SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE COMPOSITION

Kathryn Crowther et al.
Georgia Perimeter College

LibreTexts™

Book: Successful College Composition (Crowther et al.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This text was compiled on 08/26/2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Introduction to Writing

1.1: Becoming a Successful Writer

1.2: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

1.3: Using Sources

1.4: Writing Thesis Statements

1.5: Methods of Organizing Your Writing

1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 1)

1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 2)

2: The Writing Process

2.1: Prewriting

2.2: Outlining

2.3: Drafting (Part 1)

2.3: Drafting (Part 2)

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 1)

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 2)

3: Rhetorical Modes of Writing

3.0: Introduction

3.1: Narration

3.2: Description

3.3: Classification

3.4: Process Essay

3.5: Definition

3.6: Comparison and Contrast

3.7: Cause and Effect

3.8: Persuasion (Part 1)

3.8: Persuasion (Part 2)

4: Writing a Research Paper

4.1: The Purpose of Research Writing

4.2: Choosing Your Topic

4.3: Managing Your Research

4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 1)

4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 2)

4.5: Evaluating and Processing Your Sources

4.6: Applying Your Research

4.7: Writing Your Draft

4.8: Documenting Your Source Material
4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 1)
4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 2)

5: Grammar

5.1: Syntax (Part 1)
5.1: Syntax (Part 2)
5.1: Syntax (Part 3)
5.2: Verbs (Part 1)
5.2: Verbs (Part 2)
5.3: Nouns and Article Use
5.4: Pronouns
5.5: Punctuation (Part 1)
5.5: Punctuation (Part 2)
5.6: Capitalization
5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 1)
5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 2)

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

This page titled Successful College Composition (Crowther et al.) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

Licensing

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

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

1: INTRODUCTION TO WRITING

1.1: Becoming a Successful Writer
1.2: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content
1.3: Using Sources
1.4: Writing Thesis Statements
1.5: Methods of Organizing Your Writing
1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 1)
1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 2)

This page titled 1: Introduction to Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.1: Becoming a Successful Writer

In her book *On Writing*, Eudora Welty maintains: "To write honestly and with all our powers is the least we can do, and the most." But writing well is difficult. People who write for a living sometimes struggle to get their thoughts on the page; even people who generally enjoy writing have days when they would rather do anything else. For people who do not like writing or do not think of themselves as good writers, writing assignments can be stressful or even intimidating. And, of course, you cannot get through college without having to write—sometimes a lot, and often at a higher level than you are used to. No magic formula will make writing quick and easy. However, you can use strategies and resources to manage writing assignments more easily. College will challenge you as a writer, but it is also a unique opportunity to grow.

Writing to Think and Communicate

One purpose of writing is to help you clarify and articulate your thoughts. Writing a list of points, both pro and con, on an issue of concern allows you to see which of your arguments are the strongest or reveals areas that need additional support. Putting ideas on paper helps you review and evaluate them, reconsider their validity, and perhaps generate new concepts. Writing your thoughts down may even help you grasp them for the first time.

Another important—and practical—function of writing is to communicate ideas. For your college classes you are required to write essays, research papers, and essay responses on tests. If you apply to other colleges or universities, you will have to compose letters of application, respond to specific questions, or write an autobiographical sketch. When you enter your chosen career you may have to send emails and write reports, proposals, grants, or other work-related documents. You must correspond with clients, business associates, and co-workers. And on a personal level, you want to contact friends and relatives. You may even find yourself responding to a community or national issue by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Writing is an essential skill you must have in order to function in the twenty-first century, but like any skill, it is something that can be acquired and refined. Some people just naturally express themselves better than others, but everyone can learn the basic craft of writing.

Overcoming Writer's Block

At some point, every writer experiences writer's block: staring at a blank page or computer screen without being able to put down even a single line. Your mind is blank, and panic sets in because writer's block usually happens when you are working against a deadline such as in a timed writing assignment or for a paper that is due the next day. Even though there is nothing you can do to prevent writer's block from happening, there are several techniques you can use to help you overcome its negative effects:

- **Don't Procrastinate**: Give yourself as much time as possible to complete your assignment. Budget your time so you can write the assignment in sections and still have time to edit and revise. If you are in a timed writing situation, jot down ideas in a scratch outline and work from that.
- **Try Freewriting without Guilt**: Just start putting ideas down on paper. You don't need to worry about whether or not you are making spelling and grammatical errors; you shouldn't fret over organization. Keep in mind that you can always delete what you have written once your ideas begin to flow.
- **Follow Your Inspiration**: Begin by writing the section of the paper you feel best able to write. If you cannot start at the beginning, write the conclusion first, or begin writing the body of the paper. If you have an outline, you will already have the ideas and organization you need to write the body paragraphs.
- **Break the Writing Project into Parts**: Think of the paper as a series of short sections. Sometimes you can be overwhelmed by the prospect of writing a ten-page research paper, but if you break it up into manageable pieces, the assignment does not seem so daunting.
- **Review the Assignment**: Reread the instructions for the assignment to make sure you understand what you are expected to write. Look for keywords that you can research to give you insight into your topic. Often discussing the assignment with your professor can give you the clarity you need to begin writing.
- **Verbalize Your Ideas**: Discuss your ideas with a classmate, friend or family member. You can gain new insights and confidence by hearing what others have to say about your topic and sharing your misgivings with them.
- **Visualize a Friendly Audience**: Imagine you are writing the paper to a friend or someone you know well. Often the fear of rejection paralyzes your ability to start writing, so removing that obstacle should enable you to write without inhibition.
- **Take a Break**: Try working on another writing project or switch to a completely different activity. Often if you get bogged down on one subject, thinking about something else for a while might clear your brain so you can come back to the original

project with a new perspective. And getting up from the computer usually unclogs any mental blocks: take a walk, wash the dishes, or play with the dog.
- **Change Locations**: Try moving to another area more conducive to your writing style. Some people write best in a noisy environment while others require a place with minimal distractions. Find what works best for you.

Remember that writer's block is only temporary—relax and start writing.

Selecting an Appropriate Voice

Whether you are writing an argumentative essay expressing your conviction that whale hunting should be abolished or a literary analysis of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, your paper should express a distinct point of view. Your purpose should be to convince your audience that you have something worthwhile to say. Gaining their approval depends to a large degree on their perception of the writer: you need to present yourself as educated, rational, and well-informed. But in doing so, you need to be careful not to lose your own voice. You should never use a wordy, artificial style in an attempt to impress your readers; neither should you talk down to them or apologize for your writing.

Choosing the Proper Pronoun Focus

One important consideration in selecting the appropriate voice for your paper is to choose the proper pronoun focus, and this is dependent upon the nature of the assignment. In some instances, the first person ("I") is acceptable: for example, if you are writing an autobiographical sketch for an application to a university, anything other than first person would sound odd. Likewise, if you are writing an extemporaneous essay that answers a question prompting a first person response, such as "Explain why you do or do not vote," again, first person would be the obvious choice. Even within the development of an essay that takes a third person approach, if you use an example from your personal experience to illustrate a point, you can discuss that isolated example using the first person. Most of the same arguments apply to the use of the second person pronoun ("you"). This textbook, for instance, utilizes the second person because of the unique relationship between the student/reader and the instructor/writer.

As discussed in The Use of I in Writing in this book's section on "Persuasive Essays," the appropriateness of the first-person pronoun in college writing is a topic of debate. But academic writing more often requires you to adopt a third-person focus, preferably in the plural form ("they"). Using third person enables you to avoid boring the reader by suggesting that the topic is of interest only to you; in other words, it broadens the audience appeal. Using third person in the plural form also allows you to avoid making pronoun agreement errors which might occur as the natural result of imitating spoken English which seems to favor the plural form instead of the more grammatically correct singular: for example, most people would say, "Everyone should have their book in class" instead of "Everyone should have his book in class," even though the former is technically incorrect. In addition, using third person plural eliminates the problem of sexist language and prevents the awkward use of "his/her."

Consider the following examples for their use of pronoun focus imagining they appeared in an essay about the validity of using source materials from the Internet:

Example 1.1.1:

Weak: As I surfed the Internet, I found a lot of articles that I couldn't trust because I didn't see any authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

Weak: As we surf the Internet, we frequently find articles we cannot trust because we do not find authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

Weak: As one surfs the Internet, one frequently finds articles one cannot trust because one cannot find authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

Stronger: Surfing the Internet for source information is unreliable because many articles do not indicate their authors or sponsoring organizations

The first example is too limited—who cares what you found on the Internet? The second example generalizes the focus better than the first, but it, too, restricts the audience. Changing the pronoun to "one" is also problematic because it is repetitious and awkward. The final example is the best to use in an essay because it emphasizes the point in an all-inclusive manner, without

being redundant or sounding artificial.

Exercise 1.1.1

Rewrite the following sentences, changing the pronoun focus to best suit an essay written for your English Composition class:

1. I find that walking is one of the best forms of exercise because it helps me lose weight and improve my cardiovascular system while I can enjoy being outside in the fresh air.
2. One should always pay attention to the charges on one's credit card bills in order to identify if one's account number has been stolen and to avoid being charged for services one did not receive.
3. We believe that we should be able to eat healthy fruits and vegetables without our having to pay exorbitant prices for organically grown food.
4. Your best chance of making a lot of money for retirement is to diversify your portfolio, investing in a variety of options instead of putting all of your funds in just one account.

Key Takeaways

- Writing is an effective way to clarify, articulate, and communicate your thoughts.
- Writer's Block does not have to stall the writing process if you employ effective techniques to overcome it.
- Before you begin to write, adopt a voice and pronoun focus appropriate to your purpose in writing the essay.

This page titled 1.1: Becoming a Successful Writer is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.2: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. Keep in mind that three main elements shape the content of each essay:

- **Purpose**: The reason the writer composes the essay.
- **Audience**: The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.
- **Tone**: The attitude the writer conveys about the essay's subject.

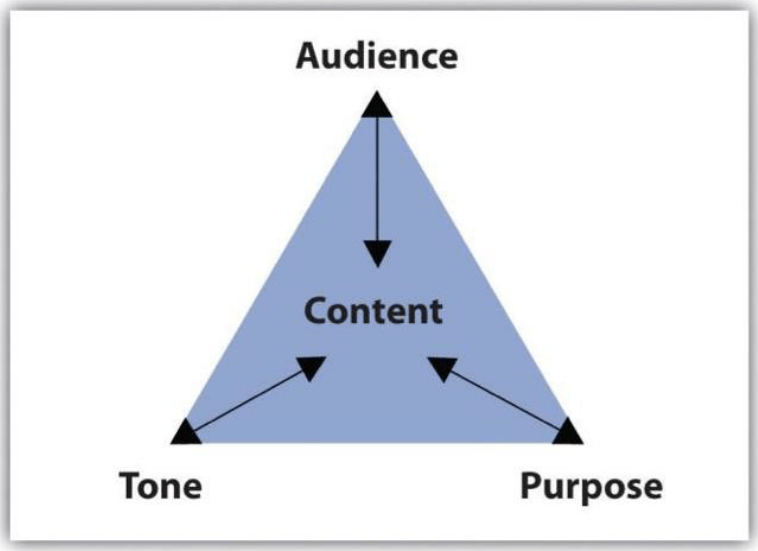


Figure 1.2.1

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what each paragraph of the essay covers and how the paragraph supports the main point—the thesis.

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write it by, basically, answering the question "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him or her of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community's needs.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing typically fulfill four main purposes:

- to summarize
- to analyze
- to synthesize
- to evaluate

A **summary** shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials, using your own words; although shorter than the original piece of writing, a summary should still communicate all the key points and key support of the original document.

An **analysis**, on the other hand, separates complex materials into their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. In the sciences, for example, the analysis of simple table salt would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Then, scientists would study how the two elements interact to create the compound NaCl, or sodium chloride: simple table salt.

In an **academic analysis**, instead of deconstructing compounds, the essay takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the main points of the document by examining individual points and identifying how the points relate to one another.

The third type of writing—**synthesis**—combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Take, for example, the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The purpose of an academic synthesis is to blend individual documents into a new document by considering the main points from one or more pieces of writing and linking the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

Finally, an **evaluation** judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday life are often not only dictated by set standards but also influenced by opinion and prior knowledge such as a supervisor's evaluation of an employee in a particular job. Academic evaluations, likewise, communicate your opinion and its justifications about a particular document or a topic of discussion. They are influenced by your reading of the document as well as your prior knowledge and experience with the topic or issue. Evaluations typically require more critical thinking and a combination of summary, analysis, and synthesis skills.

You will encounter these four purposes not only as you read for your classes but also as you read for work or pleasure, and, because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read. Remember that the purpose for writing will guide you through each part of your paper, helping you make decisions about content and style.

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs that ask you to summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

Exercise 2

Read the following paragraphs about four films and then identify the purpose of each paragraph: to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, or to evaluate.

1. This film could easily have been cut down to less than two hours. By the final scene, I noticed that most of my fellow moviegoers were snoozing in their seats and were barely paying attention to what was happening on screen. Although the director sticks diligently to the book, he tries too hard to cram in all the action, which is just too ambitious for such a detail-oriented story. If you want my advice, read the book and give the movie a miss.
2. During the opening scene, we learn that the character Laura is adopted and that she has spent the past three years desperately trying to track down her real parents. Having exhausted all the usual options—adoption agencies, online searches, family trees, and so on—she is on the verge of giving up when she meets a stranger on a bus. The chance encounter leads to a complicated chain of events that ultimately result in Laura getting her lifelong wish. But is it really what she wants? Throughout the rest of the film, Laura discovers that sometimes the past is best left where it belongs.
3. To create the feeling of being gripped in a vice, the director, May Lee, uses a variety of elements to gradually increase the tension. The creepy, haunting melody that subtly enhances the earlier scenes becomes ever more insistent, rising to a disturbing crescendo toward the end of the movie. The desperation of the actors, combined with the claustrophobic atmosphere and tight camera angles create a realistic firestorm, from which there is little hope of escape. Walking out of the theater at the end feels like staggering out of a Roman dungeon.
4. The scene in which Campbell and his fellow prisoners assist the guards in shutting down the riot immediately strikes the viewer as unrealistic. Based on the recent reports on prison riots in both Detroit and California, it seems highly unlikely that a posse of hardened criminals will intentionally help their captors at the risk of inciting future revenge from other inmates. Instead, both news reports and psychological studies indicate that prisoners who do not actively participate in a riot will go back to their cells and avoid conflict altogether. Examples of this lack of attention to detail occur throughout the film, making it almost unbearable to watch.

5. **Collaboration**: Share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 3

Group activity: Working in a group of four or five, assign each group member the task of collecting one document each. These documents might include magazine or newspaper articles, workplace documents, academic essays, chapters from a reference book, film or book reviews, or any other type of writing. As a group, read through each document and discuss the author's purpose for writing. Use the information you have learned in this chapter to decide whether the main purpose is to summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Write a brief report on the purpose of each document, using supporting evidence from the text.

Exercise 4

Consider the essay most recently assigned to you. Identify the most effective academic purpose for the assignment.

My assignment: _____

My purpose: _____

Writing at Work

Thinking about the purpose of writing a report in the workplace can help focus and structure the document. A summary should provide colleagues with a factual overview of your findings without going into too much specific detail. In contrast, an evaluation should include your personal opinion, along with supporting evidence, research, or examples to back it up. To help determine a purpose for writing, listen for words such as summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate when your boss asks you to complete a report.

Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the audience—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation. As you prepare the presentation, you visualize the audience to anticipate their expectations and reactions. What you imagine affects the information you choose to present and how you will present it. Then, during the presentation, you meet the audience in person and discover immediately how well you perform.

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send emails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of "invisible" readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

Example 1.2.1:

Example A

Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.

Example B

OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffling all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with the intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own essays, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing. Ultimately, the people you visualize will affect what and how you write.

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience would not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words. Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Polishing your work using correct grammar will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say.

Because focusing on audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

- **Demographics**: These measure important data about a group of people, such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing in the end. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you begin to think about your purpose for writing.
- **Education**: Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis may also dictate your writing.
- **Prior knowledge**: This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. If your readers have studied certain topics, they may already know some terms and concepts related to the topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.
- **Expectations**: These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment's appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment's purpose and organization. In an essay titled "The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition," for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.

Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, generate a list of characteristics under each category for each audience. This list will help you later when you read about tone and content.

1. Your classmates

   a. Demographics _____
   b. Education _____
   c. Prior knowledge _____
   d. Expectations _____
2. Your instructor
   a. Demographics _____
   b. Education _____
   c. Prior knowledge _____
   d. Expectations _____
3. The head of your academic department
   a. Demographics _____
   b. Education _____
   c. Prior knowledge _____
   d. Expectations _____
4. Now think about your next writing assignment. Identify the purpose (you may use the same purpose listed in Exercise 4), and then identify the audience. Create a list of characteristics under each category.
   a. My assignment: _____
   b. My purpose: _____
   c. My audience: _____
      i. Demographics _____
      ii. Education _____
      iii. Prior knowledge _____
      iv. Expectations _____
5. **Collaboration**: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 6

At some point during your career, you may be asked to write a report or to complete a presentation. Imagine that you have been asked to report on the issue of health and safety in the workplace. Using the information in this section complete an analysis of your intended audience—your fellow office workers. Consider how demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will influence your report and explain how you will tailor it to your audience accordingly.

Collaboration: Pair with a classmate and compare your answers.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit a range of attitudes and emotions through prose--from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers intimate their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

> Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just seven percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelts and other body parts, the tiger population has

plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

Exercise 7

Think about the assignment, purpose, and audience that you selected in previous exercises. Now, identify the tone you would use in the assignment.

My assignment: _____

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

My tone: _____

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

Exercise 8

Match the content of the following listed examples to the appropriate audience and purpose. On your own sheet of paper, write the correct letter in the blank next to the word "content."

A. Whereas economist Holmes contends that the financial crisis is far from over, the presidential advisor Jones points out that it is vital to catch the first wave of opportunity to increase market share. We can use elements of both experts' visions. Let me explain how.
B. In 2000, foreign money flowed into the United States, contributing to easy credit conditions. People bought larger houses than they could afford, eventually defaulting on their loans as interest rates rose.
C. The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, known by most of us as the humongous government bailout, caused mixed reactions. Although supported by many political leaders, the statute provoked outrage among grassroots groups. In their opinion, the government was actually rewarding banks for their appalling behavior.

Audience: An instructor

Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis

Content: _____

Audience: Classmates

Purpose: To summarize the effects of the $700 billion government bailout

Content: _____

Audience: An employer

Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery

Content: _____

Collaboration: Share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 9

Using the assignment, purpose, audience, and tone from Exercise 7, generate a list of content ideas. Remember that content consists of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations.

My assignment: _____

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

My tone: _____

My content ideas: _____

Key Takeaways

- The content of each paragraph in the essay is shaped by purpose, audience, and tone.
- The four common academic purposes are to **summarize**, to **analyze**, to **synthesize**, and to **evaluate**.
- Identifying the audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how and what you write.
- Devices such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language communicate tone and create a relationship between the writer and his or her audience.
- Content may consist of **examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies,** and **observations**. All content must be appropriate and interesting for the audience, purpose and tone.

This page titled 1.2: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.3: Using Sources

What are “sources” and how do you use them in college?

A source is anything that you didn’t write or create; a source is anything that you are using to build something that you are writing or creating. You’re probably used to thinking of sources for research papers, such as articles you found through library databases. But you will use sources for almost ALL of your writing in college. For example, the novel, poem, or play you’re reading in English is a source for the literary analysis paper you have to write; a website is a source for a market analysis in your business class; a newspaper editorial is a source for your response in a current events class; a film is the source for a film analysis; a source could be a quote you use to begin a paper in history class, and so on.

Any time that you use something that you did not write or create yourself, you are using a source.

What kinds of projects use sources?

Most of the writing that you will do here will use some kind of source. You will use sources not only in research papers and projects, but also in summaries, analyses, responses, presentations, video and audio projects, editorials, websites, blog posts, slide shows, and even personal essays. Basically, almost everything you write here will have to engage with sources in some way.

Why do you have to involve sources in your writing?

Depending on the size and scope of the writing project, you may have to build arguments based on sources you’ve read in class, you may have to write an argument based on research sources, you may have to write a personal response to a course text, you may have to summarize or analyze a course text, or you may have to present on a text in class. In short, you will need to support what you communicate in the college classroom. You will need evidence. Sources are that evidence.

There is a larger philosophical reason: **when you write in academia, you take part in a conversation that has gone on for centuries before you and will go on long after you**. Using sources is the main way you become involved in—and later help to shape— that conversation. You converse both with your colleagues and professors about sources, but you also converse *with* the sources, and that dialogue composes a large measure of your learning. In order to take part in that conversation, you need to understand the conventions of academic culture (even though you may be skeptical or critical of parts of that culture at times). These conventions are not only the conventions of American Standard English, but are also the conventions of good source use. This academic conversation is sometimes called the “Burkean Parlor,” for the philosopher Kenneth Burke, who describes academic dialogue in this way:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.[i]

What kinds of sources should you use, and what parts of them do you use?

The type of class and the assignment will determine what kinds of sources you use. Sometimes you’ll use texts that your professor has supplied, and other times, you’ll have to go and do research to find outside sources. When dealing with written sources, you’ll either quote, paraphrase, or summarize.

- When you **quote**, you use the exact wording from the source.
- When you **paraphrase**, you put a passage or part of a text in your own words, being careful not to copy the sentence structure of the original source.
- When you **summarize**, you give a very broad overview of a passage or a text-- writing your summary in a 10th of the size of

the original text.

How do you use sources well in your writing? Good source use means both ethical source use and well-integrated source use. They work together so that at the same time you are giving due credit to the creator of the source you're using or engaging, you are making it work well with your words and ideas.

Ethical Source Use means giving credit, and it also means providing the required information about the source. Giving credit in something you write may look a lot like the Burke example above, where Burke was introduced by name and then the quote was annotated. There are a number of valid ways to ethically use a source, and these often depend on what discipline you're writing in, such as English, psychology, journalism, or history.

Guidelines for Source Use

1. Make sure you have permission to use the source. How do you know? For the most part, you can use a small part of any written text in something you create for school, if you know you have permission and if you give proper credit. An exemption to the U.S. Copyright law says that using a small amount of a source is fine if you're using it "for commentary or scholarship."[1]
2. Properly cite the source. This means providing information that your reader can use to find the source. In the MLA and APA citation styles, proper citation includes both the in-text citation of the page number, year, and / or author of the source and the full citation at the end of the paper. Other styles, such as the Chicago style (used by historians) use footnotes instead of parenthetical in-text citations.
3. Include the full citation for the source at the end of your paper.

Explicating Sources

You can see examples of citations in Documenting Your Source Material in the chapter "Writing a Research Paper." In addition to properly citing the source, you need to integrate it well. This means both Introducing Cited Material Effectively with signal phrases and explicating quotations and paraphrases. You do not need to explicate summary, since you are giving a broad overview and don't have to explain it in detail.

In addition to properly introducing and documenting sources, writers need to explicate quotations and paraphrases. Explicating sources means justifying their place in your work. A good guideline to follow for explicating source material (in the form of quotations and paraphrases) is for every sentence of quotation or paraphrase that you use, follow it with three sentences of explication. Those sentences should include this information:

- **"In other words"**: Tell your readers what the quote or paraphrase means.
- **How it supports your argument**: Tell your readers how this quote or paraphrase is evidence that supports your argument.
- **Context**: Provide some context for this quote or paraphrase--where in the text did it come from--the beginning, middle, or end? What is the author of the source doing or trying to do in this section or passage?

tips

- Restrict direct quotations to when an author(s) says something that just can't be paraphrased, or when an author(s) says something in a unique way.
- Quote when authors say something especially relevant or meaningful.
- Use quotes sparingly. For most of the papers you write, you won't need very long quotes--a good guideline is to use no more than three sentences (which each need three sentences of explication) each time you quote.
- Do not rely on block quotes; use those only when absolutely necessary and follow your style's the formatting rules for block quotes.

References

[i] Burke, Kenneth. The Philosophy of Literary Form. Oakland: University of California Press, 1974. 110- 111.

1. For more information, see Stanford University's Fair Use legal resource: http://fairuse.stanford.edu/.

This page titled 1.3: Using Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.4: Writing Thesis Statements

To be effective, all support in an essay must work together to convey a central point; otherwise, an essay can fall into the trap of being out of order and confusing. Just as a **topic sentence** focuses and unifies a single paragraph, the **thesis statement** focuses and unifies an entire essay. This statement is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination; it tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point.

Because writing is not a linear process, you may find that the best thesis statement develops near the end of your first draft; however, creating a draft or working thesis early in the writing project helps give the drafting process clear direction. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

A thesis is not just a topic, but rather the writer's comment or interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic you select (for example, school uniforms, social networking), you must ask yourself, "What do I want to say about it?" Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful, and confident.

In the majority of essays, a thesis is one sentence long and appears toward the end of the introduction. It is specific and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how you will organize your information. Remember that a thesis statement does not summarize an issue but rather dissects it.

Working Thesis Statements

A strong thesis statement must have the following qualities:

- **It must be arguable**: A thesis statement must state a point of view or judgment about a topic. An established fact is not considered arguable.
- **It must be supportable**: The thesis statement must contain a point of view that can be supported with evidence (reasons, facts, examples).
- **It must be specific**: A thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and remain focused on the topic.

Example 1.4.1: Appropriate Thesis Statements

1. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
2. Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.
3. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
4. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.
5. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in Romeo and Juliet spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
6. J. D. Salinger's character in Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet acts like a phony on many occasions.
7. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxson in the play Fences symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.
  - **Weak thesis statement**: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.
- A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.
  - **Weak thesis statement**: Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.
- A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.

- **Weak thesis statement**: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.
- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.
  - **Weak thesis statement**: The life of Abraham Lincoln was long and challenging.

Exercise 10

Read the following thesis statements. On a separate piece of paper, identify each as weak or strong. For those that are weak, list the reasons why. Then revise the weak statements so that they conform to the requirements of a strong thesis.

1. The subject of this paper is my experience with ferrets as pets.
2. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
3. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet who lived in Baltimore during the nineteenth century.
4. In this essay, I will give you lots of reasons why slot machines should not be legalized in Baltimore.
5. Despite his promises during his campaign, President Kennedy took few executive measures to support civil rights legislation.
6. Because many children's toys have potential safety hazards that could lead to injury, it is clear that not all children's toys are safe.
7. My experience with young children has taught me that I want to be a disciplinary parent because I believe that a child without discipline can be a parent's worst nightmare.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing. Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis:

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

- **Pinpoint and replace** all nonspecific words, such as *people, everything, society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.
  - **Working thesis**: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.
  - **Revised thesis**: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.
  - **Explanation**: The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing. The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard.
- **Clarify ideas** that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.
  - **Working thesis**: The welfare system is a joke.
  - **Revised thesis**: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.
  - **Explanation**: A *joke* means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke* and more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.
- **Replace any linking verbs with action verbs**. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.
  - **Working thesis**: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.
  - **Revised thesis**: The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.
  - **Explanation**: The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis

statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. Asking questions will help you replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:
    - Who is not paying the teachers enough?
    - What is considered “enough”?
    - What is the problem?
    - What are the results?
- **Omit any general claims** that are hard to support.
  - **Working thesis**: Today’s teenage girls are too sexualized.
  - **Revised thesis**: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman’s worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.
  - **Explanation**: It is true that some young women in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:
    - Which teenage girls?
    - What constitutes “too” sexualized?
    - Why are they behaving that way?
    - Where does this behavior show up?
    - What are the repercussions?

Exercise 11

On a separate sheet of paper, write a thesis statement for each of the following topics. Remember to make each statement specific, precise, demonstrable, forceful and confident. Then choose one of the topics and create a list of supporting points that could be developed into one or more paragraphs each.

1. Texting while driving
2. The legal drinking age in the United States
3. Steroid use among professional athletes
4. Abortion
5. Racism

Key Takeaways

- Proper essays require a thesis statement to provide a specific focus and suggest how the essay will be organized.
- A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself.
- A strong thesis is specific, precise, forceful, confident, and is able to be demonstrated.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.
- A weak thesis is simply a declaration of your topic or contains an obvious fact that cannot be argued.
- Depending on your topic, it may or may not be appropriate to use first person point of view.
- Revise your thesis by ensuring all words are specific, all ideas are exact, and all verbs express action.

This page titled 1.4: Writing Thesis Statements is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.5: Methods of Organizing Your Writing

The method of organization for essays and paragraphs is just as important as content. When you begin to draft an essay or paragraph, your ideas may seem to flow from your mind in a seemingly random manner; however, your readers, who bring to the table different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas to help them draw connections between the body and the thesis. A solid organizational pattern not only helps readers to process and accept your ideas, but also gives your ideas a path that you can follow as you develop your essay (or paragraph). Knowing how you will organize your paragraphs allows you to better express and analyze your thoughts. In addition, planning the structure of your essay before you choose supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and targeted research. This section covers three ways to organize both essays and paragraphs: chronological order, order of importance, and spatial order.

Chronological Order

Chronological arrangement has the following purposes:

- To explain the history of an event or a topic
- To tell a story or relate an experience
- To explain how to do or to make something
- To explain the steps in a process

Chronological order is mostly used in expository writing, which is a form of writing that narrates, describes, informs, or explains a process. When using chronological order, arrange the events in the order that they actually happened, or will happen if you are giving instructions. This method requires you to use words such as *first, second, then, after that, later,* and *finally*. These transition words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis. For example, if you are writing an essay about the history of the airline industry, you would begin with its conception and detail the essential timeline events up until present day. You would follow the chain of events using words such as *first, then, next,* and so on. Keep in mind that chronological order is most appropriate for the following purposes:

- Writing essays containing heavy research
- Writing essays with the aim of listing, explaining, or narrating
- Writing essays that analyze literary works such as poems, plays, or books

When using chronological order, your introduction should indicate the information you will cover and should also establish the relevance of the information. Your body paragraphs should then provide clear divisions or steps in chronology. You can divide your paragraphs by time (such as decades, wars, or other historical events) or by the same structure of the work you are examining (such as a line-by-line explication of a poem).

Exercise 12

Choose an accomplishment you have achieved in your life. The important moment could be in sports, schooling, or extracurricular activities. On your own sheet of paper, list the steps you took to reach your goal. Try to be as specific as possible with the steps you took. Pay attention to using transition words to focus your writing.

