but all I could ever do was stand there humiliated, red-faced with clenched fists until I was walked through the equation, step by step. I was the one who tripped over my words when I had to read aloud in English, the sentences rearranging themselves on the page until tears blurred my vision. I never spoke in class because I was nervous—"socially anxious" is what the doctors called it. Severe social anxiety with panic disorder. I sat in the back and read. I sat at lunch and read because books were easier to talk to than people my own age. Kids tease; it's a fact of life. But sometimes kids are downright cruel. They are relentless. When they find an insecurity, they will poke and prod it, an emotional bruise. A scar on my heart. Names like "idiot" and "loser" and "moron" are phrases chanted like a prayer at me in the halls, on the field, in the lunchroom. They are casual bombs tossed at me on the bus and they detonate around my feet, kicking up gravel and stinging my eyes. What is the saying? Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me? Whoever came up with that has quite obviously never been a 12-year-old girl.

The principal stared at me as I walked in, his eyes as still as water. He told me my parents had to be called, I had to be suspended the rest of the week, and this is a no-tolerance school. Many facts were rattled off. I began to do what I do best—tune him out—when he said something that glowed. It caught my attention, held my focus. "Would you like to tell me your side of the story?" I must have looked shocked because he half-smiled when he said, "I know there are always two sides. I know you wouldn't just start a fist fight out of nowhere. Did he do something to you?" An avalanche in my throat, the words came crashing out. I explained the bullying, how torturous it was for me to wake up every morning and know I would have to face the jeers and mean comments all day. I told him about how when I put on my uniform every morning, it felt like I was gearing up for a battle I didn't sign up for and knew I wouldn't win. The shame and embarrassment I wore around me like a shawl slipped off. He listened thoughtfully, occasionally pressing his fingers together and bringing them to his pursed lips, his still eyes beginning to ripple, a silent storm. When I was done he apologized. How strange and satisfying to be apologized to by a grown-up. I was validated with that simple "I'm sorry." I almost collapsed on the floor in gratitude. My parents entered the room, worry and anger etched on their faces, folded up in the wrinkles that were just then starting to line their skin. My parents listened as I retold my story, admitted what I had been bottling up for months. I was relieved, I felt the cliché weight lifted off of my too-narrow shoulders. My principal assured my parents that this was also a no-tolerance stance on bullying and he was gravely sorry the staff hadn't known about the abuse earlier. I was still suspended for three days, but he said to make sure I didn't miss Monday's assembly. He thought it would be important for me.

The Monday I returned, there was an assembly all day. I didn't know what it was for, but I knew everyone had to be there on time so I hurried to find a seat.

People avoided eye-contact with me. As I pushed past them, I could feel the whispers like taps on my shoulder. I sat down and the assembly began. It was a teenage girl and she was talking about differences, about how bullying can affect people more than you could ever know. I was leaning forward in my seat trying to hang onto every word because she was describing how I had felt every day for months. She spoke about how her own anxiety and learning disability isolated her. She was made fun of and bullied and she became depressed. It was important to her for us to hear her story because she wanted people like her, like me, to know they weren't alone and that words can do the most damage of all. R.A.D. Respect all differences, a movement that was being implemented in the school to accept and celebrate everybody. At the end of her speech, she asked everyone who had ever felt bullied or mistreated by their peers to stand up. Almost half of the school stood, and I felt like a part of my school for the first time. She then invited anyone who wanted to speak to come up and take the mic. To my surprise, there were multiple volunteers. A line formed and I found myself in it.