Exercise 13

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that describes a process you are familiar with and can do well. Assume that your reader is unfamiliar with the procedure. Remember to use the chronological key words, such as *first, second, then,* and *finally*.

Order of Importance

Order of importance is best used for the following purposes:

- Persuading and convincing
- Ranking items by their importance, benefit, or significance
- Illustrating a situation, problem, or solution

Most essays move from the least to the most important point, and the paragraphs are arranged in an effort to build the essay's strength. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to begin with the most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable. When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading.

For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case. During your career, you may be required to work on a team that devises a strategy for a specific goal of your company, such as increasing profits. When planning your strategy you should organize your steps in order of importance. This demonstrates the ability to prioritize and plan. Using the order of importance technique also shows that you can create a resolution with logical steps for accomplishing a common goal.

Exercise 14

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that discusses a passion of yours. Your passion could be music, a particular sport, filmmaking, and so on. Your paragraph should be built upon the reasons why you feel so strongly. Briefly discuss your reasons in the order of least to greatest importance.

Spatial Order

Spatial order is best used for the following purposes:

- Helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it
- Evoking a scene using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
- Writing a descriptive essay

Spatial order means that you explain or describe objects as they are arranged around you in your space, for example in a bedroom. As the writer, you create a picture for your readers, and their perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you. The view must move in an orderly, logical progression, giving the reader clear directional signals to follow from place to place. The key to using this method is to choose a specific starting point and then guide the reader to follow your eye as it moves in an orderly trajectory from your starting point. Pay attention to the following student's description of her bedroom and how she guides the reader through the viewing process, foot by foot.

> Attached to my back bedroom wall is a small wooden rack dangling with red and turquoise necklaces that shimmer as I enter. Just to the right of the rack, billowy white curtains frame a large window with a sill that ends just six inches from the floor. The peace of such an image is a stark contrast to my desk, sitting to the right of the window, layered in textbooks, crumpled papers, coffee cups, and an overflowing ashtray. Turning my head to the right, I see a set of two bare windows that frame the trees outside the glass like a three-dimensional painting. Below the windows is an oak chest from which blankets and scarves are protruding. Against the wall opposite the billowy curtains is an antique dresser, on top of which sits a jewelry box and a few picture frames. A tall mirror attached to the dresser takes up much of the lavender wall.

The paragraph incorporates two objectives covered in this chapter: using an implied topic sentence and applying spatial order. Often in a descriptive essay, the two objectives work together. The following are possible transition words to include when using spatial order:

- Just to the left or just to the right
- Behind

- Between
- On the left or on the right
- Across from
- A little further down
- To the south, to the east, and so on
- A few yards away
- Turning left or turning right

Exercise 15

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph using spatial order that describes your commute to work, school, or another location you visit often.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- The way you organize your body paragraphs ensures you and your readers stay focused on and draw connections to your thesis statement.
- A strong organizational pattern allows you to articulate, analyze, and clarify your thoughts.
- Planning the organizational structure for your essay before you begin to search for supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and directed research.
- Chronological order is most commonly used in expository writing. It is useful for explaining the history of your subject, for telling a story, or for explaining a process.
- Order of importance is most appropriate in a persuasion paper as well as for essays in which you rank things, people, or events by their significance.
- Spatial order describes things as they are arranged in space and is best for helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it; it creates a dominant impression.

This page titled 1.5: Methods of Organizing Your Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 1)

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. You are likely to lose interest in a piece of writing that is disorganized and spans many pages without breaks. Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks, each paragraph focusing on only one main idea and presenting coherent sentences to support that one point. Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand on its own. For most types of informative or persuasive academic writing, writers find it helpful to think of the paragraph analogous to an essay, as each is controlled by a main idea or point, and that idea is developed by an organized group of more specific ideas. Thus, the thesis of the essay is analogous to the topic sentence of a paragraph, just as the supporting sentences in a paragraph are analogous to the supporting paragraphs in an essay.

In essays, each supporting paragraph adds another related main idea to support the writer's thesis, or controlling idea. Each related supporting idea is developed with facts, examples, and other details that explain it. By exploring and refining one idea at a time, writers build a strong case for their thesis. Effective paragraphing makes the difference between a satisfying essay that readers can easily process and one that requires readers to mentally organize the piece themselves. Thoughtful organization and development of each body paragraph leads to an effectively focused, developed, and coherent essay.

An effective paragraph contains three main parts:

- a topic sentence
- body, supporting sentences
- a concluding sentence

In **informative** and **persuasive** writing, the *topic sentence* is usually the first sentence or second sentence of a paragraph and expresses its main idea, followed by supporting sentences that help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. In **narrative** and **descriptive** paragraphs, however, topic sentences may be implied rather than explicitly stated, with all supporting sentences working to create the main idea. If the paragraph contains a concluding sentence, it is the last sentence in the paragraph and reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words. The following figure illustrates the most common paragraph structure for informative and persuasive college essays.

Paragraph Structure Graphic Organizer

Topic Sentence (topic + comment/judgment/interpretation):

_____ _____

Supporting Sentence 1: _____ _____

Supporting Sentence 2: _____ _____

Supporting Sentence 3: _____ _____

Supporting Sentence 4: _____ _____

Supporting Sentence 5: _____ _____

Supporting Sentence 6: _____ _____

Concluding Sentence (summary of comment/judgment/interpretation):

Note

The number of supporting sentences varies according to the paragraph's purpose and the writer's sentence structure.

Creating Focused Paragraphs with Topic Sentences

The foundation of a paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea or point of the paragraph. The topic sentence functions two ways: it clearly refers to and supports the essay's thesis, and it indicates what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. As the unifying sentence for the paragraph, it is the most general sentence, whereas all supporting sentences provide different types of more specific information, such as facts, details, or examples.

An effective topic sentence has the following characteristics:

- **A topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph**.
  - **Weak example**: First, we need a better way to educate students.
    - **Explanation**: The claim is vague because it does not provide enough information about what will follow, and it is too broad to be covered effectively in one paragraph.
  - **Stronger example**: Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many states.
    - **Explanation**: The sentence replaces the vague phrase "a better way" and leads readers to expect supporting facts and examples as to why standardizing education in these subjects might improve student learning in many states.
- **A good topic sentence is the most general sentence in the paragraph and thus does not include supporting details.**
  - **Weak example**: Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year.
    - **Explanation**: This topic sentence includes a supporting detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.
  - **Stronger example**: Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons.
    - **Explanation**: This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph, yet the sentence still makes a claim about salary caps – improvement of the game.
- **A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow**.
  - **Weak example**: In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types.
    - **Explanation**: The confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary bury the main idea, making it difficult for the reader to follow the topic sentence.
  - **Stronger example**: Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline.
    - **Explanation**: This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow. The writer can include examples of what kinds of writing can benefit from outlining in the supporting sentences.

Location of Topic Sentences

A topic sentence can appear anywhere within a paragraph or can be implied (such as in narrative or descriptive writing). In college-level expository or persuasive writing, placing an explicit topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph (the first or second sentence) makes it easier for readers to follow the essay and for writers to stay on topic, but writers should be aware of variations and maintain the flexibility to adapt to different writing projects. The following examples illustrate varying locations for the topic sentence. In each example, the topic sentence is underlined.

Topic Sentence Begins the Paragraph (General to Specific)

> After reading the new TV guide this week I wondered why we are still being bombarded with reality shows, a plague that continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favorites, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. Prisoner follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for

> the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season and hope that other viewers will express their criticism. These producers must stop the constant stream of meaningless shows without plotlines. We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

The first sentence tells readers that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the word bombarded. Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show and why the writer finds it unappealing. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject (reality shows) and then discuss specific examples (the reality show *Prisoner*). Most academic essays contain the topic sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph.

Topic Sentence Ends the Paragraph (Specific to General)

> Last year, a cat traveled 130 miles to reach its family, who had moved to another state and had left their pet behind. Even though it had never been to their new home, the cat was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighborhood can predict when its master is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.

The last sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals' senses are better than humans'). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence. This technique is frequently used in persuasive writing. The writer produces detailed examples as evidence to back up his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

When the Topic Sentence Appears in the Middle of the Paragraph

> For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises. It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually got my anxiety under control. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It's amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the underlined sentence is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how he used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety. Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic.

Implied Topic Sentences

Some well-organized paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all, a technique often used in descriptive and narrative writing. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph, as in the following narrative paragraph:

> Heaving herself up the stairs, Luella had to pause for breath several times. She let out a wheeze as she sat down heavily in the wooden rocking chair. Tao approached her cautiously, as if she might crumble at the slightest touch. He studied her face, like parchment, stretched across the bones so finely he could almost see right through the skin to the decaying muscle underneath. Luella smiled a toothless grin.

Although no single sentence in this paragraph states the main idea, the entire paragraph focuses on one concept—that Luella is

extremely old. The topic sentence is thus implied rather than stated so that all the details in the paragraph can work together to convey the dominant impression of Luella's age. In a paragraph such as this one, an explicit topic sentence would seem awkward and heavy-handed. Implied topic sentences work well if the writer has a firm idea of what he or she intends to say in the paragraph and sticks to it. However, a paragraph loses its effectiveness if an implied topic sentence is too subtle or the writer loses focus.

Exercise 16

In each of the following sentence pairs, **choose the more effective topic sentence**.

1. a. This paper will discuss the likelihood of the Democrats winning the next election.
   b. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Democrats need to listen to public opinion.
2. a. The unrealistic demands of union workers are crippling the economy for three main reasons.
   b. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure.
3. a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances.
   b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.
4. a. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.
   b. This essay will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry.

Exercise 17

Read the following statements and evaluate each as a topic sentence.

1. Exercising three times a week is healthy.
2. Sexism and racism exist in today's workplace.
3. I think we should raise the legal driving age.
4. Owning a business.
5. There are too many dogs on the public beach.

Exercise 18

Create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Write your responses on your own sheet of paper.

1. An endangered species
2. The cost of fuel
3. The legal drinking age
4. A controversial film or novel

This page titled 1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 2)

Developing Paragraphs

If you think of a paragraph as a sandwich, the supporting sentences are the filling between the bread. They make up the body of the paragraph by explaining, proving, or enhancing the controlling idea in the topic sentence. The overall method of development for paragraphs depends upon the essay as a whole and the purpose of each paragraph; thus paragraphs may be developed by using examples, description, narration, comparison and contrast, definition, cause and effect, classification and division. A writer may use one method, or combine several methods.

Writers often want to know how many words a paragraph should contain, and the answer is that a paragraph should develop the idea, point, or impression completely enough to satisfy the writer and readers. Depending on their function, paragraphs can vary in length from one or two sentences, to over a page; however, in most college assignments, successfully developed paragraphs usually contain approximately one hundred to two hundred and fifty words and span one-fourth to two-thirds of a typed page. A series of short paragraphs in an academic essay can seem choppy and unfocused, whereas paragraphs that are one page or longer can tire readers. Giving readers a paragraph break on each page helps them maintain focus.

This advice does not mean, of course, that composing a paragraph of a particular number of words or sentences guarantees an effective paragraph. Writers must provide enough supporting sentences within paragraphs to develop the topic sentence and simultaneously carry forward the essay's main idea.

Example 1.6.1:

In a descriptive paragraph about a room in the writer's childhood home, a length of two or three sentences is unlikely to contain enough details to create a picture of the room in the reader's mind, and it will not contribute in conveying the meaning of the place. In contrast, a half page paragraph, full of carefully selected vivid, specific details and comparisons, provides a fuller impression and engages the reader's interest and imagination. In descriptive or narrative paragraphs, supporting sentences present details and actions in vivid, specific language in objective or subjective ways, appealing to the readers' senses to make them see and experience the subject. In addition, some sentences writers use make comparisons that bring together or substitute the familiar with the unfamiliar, thus enhancing and adding depth to the description of the incident, place, person, or idea.

In a persuasive essay about raising the wage for certified nursing assistants, a paragraph might focus on the expectations and duties of the job, comparing them to that of a registered nurse. Needless to say, a few sentences that simply list the certified nurse's duties will not give readers a complete enough idea of what these healthcare professionals do. If readers do not have plenty of information about the duties and the writer's experience in performing them for what she considers inadequate pay, the paragraph fails to do its part in convincing readers that the pay is inadequate and should be increased. In informative or persuasive writing, a supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

- **Reason**: The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.
- **Fact**: Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.
- **Statistic**: Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.
- **Quotation**: "We will not allow this situation to continue," stated Senator Johns.
- **Example**: Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position, you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Personal testimony in the form of an extended example can be used in conjunction with the other types of support.

Consider the elements in the following paragraph:

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Sentence 1 (statistic): First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle.

Sentence 2 (fact): Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving.

Sentence 3 (reason): Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump.

Sentence 4 (example): Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance.

Sentence 5 (quotation): "It's the cheapest car I've ever had," she said. "The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I've owned."

Concluding sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Sometimes the writing situation does not allow for research to add specific facts or other supporting information, but paragraphs can be developed easily with examples from the writer's own experience.

Farheya, a student in a freshman English Composition class, quickly drafted an essay during a timed writing assignment in class. To practice improving paragraph development, she selected the body paragraph below to add support:

Topic: Would you be better off if you didn't own a television? Discuss.

Original paragraph:

Lack of ownership of a television set is also a way to preserve innocence, and keep the exposure towards anything inappropriate at bay. From simply watching a movie, I have seen things I shouldn't have, no matter how fast I switch the channel. Television shows not only display physical indecency, but also verbal. Many times movies do voice-overs of profane words, but they also leave a few words uncensored. Seeing how all ages can flip through and see or hear such things make t.v. toxic for the mind, and without it I wouldn't have to worry about what I may accidentally see or hear.

The original paragraph identifies two categories of indecent material, and there is mention of profanity to provide a clue as to what the student thinks is indecent. However, the paragraph could use some examples to make the idea of inappropriate material clearer. Farheya considered some of the television shows she had seen and made a few changes.

Revised paragraph:

Not owning a television set would also be a way to preserve innocence and keep my exposure to anything inappropriate at bay. While searching for a program to view, I have seen things I shouldn't have, no matter how fast I switched the channel. The synopsis of Euro Trip, which describes high school friends traveling across Europe, leads viewers to think that the film is an innocent adventure; however; it is filled with indecency, especially when the students reach Amsterdam. The movie Fast and Furious has the same problem since the women are all half-naked in half tops and mini-skirts or short-shorts. Television shows not only display physical indecency, but also verbal. Many television shows have no filters, and the characters say profane words freely. On Empire, one of the most viewed dramas today, the main characters Cookie and Lucious Lyon use profane words during their fights throughout entire episodes. Because The Big Bang Theory is a show about a group of science geeks and their cute neighbor, viewers might think that these science geniuses' conversations would be about their current research or other science topics. Instead, their characters regularly engage in conversations about their personal lives that should be kept private. The ease of flipping through channels and seeing or hearing such things makes t.v. toxic for the mind, and without a television I wouldn't have to worry about what I may accidentally see or hear.

Farheya's addition of a few examples helps to convey why she thinks she would be better off without a television.

Consider the paragraph below on the topic of trauma in J. D. Salinger's work, noticing how examples are used to develop the paragraph.

Thesis: Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority

of his works.