I heard kids I'd never talked to before speak about their ADHD, their dyslexia, how racist comments can hurt. I had no idea so many of my classmates had been verbal punching bags; I had felt utterly alone. When it was my turn I explained what it means to be socially anxious. How in classrooms and crowds in general I felt like I was being suffocated: it was hard to focus because I

often forgot to breathe. How every sentence I ever spoke was rehearsed at least 15 times before I said it aloud: it was exhausting. I was physically and emotionally drained after interactions, like I had run a marathon. I didn't like people to stare at me because I assumed everyone disliked me, and the bullying just solidified that feeling of worthlessness. It was exhilarating and terrifying to have everyone's eyes on me, everyone listening to what it was like to be inside my head. I stepped back from the microphone and expected boos, or maybe silence. But instead everyone clapped, a couple teachers even stood up. I was shocked but elated. Finally I was able to express what I went through on a day-to-day basis.

The girl who spoke came up to me after and thanked me for being brave. I had never felt brave in my life until that moment. And yes, there was the honeymoon period. Everyone in the school was nice to each other for about two weeks before everything returned to normal. But for me it was a new normal: no one threw things at me in the halls, no one called me names, and my teachers were respectful of my anxiety by not singling me out in class. School should be a sanctuary, a safe space where students feel free to be exactly who they are, free of ridicule or judgment. School had never been that for me, school had been a warzone littered with minefields. I dreaded facing my school days, but then I began to look forward to them. I didn't have to worry about being made fun of anymore. From that moment on, it was just school.

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## 23.6: 22.4-.3 Sample 3

### Parental Guidance

Essay by Derek Holt, Portland State University, 2017. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

“Derek, it’s Dad!” I already knew who it was because the call was made collect from the county jail. His voice sounded clean: he didn’t sound like he was fucked up. I heard from his ex-girlfriend about a year earlier that he was going to jail for breaking into her apartment and hiding under her bed with a knife then popping out and threatening her life; probably other stuff too. I wasn’t all that surprised to hear from him. I was expecting a call eventually. I was happy to hear from him. I missed him. He needed a place to stay for a couple weeks. I wanted to be a good son. I wanted him to be proud of me. My room-mates said it was alright. I gave him the address to our apartment and told him to come over. I was 19.

I am told when I was a toddler I wouldn’t let my dad take the garbage outside without me hitching a ride on his boot. I would straddle his foot like a horse and hang onto his leg; even in the pouring rain. He was strong, funny and a good surfer. One time at the skate park when I was 6 or 7 he made these guys leave for smoking pot in front of me and my little sister. He told them to get that shit out of here and they listened. He was protecting us. I wanted to be just like him.

When my dad got to the apartment he was still wearing his yellow jail slippers. They were rubber with a single strap. No socks, a t-shirt and jeans was all he had on. It was January: cold and rainy. He was clean and sober from what I could tell by his voice and eyes. He was there. I hugged him. I was hopeful that maybe he was back for good. I found my dad a pair of warm socks and a hoodie. We were drinking beer and one of my friends offered him one. He must have wanted one but he knows where that leads and he said no thanks. We all got stoned instead.

One time when I was in 7th grade my dad was driving me and my siblings’ home from school. He saw someone walking down the street wearing a nice snowboarding jacket. It looked just like my dad’s snowboarding jacket which he claimed was stolen from the van while he was at work. He pulled the van over next to this guy and got out. He began threatening him. He was cursing and yelling and throwing his hands up and around. I was scared.

He said he only needed a couple weeks to get back on his feet. I was happy to have him there. As long as he wasn’t drinking or using drugs he had a chance. He said he was done with all that other shit. He just needs to smoke some pot to relax at night and he will be fine. Sounded reasonable to me. It had been about a year since I dropped out of high school and moved out of my mom’s. I worked full time making pizza and smoked pot and drank beer with my friends and roommates. Occasionally there was some coke or ecstasy around but mostly just beer, pot and video games.

One day in 4th grade when we were living in Coos Bay the whole family went to the beach to surf and hang out. My mom and dad were together and it seemed like they loved each other. My littlest sister was a toddler and ran around on the beach in the sun with my mom and our Rottweiler Lani. My older brother and other sister were in the ocean with me and my dad. We all took turns being pushed into waves on our surfboards by dad. We all caught waves and had a great day. My mom cheered us on from the shore. He was a good dad.