Supporting Point/Topic Sentence: Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced themes in many of his works.

Examples 1 - 3: A title and description of each work are used to establish support for the topic sentence.

> Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, "You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live." His short story **"A Perfect Day for Bananafish"** details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released form an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short Story, **"For Esme – with Love and Squalor,"** is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger's only novel, **The Catcher in the Rye**, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

Concluding Sentences

An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame the "meat" or body of the paragraph.

Compare the topic sentence and concluding sentence from the first example on hybrid cars:

Topic Sentence: There are many advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Concluding Sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Notice the use of the synonyms *advantages* and *benefits*. The concluding sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

Writers should avoid introducing any new ideas into a concluding sentence because a conclusion is intended to provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not covered in the paragraph will confuse readers and weaken the writing.

A concluding sentence may do any of the following:

- Restate the main idea.
  Example: Childhood obesity is a growing problem in the United States.
- Summarize the key points in the paragraph.
  Example: A lack of healthy choices, poor parenting, and an addiction to video games are among the many factors contributing to childhood obesity.
- Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.
  Example: These statistics indicate that unless we take action, childhood obesity rates will continue to rise.
- Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.
  Example: Based on this research, more than 60 percent of children in the United States will be morbidly obese by the year 2030 unless we take evasive action.
- Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.
  Example: Childhood obesity is an entirely preventable tragedy.

Paragraph Length

Although paragraph length is discussed in the section on developing paragraphs with supporting sentences, some additional reminders about when to start a new paragraph may prove helpful to writers:

- If a paragraph is over a page long, consider providing a paragraph break for readers. Look for a logical place to divide the paragraph; then revise the opening sentence of the second paragraph to maintain coherence.
- A series of short paragraphs can be confusing and choppy. Examine the content of the paragraphs and combine ones with related ideas or develop each one further.
- When dialogue is used, begin a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.
- Begin a new paragraph to indicate a shift in subject, tone, or time and place.

Exercise 19

Use one of the topic sentences created in Exercise 18 and develop a paragraph with supporting details.

Exercise 20

Identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence in the following paragraph.

The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a miniscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Collaboration: Pair with another student and compare your answers.

Exercise 21

On your own paper, write one example of each type of concluding sentence based on a topic of your choice.

Improving Paragraph Coherence

A strong paragraph holds together well, flowing seamlessly from the topic sentence into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use a combination of elements:

- **A clear organizational pattern**: chronological (for narrative writing and describing processes), spatial (for descriptions of people or places), order of importance, general to specific (deductive), specific to general (inductive)
- **Transitional words and phrases**: These connecting words describe a relationship between ideas.
- **Repetition of ideas**: This element helps keep the parts of the paragraph together by maintaining focus on the main idea, so this element reinforces both paragraph coherence and unity.

In the following example, notice the use of transitions (underlined) and key words (red):

Owning a hybrid car benefits both the owner and the environment. First, these cars get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. “It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I’ve owned.” Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer’s ideas by showing that he or she has another point to make in support of the topic sentence. The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas).

In addition to transition words, the writer repeats the word *hybrid* (and other references such as *these cars*, and *they*), and ideas

related to *benefits* to keep the paragraph focused on the topic and hold it together.

To include a summarizing transition for the concluding sentence, the writer could rewrite the final sentence as follows:

> In conclusion, given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Although the phrase "in conclusion" certainly reinforces the idea of summary and closure, it is not necessary in this case and seems redundant, as the sentence without the phrase already repeats and summarizes the benefits presented in the topic sentence and flows smoothly from the preceding quotation. The second half of the sentence, in making a prediction about the future, signals a conclusion, also making the phrase "in conclusion" unnecessary. The original version of the concluding sentence also illustrates how varying sentences openings can improve paragraph coherence. As writers continue to practice and develop their style, they more easily make these decisions between using standard transitional phrases and combining the repetition of key ideas with varied sentence openings.

The following table provides some useful transition words and phrases to connect sentences within paragraphs as well as to connect:

Table of Common Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitions That Show Sequence or Time		
after	before	later
afterward	before long	meanwhile
as soon as	finally	next
at first	first, second, third	soon
at last	in the first place	then
Transitions That Show Position		
above	across	at the bottom
at the top	behind	below
beside	beyond	inside
near	next to	opposite
to the left, to the right, to the side	under	where
Transitions That Show a Conclusion		
indeed	hence	in conclusion
in the final analysis	therefore	thus
Transitions That Continue a Line of Thought		
consequently	furthermore	additionally
because	besides the fact	following this idea further
in addition	in the same way	moreover
looking further	considering..., it is clear that	
Transitions That Change a Line of Thought		
but	yet	however
nevertheless	on the contrary	on the other hand
Transitions That Show Importance		
above all	best	especially
in fact	more important	most important

most	worst	
Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay		
finally	last	in conclusion
most of all	least of all	last of all
All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas Inside Paragraphs		
admittedly	at this point	certainly
granted	it is true	generally speaking
in general	in this situation	no doubt
no one denies	obviously	of course
to be sure	undoubtedly	unquestionably
Transitions that Introduce Examples		
for instance	for example	
Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps		
first, second, third	generally, furthermore, finally	in the first place, also, last
in the first place, furthermore, finally	in the first place, likewise, lastly	

Exercise 22

Using your own paper, write a paragraph on a topic of your choice. Be sure to include a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence and to use transitional words and phrases to link your ideas together.

Collaboration: Share your paragraph with another student or your writing group.

Key Takeaways

- A paragraph contains three distinct components: a topic sentence, body, and concluding sentence.
- The topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph.
- Good topic sentences are general enough to cover the supporting sentences and limited enough to be developed well.
- Topic sentences are clear and easy to follow, and provide an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
- Topic sentences may be explicit or implied. They are usually explicit in informative and persuasive essays, whereas they are often implied in narrative and descriptive writing.
- Topic sentences may be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence by offering facts, reasons, statistics, quotations, or examples.
- Concluding sentences summarize the key points in a paragraph and reiterate the main idea without repeating it word for word.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.
- Repetition of keywords helps keep paragraphs focused and coherent.

This page titled 1.6: Writing Paragraphs (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2: THE WRITING PROCESS

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, students, and employees find that beginning to write can be intimidating. When faced with a blank page, however, experienced writers remind themselves that writing, like other everyday activities, is a process. Every process, from writing to cooking, bike riding, and learning to use a new cell phone, will get significantly easier with practice.

Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and the proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create a well-written composition. In other words, writing is a process that requires following steps and using strategies to accomplish your goals.

Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed well and arranged in the proper order. This chapter will give you the chance to work on all these important aspects of writing.

2.1: Prewriting

2.2: Outlining

2.3: Drafting (Part 1)

2.3: Drafting (Part 2)

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 1)

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 2)

This page titled 2: The Writing Process is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.1: Prewriting

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

Choosing a Topic

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

In the next few sections, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she explores and develops her essay's topic and focus. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself **why** you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and **for whom** you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter and write the first draft.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Prewriting Techniques: Brainstorming

Brainstorming refers to writing techniques used to:

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

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

In the initial stage of the writing process, it is fine if you choose a general topic. Later you can use brainstorming strategies to narrow the focus of the topic.

Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Reading

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

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

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

Freewriting

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

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

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

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

Example 2.1.1: freewriting

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

Exercise 1

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

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

Asking Questions

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

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

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

When Mariah reread her freewriting notes, she found she had rambled and her thoughts were disjointed. She realized that the topic that interested her most was the one she started with, the media. She then decided to explore that topic by asking herself questions about it. Her purpose was to refine media into a topic she felt comfortable writing about. To see how asking questions can help you choose a topic, take a look at the following chart that Mariah completed to record her questions and answers. She asked herself the questions that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are often called the **5WH** questions, after their initial letters.

Example 2.1.2: "Asking Questions"

Who? I use media. Students teachers, parents, employers and employees-- almost everyone uses media.

What? The media can be a lot of things-- television, radio, email (I think), newspapers, magazines, books.

Where? The media is almost everywhere now. It's at home, at work, in cars, and even on cell phones.

When? The media has been around for a long time, but it seems a lot more important now.

Why? Hmm. This is a good question. I don't know why there is mass media. Maybe we have it because we have the technology now. Or people live far away from their families and have to stay in touch.

How? Well, media is possible because of the technology inventions, but I don't know how they all work.

Exercise 2

Using the prompt you chose to practice freewriting in Exercise 1, continue to explore the topic by answering the 5WH questions, as Mariah does in the above example.

Narrowing the focus

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

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

- Listing
- Clustering/Idea Mapping

Narrowing the focus means breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating lots of subtopics will help

you eventually select the ones that fit the assignment and appeal to you and your audience.

Listing

Listing is a term often applied to describe any prewriting technique writers use to generate ideas on a topic, including freewriting and asking questions. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer screen) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic. The following is Mariah's brainstorming list:

Mass Media

Magazines	DVD	Smart Phones
Newspapers	Gaming/Video	Text Messages
Broadcasting	Games	Tiny Cameras
Radio	Internet	GPS
Television	Cell Phones	

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

Idea Mapping

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

To create an idea map:

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

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

Figure 2.1.1

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

Topic Checklist: Developing a Good Topic

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

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

Exercise 3

Return to the topic explored in Exercise 2 through the prewriting technique of answering questions (5WH). Explore and narrow the topic further by practicing the prewriting techniques of Brainstorming (listing) and Idea Mapping. Allow yourself no more than five to seven minutes for each technique.

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

Key Takeaways

- All writers rely on steps and strategies to begin the writing process.
- The steps in the writing process are prewriting, outlining, writing a rough draft, revising, and editing.
- Writers often choose a general topic first and then narrow the focus to a more specific topic.

- Prewriting includes any brainstorming technique used to generate ideas, narrow the focus of abstract thoughts and ideas, and transfer them into written form.
- A good topic interests the writer, appeals to the audience, and fits the purpose of the writing project.

This page titled 2.1: Prewriting is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.2: Outlining

Purpose of an Outline

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Types of Outlines

Alphanumeric Outlines

This is the most common type of outline used and is usually instantly recognizable to most people. The formatting follows these characters, in this order:

Level 1: Roman Numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, etc.)

Level 2: Capitalized Letters (A, B, C, D, E, etc.)

Level 3: Arabic Numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.)

Level 4: Lowercase Letters (a, b, c, d, e, etc.)

Example 2.2.1:

I. *(Main point)* Lowering the speed limit to 55 mph on Interstate highways is a cost effective way to reduce pollution and greenhouse gases

A. *(Supporting detail)* Gas mileage significantly decreases at speeds over 55 mph
   1. *(Supporting detail for sub-point)* Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase MPG by as much as 15 percent
      a. *(Additional explanation/support for supporting detail)* Each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (at $3.00 per gallon).

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

Decimal Outlines

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

Example 2.2.2:

1. *(Main point)* Lowering the speed limit on all Interstate highways to 55 mph would create a significant, cost free reduction in air pollution.
   1. *(Supporting detail)* Gas consumption significantly increases at speeds over 55 mph.
      1. (Supporting detail for sub-point) Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase your MPG by as much as 15 percent, and thereby eliminate 15 percent of carbon emissions.
         1. *(Additional explanation/support for supporting detail)* According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), "as a rule of thumb, each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (at $3.00 per gallon)."

Micro and Macro Outlines

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

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

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

Example 2.2.3: Micro/Full-Sentence Outline

I. *(Main point)* Lowering the speed limit on all Interstate highways to 55 mph would create a significant, cost free reduction in air pollution.
   A. *(Supporting detail)* Gas consumption significantly increases at speeds over 55 mph.
      1. *(Supporting detail for sub-point)* Slowing down from 65 mph to 55 mph can increase your car's MPG by as much as 15 percent, and thereby eliminate15 percent of carbon emissions.

a. *(Additional explanation/support for supporting detail)* According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), "as a rule of thumb, each 5 mph driven over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.21 per gallon for gas (at $3.00 per gallon)".

Example 2.2.4: Macro/Topic Outline

I. *(Main point)* Lowering the speed limit on all Interstate highways to 55 mph would create a significant, cost free reduction in air pollution.
   A. *(Supporting detail)* Increase of Consumption over 55 mph
      1. *(Supporting detail for sub-point)* Consumption and carbon emissions
         a. *(Additional explanation/support for supporting detail)* Amount of money saved

Creating an Outline

Identify your topic: Put the topic in your own words in with a single sentence or phrase to help you stay on topic.

Determine your main points. What are the main points you want to make to convince your audience? Refer back to the prewriting/brainstorming exercise of answering 5WH questions: "why or how is the main topic important?" Using your brainstorming notes, you should be able to create a working thesis.

List your main points/ideas in a logical order. You can always change the order later as you evaluate your outline.

Create sub-points for each major idea. Typically, each time you have a new number or letter, there need to be at least two points (i.e. if you have an A, you need a B; if you have a 1, you need a 2; etc.). Though perhaps frustrating at first, it is indeed useful because it forces you to think hard about each point; if you can't create two points, then reconsider including the first in your paper, as it may be extraneous information that may detract from your argument.

Evaluate: Review your organizational plan, your blueprint for your paper. Does each paragraph have a controlling idea/topic sentence? Is each point adequately supported? Look over what you have written. Does it make logical sense? Is each point suitably fleshed out? Is there anything included that is unnecessary?

Overview: View the YouTube video on "Outlining" from the University of North Carolina's Online Writing Lab:

Exercise 4

1. Create a sentence outline from the following introductory paragraph in alphanumeric format:

The popularity of knitting is cyclical, rising and falling according to the prevailing opinion of women's places in society. Though internationally a unisex hobby, knitting is pervasively thought of as a woman's hobby in the United States. Knitting is currently enjoying a boost in popularity as traditionally minded women pick up the craft while women who enjoy subverting traditional gender roles have also picked up the needles to reclaim "the lost domestic arts" and give traditionally feminine crafts the proper respect. American men are also picking up the needles in greater numbers, with men's knitting guilds and retreats nationwide. This rise in popularity has made the receiving of hand-knit items special, and many people enjoy receiving these long-lasting, painstakingly crafted items. For any knitters, the perfect gift starts by choosing the perfect yarn. Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the preferences of the person for whom the project is being made, the availability of the yarn, and the type of yarn recommended by the pattern.

What is the thesis? How is the topic introduced? Is there a hierarchy of supporting points?

2. Now create your own outline based on the topic you developed in Exercise 3.

Example 2.2.5: 3-Level Alphanumeric Outline

Outline

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

I. Making the perfect egg omelet requires proper preparation.
   A. The cook must have adequate utensils.
      1. A heavy, Teflon-coated frying pan gives even heat and prevents burning.
      2. A plastic spatula prevents the cook from scratching the frying pan.
   B. The cook must select fresh ingredients.
      1. Fresh eggs make a fluffier omelet than eggs that have aged.
      2. Sweet milk blends into the egg batter more evenly than sour milk.
      3. Fresh vegetable oil is necessary to avoid giving the omelet a greasy flavor and texture.
      4. Newly cracked pepper and sea salt add extra zest to the egg batter.
II. Making the perfect egg omelet requires skillful cooking techniques.
   A. The cook must prepare the egg batter quickly.
      1. The eggs must be beaten with a whisk until they are fluffy.
      2. The milk and seasonings must be whisked into the egg batter before the eggs go flat.
   B. The cook must fry the egg batter with care.
      1. The egg batter must be poured into the frying pan as soon as the oil is hot.
      2. The omelet must be turned in the pan only once as soon as the batter sets on top.