Two weeks passed quickly and my dad was still staying at our apartment. One day while I was at work my dad blew some coke with my roommate. I could tell something was off when I got home. I was worried. He said he was leaving for a couple days to go stay with his friend who is a pastor. He needed some spiritual guidance or something like that. He sounded fucked up.

Growing up we did a lot of board sports. My dad owned a surf shop in Lincoln City for a while and worked as a sales representative for various gear companies. We had surfboards, snowboards, windsurfers, sails, wakeboards, and wetsuits: several thousand dollars’ worth of gear. One day my dad told us someone broke into our garage and stole all the gear. The window in the garage was broken except it appeared to be broken from the inside. He didn’t file a police report. My middle school surf club coach tried to get my surfboard from the pawnshop but it was too expensive and the pawn shop owner wouldn’t give it back. I felt betrayed.

I came home from work and found my dad in my room passed out. I stumbled over an empty beer can on the way in and there were cheap whiskey bottles scattered about. It smelled horrible. He woke up and was ashamed. He looked up at me from my bed with a thousand pounds pulling down on his puffy eyelids and asked me for a cigarette. He was strung out. Half of our spoons went missing. It smelled like booze, heroin and filth. I was ashamed.

One day in 9th grade I came home from school to find my brother lifting blood stains out of the carpet with hydrogen peroxide. He said some guys came over and beat dad up. He owed them money or stole from them or something. I wanted to call my mom. I was scared.

I told my dad he had to leave. He pleaded to stay for another thirty minutes. I would be at work by then. While I was at work my friends escorted him out. He said he was going to his friend the pastor’s house. I didn’t hear from him for a couple years after that. We learn a lot from our parents. Sometimes the best lessons are those on what not to do.

My two-year-old daughter calls me Papa Daddy, Dad or Derek. Whatever she calls me it has a positive meaning. When we are driving s says from her car-seat, “Daddy’s hand”, “I want daddy’s hand please” and I reach back and put it on her lap.

One day my daughter woke me up and said, “Oh hi Daddy! I wanna go forest. I wanna go hike!” She was smiling. We practiced the alphabet before breakfast then went for a walk the woods: mama, papa and baby. I’m a good dad.

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## 23.7: Assignment

### 22.5.1 Descriptive Personal Narrative

To synthesize what you've learned about description, narration, and reflection, you will write a personal narrative. This is generally a nonfiction, prose essay (similar to a memoir), but your instructor might provide additional guidelines in regard to genre, media, approach, or assessment standards.

### 22.5.2 Assignment

Your task is to identify an influential place, event, or person from your life experience about which you can tell a story. Then, you will write a narrative essay that relates that story and considers the impact it had on you, your worldview, and/or your life path.

Using model texts in this book as exemplars, you will tell a story (*narrate*) using vivid *description* and draw out meaning and insight using *reflection*.

As you'll evaluate below, descriptive personal narratives have a variety of purposes. One important one is to share a story that stands in for a bigger idea. Do not be worried if you don't know the "bigger idea" yet, but be advised that your final draft will narrate a focused, specific moment that represents something about who you are, how you got here, what you believe, or what you strive to be.

Be sure to apply the concepts you learn in class to your writing.

Before you begin, consider your rhetorical situation:

|                                            |                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject:</b>                            | <b>Occasion:</b>                           |
| How will this influence the way you write? | How will this influence the way you write? |
| <b>Audience:</b>                           | <b>Purpose:</b>                            |
| How will this influence the way you write? | How will this influence the way you write? |

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## 23.8: One Example of a Peer Workshop Process

Before the workshop, each author should spend several minutes generating requests for support (#1 below). Identify specific elements you need help on. Here are a few examples:

- I need suggestions for new imagery.
- Do you think my reflective writing seems too “tacked on?”
- Do you have any ideas for a title?
- I need help proofreading and polishing.