This page titled 2.2: Outlining is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.3: Drafting (Part 1)

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

Goals and Strategies for Drafting

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

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

Making the Writing Process Work for You

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

- **Begin writing with the part you know the most about**: You can start with the third paragraph in your outline if ideas come easily to mind. You can start with the second paragraph or the first paragraph, too. Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support. Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.
- **Write one paragraph at a time and then stop**: As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.
- **Take short breaks to refresh your mind**: This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multipage report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. But do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.
- **Be reasonable with your goals**: If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.
- **Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write**: These aspects of writing are just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

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

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

to explain to that audience, or to inform them of, or to persuade them about.

Exercise 5

Using the topic for the essay that you outlined in the second step of Exercise 4, describe your purpose and your audience as specifically as you can. Use your own sheet of paper to record your responses. Then keep these responses near you during future stages of the writing process.

Purpose: _____

Audience: _____

Discovering the Basic Elements of a First Draft

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

A first draft should include the following elements:

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

The Bowtie Method

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

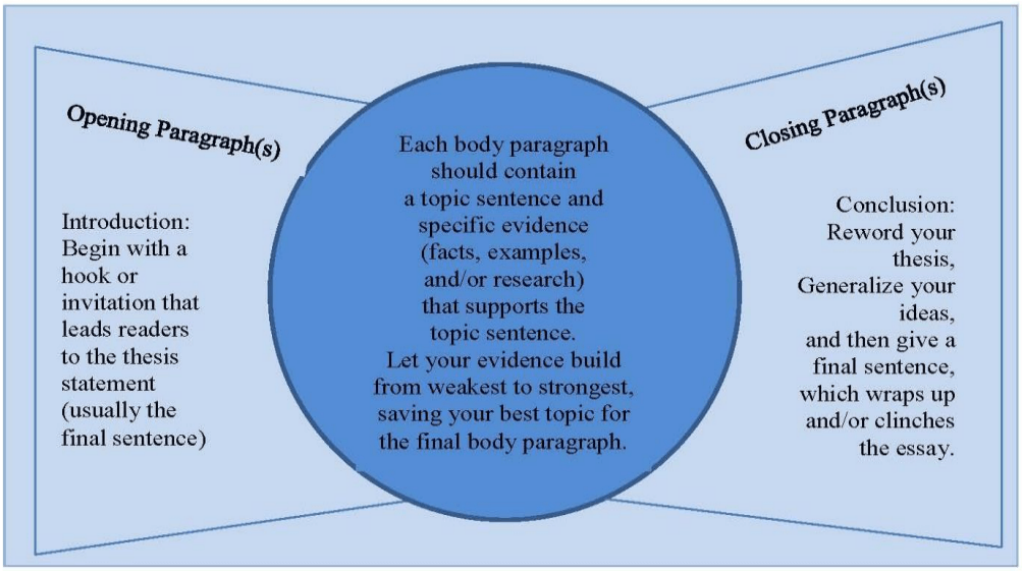


Figure 2.3.1 - Figure of the "Bowtie Method"

Starting Your First Draft

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

The following is Mariah's thesis statement:

E-book readers are changing the way people read.

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

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

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

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

I. Ebook readers are changing the way people read.
   A. Ebook readers make books easy to access and to carry.

    1. Books can be downloaded electronically.
    2. Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.
  B. The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.
    1. Booksellers sell their own ebook readers.
    2. Electronics and computer companies also sell ebook readers.
  C. Current ebook readers have significant limitations.
    1. The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.
    2. Few programs have been made to duplicate the way Americans borrow and read printed books.

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

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

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

Exercise 6

Study how Mariah made the transition from her sentence outline to her first draft. First, copy her outline onto your own sheet of paper. Leave a few spaces between each part of the outline. Then copy sentences from Mariah's paragraph to align each sentence with its corresponding entry in her outline.

This page titled 2.3: Drafting (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.3: Drafting (Part 2)

Continuing the First Draft

Mariah continued writing her essay, moving to the second and third body paragraphs. She had supporting details but no numbered sub-points in her outline, so she had to consult her prewriting notes for specific information to include. If you decide to take a break between finishing your first body paragraph and starting the next one, do not start writing immediately when you return to your work. Put yourself back in context and in the mood by rereading what you have already written. This is what Mariah did. If she had stopped writing in the middle of writing the paragraph, she could have jotted down some quick notes to herself about what she would write next.

Preceding each body paragraph that Mariah wrote is the appropriate section of her sentence outline. Notice how she expanded Roman numeral II from her outline into a first draft of the second body paragraph. As you read, ask yourself how closely she stayed on purpose and how well she paid attention to the needs of her audience.

Outline

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

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

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

Outline

I.
II. ...
III. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.
    A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?
    B. In the screen-size wars, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?
    C. Does every home really need a media center? ...

Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. You could listen to the guys in the electronics stores, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell you what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the

number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions. The other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show decent lacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints. Large flatpanel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need.

Exercise 7

Reread body paragraphs two and three of the essay that Mariah is writing. Then answer the questions on your own sheet of paper.

1. In body paragraph two, Mariah decided to develop her paragraph as a nonfiction narrative. Do you agree with her decision? Explain. How else could she have chosen to develop the paragraph? Why is that better?
2. Compare the writing styles of paragraphs two and three. What evidence do you have that Mariah was getting tired or running out of steam? What advice would you give her? Why?
3. Choose one of these two body paragraphs. Write a version of your own that you think better fits Mariah's audience and purpose.

Writing a Title

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaways

- Make the writing process work for you. Use any and all of the strategies that help you move forward in the writing process.
- Always be aware of your purpose for writing and the needs of your audience. Cater to those needs in every sensible way.
- Remember to include all the key structural parts of an essay: a thesis statement that is part of your introductory paragraph, three or more body paragraphs as described in your outline, and a concluding paragraph. Then add an engaging title to draw in readers.
- Write paragraphs of an appropriate length for your writing assignment. Paragraphs in college-level writing can be a page long, as long as they cover the main topics in your outline.
- Use your topic outline or your sentence outline to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas. Each main idea, indicated by a Roman numeral in your outline, becomes the topic of a new paragraph. Develop it with the supporting details and the sub-points of those details that you included in your outline.
- Generally speaking, write your introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.

Drafting Body Paragraphs

If your thesis gives the reader a roadmap to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be

able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement. The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

Select Primary Support for Your Thesis

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points you choose to expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further supported by supporting details within the paragraphs.

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it. For guidance on incorporating research into your paragraphs, see the section "Using Sources."

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards:

- **Be relevant to the thesis**: Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your supporting points wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.
- **Be specific**: The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be more specific than the thesis. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.
- **Be detailed**: Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

Pre-write to Identify Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

Recall that when you pre-write you essentially make a list of examples or reasons why you support your stance. Stemming from each point, you further provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, you are then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces you will use in your body paragraphs.

Select the Most Effective Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

As you developed a working thesis through prewriting techniques, you may have generated a lot of information, which may be edited out later. Remember that your primary support must be relevant to your thesis. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

1. **Facts**: Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation. For example, the sentence "The most populated state in the United States is California" is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.
2. **Judgments**: Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.

3. **Testimony**: Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; he adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.
4. **Personal observation**: Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child's social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field. When using sources, you are responsible for properly documenting the borrowed information properly. Refer to the section "Using Sources" for more information.

Choose Supporting Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should comprise the following elements: topic sentence + supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

As you read in Writing Paragraphs, topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay. These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement. Topic sentences are linked to the ideas you have introduced in your thesis, thus reminding readers what your essay is about. A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

Unless your professor instructs otherwise, you should include at least three body paragraphs in your essay. A five-paragraph essay, including the introduction and conclusion, is commonly the standard for exams and essay assignments because it is meant to help students create fully developed essays; however, writers should maintain flexibility and not expect all essays to conform to that model. The emphasis is on creating an essay that provides enough support to tell a story, create an image or idea, or inform or persuade the audience.

Example 2.3.1:

Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

Example 2.3.2:

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the primary support sentence (the topic sentence), which is underlined.

<u>Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works</u>. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, "You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live." His short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released form an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short Story, "For Esme – with Love and Squalor," is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger's only novel, the <u>Catcher in The Rye</u>, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

Draft Supporting Detail Sentences for Each Primary Support Sentence

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence. The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

Thesis: Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.

I. Dogs can scare cyclists.
   A. Cyclists are forced to zigzag on the roads.
   B. School children panic and turn wildly on their bikes.
   C. People walking at night freeze in fear.
II. Loose dogs are traffic hazards.
   A. Dogs in the street make people swerve their cars.
   B. To avoid dogs, drivers run into other cars or pedestrians.
   C. Children coaxing dogs across city streets create danger.
III. Unleashed dogs damage gardens.
   A. They step on flowers and vegetables.
   B. They destroy hedges by urinating on them.
   C. They mess up lawns by digging holes.

You have the option of writing your topic sentences in one of three ways. You can state it at the beginning of the body paragraph, or at the end of the paragraph, or you do not have to write it at all. This is called an implied topic sentence. An implied topic sentence lets readers form the main idea for themselves. For beginning writers, it is best to not use implied topic sentences because it makes it harder to focus your writing. Your instructor may also want to clearly identify the sentences that support your thesis.

Key Takeaways

- Your body paragraphs should closely follow the path set forth by your thesis statement.
- Strong body paragraphs contain evidence that supports your thesis.
- Primary support comprises the most important points you use to support your thesis.
- Strong primary support is specific, detailed, and relevant to the thesis.
- Prewriting helps you determine your most compelling primary support.
- Evidence includes facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observation.
- Reliable sources may include newspapers, magazines, academic journals, books, encyclopedias, and firsthand testimony.
- A topic sentence presents one point of your thesis statement while the information in the rest of the paragraph supports that point.
- A body paragraph comprises a topic sentence plus supporting details.

Exercise 8

Print out the first draft of your essay and use a highlighter to mark your topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately present your paragraphs, as well as accurately reflect your thesis. If your topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it to more accurately match the rest of the paragraph.

Exercise 9

Choose one of the following working thesis statements. On a separate sheet of paper, write for at least five minutes using one of the prewriting techniques you learned in Chapter 2, “PreWriting Techniques.”

1. Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.
2. Students cheat for many different reasons.

3. Drug use among teens and young adults is a problem.
4. The most important change that should occur at my college or university is _____.

Exercise 10

Refer to the previous Exercise and select three of your most compelling reasons to support the thesis statement. Remember that the points you choose must be specific and relevant to the thesis. The statements you choose will be your primary support points, and you will later incorporate them into the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 11

In the previous Exercise, you chose three of your most convincing points to support the thesis statement you selected from the list. Take each point and incorporate it into a topic sentence for each body paragraph.

Supporting point 1: _____

Topic sentence: _____

Supporting point 2: _____

Topic sentence: _____

Supporting point 3: _____

Topic sentence: _____

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 12

Using the three topic sentences you composed for the thesis statement in Exercise 11, draft at least three supporting details for each point.

Thesis statement: _____

Primary supporting point 1: _____

Supporting details: _____

Primary supporting point 2: _____

Supporting details: _____

Primary supporting point 3: _____

Supporting details: _____

Drafting Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

Picture your introduction as a storefront window: You have a certain amount of space to attract your customers (readers) to your goods (subject) and bring them inside your store (discussion). Once you have enticed them with something intriguing, you then point them in a specific direction and try to make the sale (convince them to accept your thesis). Your introduction is an invitation

to your readers to consider what you have to say and then to follow your train of thought as you expand upon your thesis statement.

Writing an Introduction

An introduction serves the following purposes:

- Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
- Introduces the general topic of the essay
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs

First impressions are crucial and can leave lasting effects in your reader's mind, which is why the introduction is so important to your essay. If your introductory paragraph is dull or disjointed, your reader probably will not have much interest in continuing with the essay.

Attracting Interest in Your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction should begin with an engaging statement devised to provoke your readers' interest. In the next few sentences, introduce them to your topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move deeper into your introduction, you gradually narrow the focus, moving closer to your thesis. Moving smoothly and logically from your introductory remarks to your thesis statement can be achieved using a funnel technique, as illustrated in the diagram "Funnel Technique."

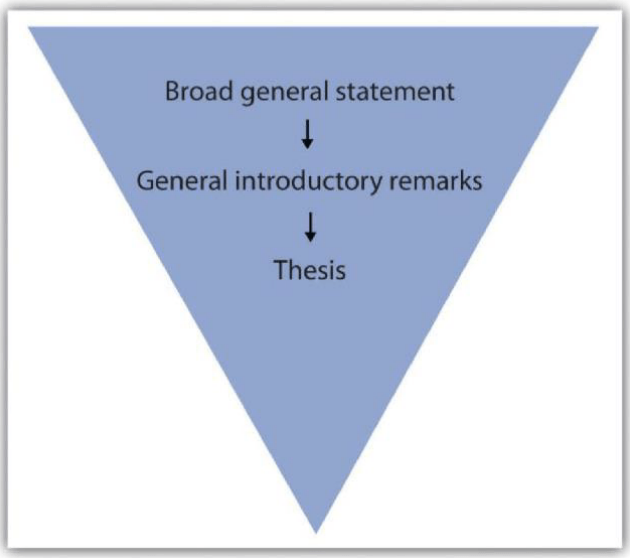


Figure 2.3.1 - *Funnel Technique*

Immediately capturing your readers' interest increases the chances of having them read what you are about to discuss. You can garner curiosity for your essay in a number of ways. Try to get your readers personally involved by doing any of the following:

- Appealing to their emotions
- Using logic
- Beginning with a provocative question or opinion
- Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
- Raising a question or series of questions
- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
- Opening with a striking image
- Including a personal anecdote

Remember that your diction, or word choice, while always important, is most crucial in your introductory paragraph. Boring diction could extinguish any desire a person might have to read through your discussion. Choose words that create images or express action.

Earlier in this chapter we followed Mariah as she moved through the writing process. In this section, Mariah writes her introduction and conclusion for the same essay. Mariah incorporates some of the introductory elements into her introductory paragraph, which she previously outlined. Her thesis statement is underlined.

> Play Atari on a General Electric brand television set? Maybe watch Dynasty? Or read old newspaper articles on microfiche at the library? Twenty-five years ago, the average college student did not have many options when it came to entertainment in the form of technology. Fast forward to the twenty-first century, and the digital age has revolutionized the way people entertain themselves. In today's rapidly evolving world of digital technology, consumers are bombarded with endless options for how they do most everything, from buying and reading books to taking and developing photographs. In a society that is obsessed with digital means of entertainment, it is easy for the average person to become baffled. Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusing.

Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach your conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade. But what good writers remember is that it is vital to put just as much attention into the conclusion as in the rest of the essay. After all, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

A conclusion that does not correspond to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle your readers and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if you have worked hard to write the introduction and body, your conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

Keep in mind that the ideas in your conclusion must conform to the rest of your essay. In order to tie these components together, restate your thesis at the beginning of your conclusion. This helps you assemble, in an orderly fashion, all the information you have explained in the body. Repeating your thesis reminds your readers of the major arguments you have been trying to prove and also indicates that your essay is drawing to a close. A strong conclusion also reviews your main points and emphasizes the importance of the topic.

The construction of the conclusion is similar to the introduction, in which you make general introductory statements and then present your thesis. The difference is that in the conclusion you first paraphrase, or state in different words, your thesis and then follow up with general concluding remarks. These sentences should progressively broaden the focus of your thesis and maneuver your readers out of the essay.

Many writers like to end their essays with a final emphatic statement. This strong closing statement will cause your readers to continue thinking about the implications of your essay; it will make your conclusion, and thus your essay, more memorable. Another powerful technique is to challenge your readers to make a change in either their thoughts or their actions. Challenging your readers to see the subject through new eyes is a powerful way to ease yourself and your readers out of the essay.

When closing your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Relying on statements such as *in conclusion, it is clear that, as you can see*, or *in summation* is unnecessary and can be considered trite.

It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in your conclusion:

- **Introducing new material**: Introducing new material in your conclusion has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph.
- **Contradicting your thesis**: Contradicting or changing your thesis statement causes your readers to think that you do not actually have a conviction about your topic. After all, you have spent several paragraphs adhering to a specific point of view.
- **Changing your thesis**: When you change sides or open up your point of view in the conclusion, your reader becomes less inclined to believe your original argument.
- **Using apologies or disclaimers**: By apologizing for your opinion or stating that you know it is tough to digest, you are in fact admitting that even you know what you have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. You do not want your readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

Mariah incorporates some of these pointers into her conclusion. She has paraphrased her thesis statement in the first sentence, which is underlined.

> In a society fixated on the latest and smartest digital technology, a consumer can easily become confused by the countless options and specifications. The ever-changing state of digital technology challenges consumer with its updates and add-ons and expanding markets and incompatible formats and restrictions – a fact that is complicated by salesmen who want to sell them anything. In a world that is increasingly driven by instant gratification, it's easy for people to buy the first thing they see. The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

Make sure your essay is balanced by not having an excessively long or short introduction or conclusion. Check that they match each other in length as closely as possible, and try to mirror the formula you used in each. Parallelism strengthens the message of your essay.

Exercise 13

Reread each sentence in Mariah's introductory paragraph. Indicate which techniques she used and comment on how each sentence is designed to attract her readers' interest.

Exercise 14

On a separate sheet of a paper, restate your thesis from an earlier exercise in this section and then make some general concluding remarks. Next, compose a final emphatic statement. Finally, incorporate what you have written into a strong conclusion paragraph for your essay.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

This page titled 2.3: Drafting (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 1)

Revising and editing are the two tasks you undertake to significantly improve your essay. Both are very important elements of the writing process. You may think that a completed first draft means little improvement is needed. However, even experienced writers need to improve their drafts and rely on peers during revising and editing. You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. For both athletes and dancers, the more they practice, the stronger their performance will become. Web designers seek better images, a more clever design, or a more appealing background for their web pages. Writing has the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.

Understanding the Purpose of Revising and Editing

Revising and editing allow you to examine two important aspects of your writing separately, so that you can give each task your undivided attention.

- When you **revise**, you take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information in order to make your ideas clearer, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.
- When you **edit**, you take a second look at how you expressed your ideas. You add or change words. You fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. You improve your writing style. You make your essay into a polished, mature piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.

Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them over the course of this semester; then keep using the ones that bring results.

- Take a break. You are proud of what you wrote, but you might be too close to it to make changes. Set aside your writing for a few hours or even a day until you can look at it objectively.
- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Use the resources that your college provides. Find out where your school's writing lab is located and ask about the assistance they provide online and in person.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?

Many people hear the words critic, critical, and criticism and pick up only negative vibes that provoke feelings that make them blush, grumble, or shout. However, as a writer and a thinker, you need to learn to be critical of yourself in a positive way and have high expectations for your work. You also need to train your eye and trust your ability to fix what needs fixing. For this, you need to teach yourself where to look.

When you reread your writing to find revisions to make, look for each type of problem in a separate sweep. Read it straight through once to locate any problems with unity. Read it straight through a second time to find problems with coherence. You may follow this same practice during many stages of the writing process.

Completing a Peer Review

After working so closely with a piece of writing, writers often need to step back and ask for a more objective reader. What writers most need is feedback from readers who can respond only to the words on the page. When they are ready, writers show their drafts to someone they respect and who can give an honest response about its strengths and weaknesses.

You, too, can ask a peer to read your draft when it is ready. After evaluating the feedback and assessing what is most helpful, the reader's feedback will help you when you revise your draft. This process is called **peer review**. You can work with a partner in your class and identify specific ways to strengthen each other's essays. Although you may be uncomfortable sharing your writing at first, remember that each writer is working toward the same goal: a final draft that fits the audience and the purpose. Maintaining a positive attitude when providing feedback will put you and your partner at ease. The box that follows provides a useful framework for the peer review session.

Questions for Peer Review

Title of essay: _____

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Peer reviewer's name: _____

1. This essay is about_____.
2. Your main points in this essay are_____.
3. What I most liked about this essay is_____.
4. These three points struck me as your strongest:
   a. Point: _____
      Why: _____
   b. Point: _____
      Why: _____
   c. Point: _____
      Why: _____

These places in your essay are not clear to me:

a. Where: _____
   Needs improvement because _____
b. Where: _____
   Needs improvement because _____
c. Where: _____
   Needs improvement because _____

The one additional change you could make that would improve this essay significantly is_____.

Exercise 15

Exchange essays with a classmate and complete a peer review of each other's draft in progress. Remember to give positive feedback and to be courteous and polite in your responses. Focus on providing one positive comment and one question for more information to the author

Using Feedback

Using Feedback Objectively

The purpose of peer feedback is to receive constructive criticism of your essay. Your peer reviewer is your first real audience, and you have the opportunity to learn what confuses and delights a reader so that you can improve your work before sharing the final draft with a wider audience (or your intended audience). It may not be necessary to incorporate every recommendation your peer reviewer makes. However, if you start to observe a pattern in the responses you receive from peer reviewers, you might want to take that feedback into consideration in future assignments. For example, if you read consistent comments about a need for more research, then you may want to consider including more research in future assignments.

Using Feedback from Multiple Sources

You might get feedback from more than one reader as you share different stages of your revised draft. In this situation, you may receive feedback from readers who do not understand the assignment or who lack your involvement with and enthusiasm for it. You need to evaluate the responses you receive according to two important criteria:

- Determine if the feedback supports the purpose of the assignment.
- Determine if the suggested revisions are appropriate to the audience.

Then, using these standards, accept or reject revision feedback.

Exercise 16

Work with two partners. Go back Exercise 14 in this lesson and compare your responses to Mariah's paragraph, with your partners' response. Recall Mariah's purpose for writing and her audience. Then, working individually, list where you agree and where you disagree about revision needs.

Writing at Work

One of the reasons why word-processing programs build in a reviewing feature is that workgroups have become a common feature in many businesses. Writing is often collaborative, and the members of a workgroup and their supervisors often critique group members' work and offer feedback that will lead to a better final product.

Creating Unity and Coherence

Following your outline closely offers you a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. However, when writers are rushed, are tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may become less than they want it to be. Their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may be adding information that is not needed to develop the main idea.

When a piece of writing has unity, all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense. When the writing has coherence, the ideas flow smoothly. The wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and from paragraph to paragraph.

Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes.

Creating Unity

Sometimes writers get caught up in the moment and cannot resist a good digression. Even though you might enjoy such detours when you chat with friends, unplanned digressions usually harm a piece of writing.

Mariah stayed close to her outline when she drafted the three body paragraphs of her essay she tentatively titled "Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?" But a recent shopping trip for an HDTV upset her enough that she digressed from the main topic of her third paragraph and included comments about the sales staff at the electronics store she visited. When she revised her essay, she deleted the offtopic sentences that affected the unity of the paragraph. Read the following paragraph twice, the first time without Mariah's changes, and the second time with them.

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

Exercise 17

1. Answer the following two questions about Mariah's paragraph:
   1. Do you agree with Mariah's decision to make the deletions she made? Did she cut too much, too little, or just enough? Explain.
   2. Is the explanation of what screen resolution means a digression? Or is it audience friendly and essential to understanding the paragraph? Explain.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

2. Now start to revise the first draft of the essay you wrote at the end of Writing Your Own First Draft. Reread it to find any statements that affect the unity of your writing. Decide how best to revise.

Creating Coherence

Careful writers use transitions to clarify how the ideas in their sentences and paragraphs are related. These words and phrases help the writing flow smoothly. Adding transitions is not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and give a mature feel to your essays. The Table of Common Transitional Words and Phrases groups many common transitions according to their purpose.

After Mariah revised for unity, she next examined her paragraph about televisions to check for coherence. She looked for places where she needed to add a transition or perhaps reword the text to make the flow of ideas clear. In the version that follows, she has already deleted the sentences that were off topic.

Many writers make their revisions on a printed copy and then transfer them to the version on-screen. They conventionally use a small arrow called a caret (^) to show where to insert an addition or correction.

> ^ Finally, Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HD television) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. ^ There's good reason for this confusion: You face a decision you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. ^ The first big decision is the screen resolution you want. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The ^ second other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ^ Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. ^ However, Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need!

Exercise 18

1. Answer the following questions about Mariah's revised paragraph.
   1. Do you agree with the transitions and other changes that Mariah made to her paragraph? Which would you keep and which were unnecessary? Explain.
   2. What transition words or phrases did Mariah add to her paragraph? Why did she choose each one?
   3. What effect does adding additional sentences have on the coherence of the paragraph? Explain. When you read both versions aloud, which version has a more logical flow of ideas? Explain.
2. Now return to the first draft of the essay you wrote in Starting Your First Draft and revise it for coherence. Add transition words and phrases where they are needed, and make any other changes that are needed to improve the flow and connection between ideas.

This page titled 2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 2)

Being Clear and Concise

Some writers are very methodical and painstaking when they write a first draft. Other writers unleash a lot of words in order to get out all that they feel they need to say. Do either of these composing styles match your style? Or is your composing style somewhere in between? No matter which description best fits you, the first draft of almost every piece of writing, no matter its author, can be made clearer and more concise. If you have a tendency to write too much, you will need to look for unnecessary words. If you have a tendency to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language.

Identifying Wordiness

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers, because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

- **Sentences that begin with** *There is* or *There are*.
  Wordy: There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.
  Revised: The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.
- **Sentences with unnecessary modifiers.**
  Wordy: Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favor of the proposed important legislation.
  Revised: Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favor of the proposed legislation.
- **Sentences with deadwood phrases that add little to the meaning**. Be judicious when you use phrases such as *in terms of, with a mind to, on the subject of, as to whether or not, more or less, as far as…is concerned,* and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point.
  Wordy: As a world leader in the field of green technology, the company plans to focus its efforts in the area of geothermal energy. A report as to whether or not to use geysers as an energy source is in the process of preparation.
  Revised: As a world leader in green technology, the company plans to focus on geothermal energy. A report about using geysers as an energy source is in preparation.
- **Sentences in the passive voice or with forms of the verb** *to be*. Sentences with passive-voice verbs often create confusion, because the subject of the sentence does not perform an action. Sentences are clearer when the subject of the sentence performs the action and is followed by a strong verb. Use strong active-voice verbs in place of forms of *to be*, which can lead to wordiness. Avoid passive voice when you can.
  Wordy: It might perhaps be said that using a GPS device is something that is a benefit to drivers who have a poor sense of direction.
  Revised: Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.
- **Sentences with constructions that can be shortened**.
  Wordy: The ebook reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. My over-sixty uncle bought an ebook reader, and his wife bought an ebook reader, too.
  Revised: The ebook reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. My over-sixty uncle and his wife both bought ebook readers.

Exercise 19

Now return once more to the first draft of the essay you have been revising. Check it for unnecessary words. Try making your sentences as concise as they can be.

Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most college essays should be written in formal English, suitable for an academic situation. Follow these principles to be sure

that your word choice is appropriate.

- **Avoid slang**: Find alternatives to *bummer, kewl*, and *rad*.
- **Avoid language that is overly casual**: Write about "men and women" rather than "girls and guys" unless you are trying to create a specific effect. A formal tone calls for formal language.
- **Avoid contractions**: Use *do not* in place of *don't*, *I am* in place of *I'm*, *have not* in place of *haven't*, and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.
- **Avoid clichés**: Overused expressions such as *green with envy, face the music, better late than never,* and similar expressions are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.
- **Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have different meanings**: Some examples are *allusion/illusion, complement/compliment, council/counsel, concurrent/consecutive, founder/flounder,* and *historic/historical*. When in doubt, check a dictionary.
- **Choose words with the connotations you want:** Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word *proud* and the negative connotations of *arrogant* and *conceited*.
- **Use specific words rather than overly general words:** Find synonyms for *thing, people, nice, good, bad, interesting*, and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Now read the revisions Mariah made to make her third paragraph clearer and more concise. She has already incorporated the changes she made to improve unity and coherence.

> Finally, nothing ^ confuses buyers more than purchasing ~~is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want~~ a new high-definition digital television (HDTV), ~~with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on.~~ ^ and with ~~There's a~~ good reason. ~~for this confusion. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture tube televisions.~~ The first big decision ~~is~~ ^ involves screen resolution, ~~you want.~~ ^ which ~~Screen resolution~~ means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or ^ as 768p. The trouble is that ^ on ~~if you have~~ a ~~smaller screen~~, 32-inch or 37-inch diagonal, ^ screen, viewers will not ~~you won't~~ be able to tell the difference ^ between them with the naked eye. The other important decision ~~you face as you walk around the sales floor~~ is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features~~. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show ~~truer~~ ^ deeper blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. ^ Only after buyers are totally certain they know what they want should they open their wallets. ~~Don't buy more television than you need!~~

Exercise 20

1. Answer the following questions about Mariah's revised paragraph:
   a. Read the unrevised and the revised paragraphs aloud. Explain in your own words how changes in word choice have affected Mariah's writing.
   b. Do you agree with the changes that Mariah made to her paragraph? Which changes would you keep and which were unnecessary? Explain. What other changes would you have made?
   c. What effect does removing contractions and the pronoun you have on the tone of the paragraph? How would you characterize the tone now? Why?
2. Now return once more to your essay in progress. Read carefully for problems with word choice. Be sure that your draft is written in formal language and that your word choice is specific and appropriate.

Writing at Work

Many companies hire copy editors and proofreaders to help them produce the cleanest possible final drafts of large writing projects. Copy editors are responsible for suggesting revisions and style changes; proofreaders check documents for any errors in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation that have crept in. Many times, these tasks are done on a freelance basis, with one freelancer working for a variety of clients.

Editing Your Draft

If you have been incorporating each set of revisions as Mariah has, you have produced multiple drafts of your writing. So far, all your changes have been content changes. Perhaps with the help of peer feedback, you have made sure that you sufficiently supported your ideas. You have checked for problems with unity and coherence. You have examined your essay for word choice, revising to cut unnecessary words and to replace weak wording with specific and appropriate wording.

The next step after revising the content is **editing**. When you edit, you examine the surface features of your text. You examine your spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation. You also make sure you use the proper format when creating your finished assignment. Editing often takes time. Budgeting time into the writing process allows you to complete additional edits after revising.