During the workshop, follow this sequence:

1. Student A introduces their draft, distributes copies, and makes requests for feedback. What do you want help with, specifically?
2. Student A reads their draft aloud while students B and C annotate/take notes. What do you notice as the draft is read aloud?
3. Whole group discusses the draft; student A takes notes. Use these prompts as a reference to generate and frame your feedback. Try to identify specific places in your classmates’ essays where the writer is successful and where the writer needs support. Consider constructive, specific, and actionable feedback. What is the author doing well? What could they do better?
  - a. What requests does the author have for support? What feedback do you have on this issue, specifically?
  - b. Identify one “golden line” from the essay under consideration—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph that resonates with you. What about this line is so striking?
  - c. Consult either the rubric included above or an alternate rubric, if your instructor has provided one. Is the author on track to meet the expectations of the assignment? What does the author do well in each of the categories? What could they do better?
    - I. Ideas, Content, and Focus
    - II. Structure
    - III. Style and Language
    - IV. Depth, Support, and Reflection
    - V. Mechanics
4. Repeat with students B and C.

After the workshop, try implementing some of the feedback your group provided while they’re still nearby! For example, if Student B said your introduction needed more imagery, draft some new language and see if Student B likes the direction you’re moving in. As you are comfortable, exchange contact information with your group so you can to continue the discussion outside of class.

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## Index

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## Index

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## Glossary

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**Sample Word 1** | Sample Definition 1

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### Overview

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### By Page

- [Remix: Expression and Inquiry \(Manning et al.\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [Front Matter](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [TitlePage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [InfoPage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [Table of Contents](#) - [Undeclared](#)
    - [Licensing](#) - [Undeclared](#)
    - [Preface](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [Part I: Nuts and Bolts of Writing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1: Overview- The Writing Process](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [1.2: The Writing Process](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [1.3: Five Evaluation Criteria](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2: Topic](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [2.1: How Do I Choose A Topic](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3: What Are Some Other Ways to Get Ideas](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [3.1: What is a Brainstorm](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [3.2: What is Clustering?](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [3.3: What is Freewriting?](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [4: How Do I Make an Outline](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [4.1: Outline](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [5: Researching](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [5.1: Introduction to Researching](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [5.2: Determine the Role of Research in Your Writing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [5.3: Finding Scholarly Sources](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [5.4: Evaluating Scholarly Sources](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
      - [5.5: Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [5.6: Evaluating Web Sources](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [5.7: Consider Your Project](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [5.8: Integrating Scholarly Sources](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [5.9: Cite Sources to Avoid Plagiarism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [6: Drafting](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.1: Overview of Drafting](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.2: Drafting- The Process](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.3: During the Drafting Process](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.4: Dealing with Writer's Block](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.5: Meeting the Minimum Word Count](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.6: Title of Your Essay](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [6.7: Final Thoughts on Drafting](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [7: Editing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [7.1: Editing and Revising- One and the Same?](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [7.2: Sentence Structure](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [7.3: Editing Tips](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [7.4: Perspectives on Style](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [8: Reviewing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.1: Overview of Reviewing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.2: Establishing Criteria](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.3: Writing Helpful Comments](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.4: Responding to Criticism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.5: Peer Reviews](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [8.6: Peer Reviews cont.](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - [9: Revising](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [9.1: Overview of Revising](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