Editing and proofreading your writing helps you create a finished work that represents your best efforts. Here are a few more tips to remember about your readers:

- Readers do not notice correct spelling, but they do notice misspellings.
- Readers look past your sentences to get to your ideas—unless the sentences are awkward, poorly constructed, and frustrating to read.
- Readers notice when every sentence has the same rhythm as every other sentence, with no variety.
- Readers do not cheer when you use there, their, and they're correctly; but they notice when you do not.
- Readers will notice the care with which you handled your assignment and your attention to detail in the delivery of an error-free document.

Chapter 5 offers a useful review of grammar, mechanics, and usage. Use it to help you eliminate major errors in your writing and refine your understanding of the conventions of language. Do not hesitate to ask for help, too, from peer tutors in your academic department or in the college's writing lab. In the meantime, use the following checklists to help you edit your writing.

Checklists for Editing Your Writing

Grammar

- Are some sentences actually sentence fragments?
- Are some sentences run-on sentences? How can I correct them?
- Do some sentences need conjunctions between independent clauses?
- Does every verb agree with its subject?
- Is every verb in the correct tense?
- Are tense forms, especially for irregular verbs, written correctly?
- Have I used subject, object, and possessive personal pronouns correctly?
- Have I used who and whom correctly?
- Is the antecedent of every pronoun clear?
- Do all personal pronouns agree with their antecedents?
- Have I used the correct comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs?
- Is it clear which word a participial phrase modifies, or is it a dangling modifier?

Sentence Structure

- Are all my sentences simple sentences, or do I vary my sentence structure?
- Have I chosen the best coordinating or subordinating conjunctions to join clauses?
- Have I created long, overpacked sentences that should be shortened for clarity?
- Do I see any mistakes in parallel structure?

Punctuation

- Does every sentence end with the correct end punctuation?
- Can I justify the use of every exclamation point?
- Have I used apostrophes correctly to write all singular and plural possessive forms?
- Have I used quotation marks correctly?

Mechanics and Usage

- Can I find any spelling errors? How can I correct them?
- Have I used capital letters where they are needed?
- Have I written abbreviations, when allowed, correctly?
- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as to/too/two?

Be careful about relying too much on spelling checkers and grammar checkers. A spelling checker cannot recognize that you meant to write *principle* but wrote principal instead. A grammar checker often queries constructions that are perfectly correct. The program does not understand your meaning; it makes its check against a general set of formulas that might not apply in each instance. If you use a grammar checker, accept the suggestions that make sense, but consider why the suggestions came up.

Proofreading requires patience; it is very easy to read past a mistake. Set your paper aside for at least a few hours, if not a day or more, so your mind will rest. Some professional proofreaders read a text backward so they can concentrate on spelling and punctuation. Another helpful technique is to slowly read a paper aloud, paying attention to every word, letter, and punctuation mark. If you need additional proofreading help, ask a reliable friend, a classmate, or a peer tutor to make a final pass on your paper to look for anything you missed.

Formatting

Remember to use proper format when creating your finished assignment. Sometimes an instructor, a department, or a college will require students to follow specific instructions on titles, margins, page numbers, or the location of the writer's name. These requirements may be more detailed and rigid for research projects and term papers, which often observe the American Psychological Association (APA) or Modern Language Association (MLA) style guides, especially when citations of sources are included. To ensure the format is correct and follows any specific instructions, make a final check before you submit an assignment.

Exercise 21

With the help of the checklist, edit and proofread your essay.

Key Takeaways

- Revising and editing are the stages of the writing process in which you improve your work before producing a final draft.
- During revising, you add, cut, move, or change information in order to improve content.
- During editing, you take a second look at the words and sentences you used to express your ideas and fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- Unity in writing means that all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong together and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense.
- Coherence in writing means that the writer's wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and between paragraphs.
- Transitional words and phrases effectively make writing more coherent.
- Writing should be clear and concise, with no unnecessary words.
- Effective formal writing uses specific, appropriate words and avoids slang, contractions, clichés, and overly general words.
- Peer reviews, done properly, can give writers objective feedback about their writing. It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer reviews and incorporate only useful feedback.
- Remember to budget time for careful editing and proofreading. Use all available resources, including editing checklists, peer editing, and your institution's writing lab, to improve your editing skills.

Exercise 22

Starting with the title "The Future of Information: How It Will Be Created, Transmitted, and Consumed," narrow the focus of the topic until it is suitable for a two- to three-page paper. Then narrow your topic with the help of brainstorming, idea mapping, and searching the Internet until you select a final topic to explore. Keep a journal or diary in which you record and comment on everything you did to choose a final topic. Then record what you will do next to explore the idea and create a thesis statement.

Exercise 23

Write a thesis statement and a formal sentence outline for an essay about the writing process. Include separate paragraphs for prewriting, drafting, and revising and editing. Your audience will be a general audience of educated adults who are unfamiliar with how writing is taught at the college level. Your purpose is to explain the stages of the writing process so that readers will understand its benefits.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 24

Pieces of writing in a variety of real-life and work-related situations would benefit from revising and editing. Consider the following list of real-life and work-related pieces of writing: emails, greeting card messages, junk mail, late-night television commercials, social networking pages, local newspapers, bulletin-board postings, and public notices. Find and submit at least two examples of writing that needs revision. Explain what changes you would make. Replace any recognizable names with pseudonyms.

Exercise 25

Group activity: At work, an employer might someday ask you to contribute to the research base for an essay such as the one Mariah wrote or the one you wrote while working through this chapter. Choosing either her topic or your own, compile a list of at least five sources. Then, working in a group of four students, bring in printouts or PDF files of Internet sources or paper copies of non-Internet sources for the other group members to examine. In a group report, rate the reliability of each other's sources.

Exercise 26

Group activity: Working in a peer-review group of four, go to the section on Drafting and reread the draft of the first two body paragraphs of Mariah's essay, "Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?" Review those two paragraphs using the same level of inspection given to the essay's third paragraph in the section Revising and Editing. Suggest and agree on changes to improve unity and coherence, eliminate unneeded words, and refine word choice. Your purpose is to help Mariah produce two effective paragraphs for a formal college-level essay about her topic.

Sample Student Paper with Outline

The following paper and outline by Pere Ellis, entitled "Aquaponics: A Viable Solution to World Hunger," clearly breaks down the argument presented in his thesis, providing specific examples in the sub-points and further developing and expanding the subpoints.

Sample Student Outline

Pere J. Ellis II

English 1101 Honors

Dr. Cox

February 25, 2014

Outline

Thesis: Aquaponics is the best solution to the world hunger problem because it is simple to manage, environmentally friendly, and yields larger food quantities than typical farming techniques.

I. Aquaponics is a simple system that can be managed at the individual level, commercial level, and adapted to any location.
   A. An aquaponics system can be managed by one person.
      1. The system can be created at any level to meet the individual needs.
      2. The system can be easily managed with the use of technology.
   B. An aquaponics system can be managed at a commercial level.
      1. The system can be created for small scale and large scale production.
      2. The system is capable of providing produce to the commercial market.
   C. An aquaponics system can be managed at any location.
      1. A system can be built on land not suitable for crops.
      2. A system can be created with plants and animals from similar environments
II. Aquaponics is an environmentally friendly system.
   A. Chemical fertilizers are not used in aquaponics.
      1. Fish excrement is the only fertilizer used in the aquaponic system.
      2. Fish excrement is filtered from the water and cycled back into the system.
   B. Pesticides are not used in aquaponics.
      1. Pesticides contaminate fish tanks and potentially harm the fish.
      2. Pesticides kill insects, which are an additional food source for the fish.
III. Aquaponics yields larger quantities of food.
   A. Aquaponics produces two types of crops.
      1. Various species of plants can be grown in an aquaponics system.
      2. Various species of fish can be grown in an aquaponics system.
   B. Aquaponics produces greater quantities of food in a smaller area.
      1. Aquaponics farms are compounded and compact ecological systems.
      2. Aquaponics farms are capable of producing food year round.

Sample Student Paper

Pere J. Ellis II

English 1101 Honors

Dr. Cox

February 25, 2014

Aquaponics: A Viable Solution to World Hunger

Hunger and food shortages have plagued the world over and over again. The World agricultural community has historical problems with the demand and the need for more food. Technological advancements such as the bioengineering of plants have allowed them to thrive in harsher environments and produce high yields. But these advancements have not solved the world's food problems. One of the more recent developments is a technique known as aquaponics. Aquaponics is a farming method that utilizes a balanced ecological cycle between plants and aquatic animals, which creates surprising results. The cycle starts with transferring fresh water aquatic animal excrement to plants as a source of nutrients. The excrement is then filtered by the plants, and the water is recycled back to the freshwater aquatic animal environment. The cycle is constantly repeated until the plants

and animals are harvested. An aquaponics system is the best system for farming because it is the most easily managed and environmentally friendly system available, and it is capable of producing impressive crop yields several times higher than more traditional farming systems practiced today.

Aquaponics is a versatile and simple system that can be easily managed by one person. One individual can easily set up a small scale operation to completely supplement or cheapen a food budget. By incorporating inexpensive sensors and other technological devices, an aquaponics system can be expanded beyond the management capabilities of one individual. Adapting technology to a smaller system will minimize the amount of time spent on managing an aquaponics system. Electronic devices, such as timed fish feeders and automated temperature control devices, reduce the amount of time spent managing a system, while simultaneously increasing production.

Like any individually managed aquaponics systems, a commercial system can be created on any scale. The scale of a commercial aquaponics system will be limited to the available space, workforce, and funding. Commercial systems typically provide produce to individual, local, and national markets. Most commercial aquaponics systems distribute to the local market since a typical aquaponics system is a small or medium scale operation. There are a few large-scale commercial aquaponics companies capable of meeting the demands of the national market.

No matter the scale of the operation, an aquaponics system can be created anywhere. An individual can build an aquaponics system in a backyard or on the rooftop of an apartment building. Several aquaponics farms have been created on land previously incapable of producing crops of any kind. Other commercial scale systems have been built in large unused industrial buildings reconstructed for use as green houses. In addition to being able to build an aquaponics system in any physical location, an aquaponics farm can also be adapted to many environments. The ability to adapt an aquaponics system to multiple environments comes from the variety of different plants and animals which can be grown within a single system. Identifying plants and animals that thrive in atmospheres similar to the aquaponics farm's environment strengthens the production and survivability of the plants and animals in the system.

While aquaponics is a very adaptive ecological system, it is also an environmentally friendly system with no chemical additives. Unlike other farming techniques, aquaponics systems never use chemical fertilizers. This is partially because chemical fertilizers are extremely toxic to the aquatic animals in the system and there is no need for chemical fertilizers. The entire aquaponics system is a symbiotic ecosystem where the fish and plants rely on each other to survive. Fish excrement provides the nutrients needed for the plants to continue to grow. In turn, the plants filter and clean the water that is reintroduced back into the fish tanks. And the cycle is repeated over and over until harvest. As with chemical fertilizers, pesticides are not used in an aquaponics system because they are harmful to both plants and animals. Additionally, insects are a natural food source for aquatic animals such as fish, which are the most common type of aquatic animal used in an aquaponics system.

While the aquaponics system is an adaptable and environmentally friendly system, its most important quality is the amount of food that can be produced. Aquaponics farms are capable of growing two different types of crops. The adaptability of the aquaponics system is partially derived from the vast combinations of plants and animals which can be cultivated and raised. There are hundreds of various fruits and vegetables that can be grown in an aquaponics system. Broad leafy and juicy fruit bearing plants tend to do very well. Besides plants, various species of freshwater fish such as catfish, trout, and tilapia also do very well in aquaponics systems. In addition to growing fish, a few aquaponics farms have been very successful in raising different species of freshwater shrimp, further diversifying the aquaponics system.

Another advantage of the aquaponics system is that it requires a much smaller area than traditional farming systems. Aquaponics farms are compounded systems that can produce two different types of crops in the same amount of space that one traditional crop requires. This is accomplished in part by growing the plants much closer to each other. Typically, aquaponics systems are built in greenhouses, allowing for year round production, a smaller geographic footprint, and the production of larger crop yields.

The adaptable system of aquaponics is the best answer to solving world hunger because it produces organic and environmentally friendly high yield crops on less land than more traditional farming methods. Even though several aquaponics systems have been built in differing environments throughout world and have done quite well, aquaponics still has not been accepted as a viable alternative to traditional farming. Perhaps this is because it is a new idea and will take a while to catch on. Nevertheless, once aquaponics is accepted as a solution, the world may finally be rid of one of its longest living problems.

This page titled 2.4: Revising and Editing (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3: RHETORICAL MODES OF WRITING

3.0: Introduction
3.1: Narration
3.2: Description
3.3: Classification
3.4: Process Essay
3.5: Definition
3.6: Comparison and Contrast
3.7: Cause and Effect
3.8: Persuasion (Part 1)
3.8: Persuasion (Part 2)

This page titled 3: Rhetorical Modes of Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.0: Introduction

Rhetorical modes simply mean the ways we can effectively communicate through language. Each day people interact with others to tell a story about a new pet, describe a transportation problem, explain a solution to a science experiment, persuade a customer that a brand is the best, or even reveal what has caused a particular medical issue. We speak in a manner that is purposeful to each situation, and writing is no different. While rhetorical modes can refer to both speaking and writing, in this chapter we reveal the ways in which we shape our writing according to our purpose or intent. **Your purpose for writing determines the mode you choose**.

The four major categories of rhetorical modes are narration, description, exposition, and persuasion. The narrative essay tells a relevant story or relates an event. The descriptive essay uses vivid, sensory details to draw a picture in words. The writer's purpose in expository writing is to explain or inform. Exposition is subdivided into five modes: classification, process, definition, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect. In the persuasive essay, the writer's purpose is to persuade or convince the reader by presenting one idea against another and clearly taking a stand on one side of the issue. We often use several of these modes in everyday and professional writing situations, so this chapter will also consider special examples of these modes such as personal statements and other common academic writing assignments.

Whether you are asked to write a cause/effect essay in a history class, a comparison/contrast report in biology, or a narrative email recounting the events in a situation on the job, you will be equipped to express yourself precisely and communicate your message clearly. Learning these rhetorical modes will also help you to become a more effective writer.

The best way to become a better writer is to become a closer reader. This chapter contains essays from students and professional writers that illustrate the rhetorical modes. Model student essays demonstrating these and other rhetorical modes can often be found in college and university publications such as Perimeter College's *The Polishing Cloth*.

While you read these essays, remember the purpose of the writing and pay attention to the following:

Thesis statement: What is the author's main point of the essay? Identify the sentence and see how well it is supported throughout the essay.

Topic sentence: How well does each topic sentence support the thesis, and how well does it describe the main idea of the paragraph?

Supporting evidence: Identify the evidence that the author uses to support the essay's main ideas, and gauge their credibility.

Noting these elements should shape your response to each essay and also to your own writing.

This page titled 3.0: Introduction is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.1: Narration

The Purpose of Narrative Writing

Narration means the art of storytelling, and the purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. A narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is a made-up, or imagined, story; when writing a fictional story, we can create characters and events to best fit our story.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is determined by a writer's purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories can depart from real people and events because their intentions are not to retell a real-life event. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful to understand what your **purpose** is from the beginning. Is it important that you recount history, either your own or someone else's? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—either how you would like to see it or how you imagine it could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. You want your audience to be moved by your story, which could mean through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience is likely to be.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, start brainstorming ideas for a narrative. First, decide whether you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then, freewrite for five minutes. Be sure to use all five minutes, and keep writing the entire time. Do not stop to think about what to write. To review other brainstorming techniques, see Chapter 2.1 Prewriting. The following are some topics to consider as you get going:

1. Childhood
2. School
3. Adventure
4. Work
5. Love
6. Family
7. Friends
8. Vacation
9. Nature
10. Space

The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in chronological order, the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time. However, sometimes it can be effective to begin with an exciting moment from the climax of the story ("flash-forward") or a pivotal event from the past ("flash-back") before returning to a chronological narration. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed in Table of Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time. For more information about chronological order, see Chapter 1.5 "Methods of Organizing Your Writing."