- 9.2: Differences Between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.3: A Change for the Better - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.4: Introductions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.5: Position - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.6: Scope - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.7: Body Paragraphs - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.8: Conclusions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9.9: Analyze Each Part of Your Paper - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- Part II: Academic Writing and Analysis - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
  - 10: Reading Analytically - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.1: Reading with a Purpose - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.2: 10.2-2 Key Terms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.3: 10.2-3 Authorial Intent - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.4: 10.2-4 Radical Noticing- Seeing What Is On the Page - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.5: 10.2-5 Symbols, Patterns, and References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.6: 10.2-6 Sociocultural Lenses - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.7: Reading Analytically - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.8: 10.3-1 Key Terms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.9: 10.3-2 Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.10: 10.3-3 Tracking Your Reactions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.11: 10.3-4 Writing Your Summary - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.12: 10.3-5 Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.13: 10.3-6 Original Passage - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.14: Summary and Response - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.15: 10.4-1 Summary and Response- TV Show or Movie - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.16: 10.4-2 Digital Media Summary - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.17: 10.4-3 An Analysis of Texts - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.18: 10.4-4 Sample 1 - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 10.19: Reading Activities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
  - Part III: Techniques of Description and Narration - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 11: From Reading to Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.1: The Case for Critical Writers - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.2: Sample 2 - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913) - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.4: Rhetorical Situations - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.5: Writing as a Process - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.6: Chapter Vocabulary - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 11.7: The Yellow Wallpaper - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 12: From Reading to Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.1: 11 From Reading to Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.2: 12.3-1 Introduction - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.3: 12.3-2 Body - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.4: 12.3-3 Conclusion - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.5: 12.5-1 Sample 1 - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.6: 12.5-2 Sample 2 - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.7: 12.5-3 Sample 3 - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.8: Chapter 11 Endnotes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 12.9: Structure of an Analytical - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 13: What is Exposition in Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.1: Types of Exposition - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.2: Find a Topic, Read, Discuss, and Research - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.3: Structure of an Analytical or Expository Essay - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.4: Sample Exposition Assignments - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.5: Sample Papers - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 13.6: Analytical Essay Checklist Exercise - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 14: What is Evaluative Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 14.1: Establishing Evaluative Criteria - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 14.2: How to Evaluate - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 14.3: Structure of the Evaluative Essay - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 14.4: Sample Assignments - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 15: A Brief Guide to the Art of Persuasion and Argument - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 15.1: Basic Argument Essay Structure - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 15.2: Strengthening Your Argument - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
      - 15.3: Sample Essay - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
    - 16: How to use this Book—Pedagogical Background for Students and Teachers - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

- 16.1: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.2: Rhetorical Situations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.3: Assignments and Activities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.4: Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.5: Rhetorical Situations Applications - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.6: Writing as Process - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.7: Introductory - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.7.1: Introductory - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 16.7.1.1: Introductory - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 16.7.1.1.01: Introductory - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 16.7.1.1.1: Introductory/Pedagogical Vocabulary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17: Introduction- Description, Narration, and Reflection - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 17.1: Description and Narration Vocabulary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 17.2: Techniques - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 17.3: Descriptive Section Vocabulary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 17.4: Imagery and Experiential Language - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 18: Activities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.1: Specificity Taxonomy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.2: Micro-Ethnography - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.3: Imagery Inventory - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.4: The Dwayne Johnson Activity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.5: Surprising Yourself- Constraint-Based Scene Description - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 18.6: Image Builder - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 19: Model Texts by Student Authors - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 19.1: Sample 1 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 19.2: Sample 2 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 20: Telling a Story - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 20.1: Vocabulary and ideas to consider as you write narratives. - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 20.2: Telling a Story - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 21: Story Activities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 21.1: Idea Generation- What Stories Can I Tell? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 21.2: Idea Generation- Mapping an Autobiography - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 21.3: Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 22: Model Texts by Student Authors - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 22.1: Sample 1 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 22.2: Sample 2 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 22.3: Sample 3 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 23: Reflecting on an Experience - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.1: Reflective Vocabulary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.2: Techniques - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.3: Reflective Activities - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.4: 22.4-.1 Sample 1 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.5: 22.4-.2 Sample 2 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.6: 22.4-.3 Sample 3 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.7: Assignment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 23.8: One Example of a Peer Workshop Process - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- Back Matter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Index - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Index - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*