Table of Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time

after/afterward	as soon as	at last	before	until

currently	during	eventually	meanwhile	when /whenever
next	now	since	soon	while
finally	later	still	then	first, second, third

The following are the other basic components of a narrative:

- **Plot**: The events as they unfold in sequence.
- **Characters**: The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist.
- **Conflict**: The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- **Theme**: The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing at Work

When interviewing candidates for jobs, employers often ask about conflicts or problems a potential employee has had to overcome. They are asking for a compelling personal narrative. To prepare for this question in a job interview, write out a scenario using the narrative mode structure. This will allow you to troubleshoot rough spots, as well as better understand your own personal history. Both processes will make your story better and your self-presentation better, too.

Exercise 2

Take your freewriting exercise from the last section and start crafting it chronologically into a rough plot summary. Be sure to use the time transition words and phrases listed in Table of Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time to sequence the events.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your rough plot summary

Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story, then free-write about topics that are of general interest to you. For more information about freewriting, see Chapter 2.1 "Prewriting."

Once you have a general idea of what you will be writing about, you should sketch out the major events of the story that will constitute your plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story, although you might consider using a flash-forward or flash-back for dramatic effect. The use of vivid details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing. To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world that you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an event that is interesting to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece. See the student and professional essays at the end of this section to read a sample narrative essay.

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, add two or three paragraphs to the plot summary you started in the last section. Describe in detail the main character and the setting of the first scene. Try to use all five senses in your descriptions.

Sample Narrative Essay: Personal Statement

One type of narrative essay you may have reason to write is a Personal Statement. Many colleges and universities ask for a Personal Statement Essay for students who are applying for admission, to transfer, or for scholarships. Generally, a Personal Statement asks you to respond to a specific prompt, most often asking you to describe a significant life event, a personality trait, or a goal or principle that motivates or inspires you. Personal Statements are essentially narrative essays with a particular focus on the writer's personal life. The following essay was responding to the prompt: "Write about an experience that made you aware of a skill or strength you possess." As you read, pay attention to the way the writer gets your attention with a strong opening, uses vivid details and a chronological narrative to tell his story, and links back to the prompt in the conclusion.

Sample Student Essay

Alen Abramyan

Professor Jones

English 1101

2/5/2015

In the Middle of Nowhere Fighting Adversity.

A three-punch combination had me seeing stars. Blood started to rush down my nose. The Russian trainers quietly whispered to one another. I knew right away that my nose was broken. Was this the end of my journey; or was I about to face adversity?

Ever since I was seven years old, I trained myself in, "The Art of Boxing." While most of the kids were out playing fun games and hanging out with their friends, I was in a damp, sweat-filled gym. My path was set to be a difficult one. Blood, sweat, and, tears were going to be an everyday occurrence.

At a very young age I learned the meaning of hard work and dedication. Most kids jumped from one activity to the next. Some quit because it was too hard; others quit because they were too bored. My father pointed this out to me on many occasions. Adults would ask my father," why do you let your son box? It's such a dangerous sport, he could get hurt." My father always replied, "Everyone is going to get hurt in their lives, physically, mentally and emotionally. I'm making sure he's ready for the challenges he's going to face as a man." I always felt strong after hearing my father speak that way about me. I was a boy being shaped into a man, what a great feeling it was.

Year after year, I participated in boxing tournaments across the U.S. As the years went by, the work ethic and strength of character my father and coaches instilled in me, were starting to take shape. I began applying the hard work and dedication I learned in boxing, to my everyday life. I realized that when times were tough and challenges presented themselves, I wouldn't back down, I would become stronger. This confidence I had in myself, gave me the strength to pursue my boxing career in Russia.

I traveled to Russia to compete in Amateur Boxing. Tournament after tournament I came closer to my goal of making the Russian Olympic Boxing team. After successfully winning the Kaliningrad regional tournament, I began training for the Northwest Championships. This would include boxers from St. Petersburg, Pskov, Kursk and many other powerful boxing cities.

We had to prepare for a tough tournament, and that's what we did. While sparring one week before the tournament, I was caught by a strong punch combination to the nose. I knew right away it was serious. Blood began rushing down my face, as I noticed the coaches whispering to each other. They walked into my corner and examined my nose," yeah, it's broken," Yuri Ivonovich yelled out. I was asked to clean up and to meet them in their office. I walked in to the Boxing Federation office after a quick shower. I knew right away, they wanted to replace me for the upcoming tournament. "We're investing a lot of money on you boxers and we expect good results. Why should we risk taking you with a broken nose?" Yuri Ivonovich asked me. I replied, "I traveled half-way around the world to be here, this injury isn't a problem for me." And by the look on my face they were convinced, they handed me my train ticket and wished me luck.

The train came to a screeching halt, shaking all the passengers awake. I glanced out my window, "Welcome to Cherepovets," the sign read. In the background I saw a horrific skyline of smokestacks, coughing out thick black smoke. Arriving in the city, we went straight to the weigh ins. Hundreds of boxers, all from many cities were there. The brackets were set up shortly after the weigh ins. In the Super Heavyweight division, I found out I had 4 fights to compete in, each increasing in difficulty. My first match, I

made sure not a punch would land; this was true for the next two fights. Winning all three 6-0, 8-0 and 7-0 respectively. It looked like I was close to winning the whole tournament. For the finals I was to fight the National Olympic Hope Champion.

The night before the finals was coincidentally the 200th anniversary of the city. All night by my hotel, I heard screams of laughter and partying. I couldn't sleep a wink. The morning of the fight I was exhausted but anxious. I stepped into the ring knowing that I was tired. I fell behind in points quickly in the first round. I felt as if I were dreaming, with no control of the situation. I was going along for the ride and it wasn't pleasant. At the end of the second round, the coach informed me that I was far behind. "You're asleep in there," he yelled out to me, confirming how I felt. I knew this was my last chance; I had to give it my all. I mustered up enough strength to have an amazing round. It was as if I stepped out and a fresh boxer stepped in. I glanced at my coaches and see a look of approval. No matter the outcome, I felt that I had defeated adversity. My opponent's hand was raised; he won a close decision, 6-5. After I got back to my hotel, I remembered Yuri Ivonovich telling me they expected good results. "How were my results," I asked myself. In my mind, the results were great, with a broken nose and with no sleep, I came one point shy of defeating the National Olympic Hope Champion.

Even from a very young age, I knew that when my back was against the wall and adversity was knocking on my door, I would never back down. I became a stronger person, a trait my family made sure I would carry into my adult years. No matter what I'm striving for; getting into a University; receiving a scholarship; or applying for a job, I can proudly say to myself, I am Alen Abramyan and adversity is no match for me.

Online Narrative Essay Alternatives

Sandra Cisneros offers an example of a narrative essay in "Only Daughter" that captures her sense of her Chicana-Mexican heritage as the only daughter in a family of seven children. Click here to access the essay as a PDF file. (It can also be accessed here as a .doc file).

Gary Shteyngart came to the United States when he was seven years old. The son of Russian Jewish parents who struggled to provide a better life for their son, he reflects on his struggles, including becoming "American," in his *New Yorker* essay "Sixty-Nine Cents."

This page titled 3.1: Narration is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.2: Description

The Purpose of Description in Writing

Writers use description in writing to make sure that their audience is fully immersed in the words on the page. This requires a concerted effort by the writer to describe the world through the use of sensory details.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, sensory details are descriptions that appeal to our sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The use of sensory details provides you the greatest possibility of relating to your audience and thus engaging them in your writing, making descriptive writing important not only during your education but also during everyday situations. To make your writing vivid and appealing, avoid empty descriptors if possible. Empty descriptors are adjectives that can mean different things to different people. Good, beautiful, terrific, and nice are examples. The use of such words in descriptions can lead to misreads and confusion. A good day, for instance, can mean far different things depending on one's age, personality, or tastes.

Exercise 4

On a separate sheet of paper, describe the following five items in a short paragraph. Use at least three of the five senses for each description.

- Night
- Beach
- City
- Dinner
- Stranger

The Structure of a Description Essay

Description essays typically describe a person, a place, or an object using sensory details. The structure of a descriptive essay is more flexible than in some of the other rhetorical modes. The introduction of a description essay should set up the tone and focus of the essay. The thesis should convey the writer's overall impression of the person, place, or object described in the body paragraphs.

The organization of the essay may best follow spatial order, which means an arrangement of ideas according to physical characteristics or appearance. Depending on what the writer describes, the organization could move from top to bottom, left to right, near to far, warm to cold, frightening to inviting, and so on. For example, if the subject were a client's kitchen in the midst of renovation, you might start at one side of the room and move slowly across to the other end, describing appliances, cabinetry, and so on. Or you might choose to start with older remnants of the kitchen and progress to the new installations. Or maybe start with the floor and move up toward the ceiling.

Exercise 5

On a separate sheet of paper, choose an organizing strategy and then execute it in a short paragraph for three of the following six items:

- Train station
- Your office
- Your car
- A coffee shop
- Lobby of a movie theater
- Mystery Option*

*Choose an object to describe but do not indicate it. Describe it, but preserve the mystery.

Writing a Description Essay

Choosing a subject is the first step in writing a description essay. Once you have chosen the person, place, or object you want to describe, your challenge is to write an effective thesis statement to guide your essay. The remainder of your essay describes your subject in a way that best expresses your thesis. Remember, you should have a strong sense of how you will organize your essay. Choose a strategy and stick to it. Every part of your essay should use vivid sensory details. The more you can appeal to your readers' senses, the more they will be engaged in your essay. You can read a sample essay at the end of this section.

Example 6

On a separate sheet of paper, choose one of the topics that you started in Exercise 5 and expand it into a five-paragraph essay. Expanding on ideas in greater detail can be difficult. Sometimes it is helpful to look closely at each of the sentences in a summary paragraph. Those sentences can often serve as topic sentences to larger paragraphs.

Mystery Option: Here is an opportunity to collaborate. Please share with a classmate and compare your thoughts on your mystery descriptions. Did your classmate correctly guess your mystery topic? If not, how could you provide more detail to describe it and lead them to the correct conclusion?

Sample Description Essay

In the following student essay, notice how the writer uses sensory details to describe not only the visual appearance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s tomb, but also the experience of visiting such a historically significant and emotionally moving monument. Pay particular attention to the organization of the description; how does the author move us around the monument and describe its characteristics? Is it effective?

Sharif Ray

Professor Smith

English 1101

11 June 2014

The King's Tomb

The water is always so beautiful, a hypnotic shade of baby blue, with a few autumn colored leaves floating in the ripples made by the wind. This isn't a natural body of water. No wildlife swim in the shallow waves, but this water is as full of life as any ocean. In the middle of what is fittingly called the Reflecting Pool lies the closest thing African Americans have ever had to royalty. Here lie the remains of Dr. Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King.

Nestled between the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the original Ebenezer Baptist Church is a beautiful white marble monument, warmly bathed in the lights circling the tomb of our late civil rights leaders. Following Dr. King's assassination in April 1968, he was first interred at South View Cemetery, a final resting place largely reserved for African Americans during that period. It took nearly a decade before he was exhumed and placed in the beautiful ivory stone structure that he now shares with his beloved wife Coretta. The tomb, erected in 1977, sits within the south end of the Reflecting Pool. Seemingly suspended on the bright blue water, the tomb displays scriptures that only capture a small portion of the legacy left by these great leaders. Engraved on Dr. King's portion reads, "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God Almighty I'm free at last!" from his pivotal "I Have a Dream" speech given during the March on Washington in 1963. I can't help but attempt to recite the mantra in my head with the same bravado and conviction as Dr. King had when he gave the speech over fifty years ago. While the saying is a beautiful incantation, fit for a King, the cost at which that freedom was attained is still heartbreaking.

In a scene reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, who passed away in January 2006 after a prolonged illness, lies next to her slain husband. For a short period following her death Mrs. King was interred in a smaller yet equally beautiful tomb

directly across from her late husband. Spectacular floral arrangements surrounded her tomb as scores of mourners came from afar to pay their respects to the First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement. In November 2006, she was laid to rest in a beautiful new tomb aside her husband. The words “And now abide Faith, Hope, Love, These Three, but the greatest of these is Love,” emblazon her final resting place. No truer instance could describe her legacy.

Auburn Avenue, shrouded in darkness, is void of people aside from the few vagrants that aimlessly roam the streets. Heat from the Eternal Flame warms my back as I stare off into space. The brilliant glow of the LED lights strategically placed around the tomb and the amber flicker of the Eternal Flame are the only lights that seem to suit this moment. Kneeling as if I’m preparing to pray, I take a moment to reflect. Through my clenched eyes I can hear the soft splashes of the water, the gas fueled roar of the Eternal Flame. The ambient noise of car horns, traffic and construction fade to nearly a whisper. I envision the March on Washington. I can feel the sting of water hoses pelting my black skin. I can hear the sharp sonics of police dogs barking. The feeling is overwhelming. My eyelashes clump together from the tears winning their battle against my eyelids. Nearby is a place of worship, a place where anyone can still feel the spirit of past congregations, a place where the walls hold almost as much history as any Smithsonian exhibit.

Just a few feet away sits the original Ebenezer Baptist Church, a beautiful, rustic old building left largely intact from the days of Atlanta’s past. Walking inside is like stepping into a time warp, instantly sending you to the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. With the exception of a few strategically placed speakers, the church is left in its pure form. Dr. King’s voice echoes through wooden pews playing his famous “Drum Major” speech, given during his final sermon at Ebenezer on February 4, 1968. With closed eyes, I have difficulty telling what era I am in. Given with almost Machiavellian prediction and passion, ten minutes engulfed with his powerful words makes me feel as though I’ve been baptized, born again.

Surrounded with reminders of our history’s darkest time, this place brings me peace. There’s an aura in this place. A powerful spirit that infiltrates my conscience with thoughts of struggle, loss and freedom. The reality of this place forces my mind to reevaluate my own mortality. Even with the knowledge of how Dr. King was vilified, degraded, and executed, his death serves as a shining beacon of light. A lone ray of sun through the seemingly endless cloud of racism and intolerance. Coretta’s grace, beauty and resilience in the face of unspeakable tragedy and injustice is incomparable. Her social work and philanthropy should be an influence to women of all walks of life.

The legacy that Dr. and Mrs. King leave behind is an unfulfilled one. Equality in America has improved since Dr. King’s assassination but his dream is still unrealized. There is turmoil within the King family regarding funding and management of the King Memorial, leaving the future of this serene place uncertain. Engraved on the Stone of Hope, a newly completed Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., reads, “Out of the Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope.” Although we still have a mountain to climb, The King’s Tomb is surely my Stone of Hope.

Online Descriptive Essay Alternatives

Susan Berne visits New York and describes her impressions in “Where Nothing Says Everything,” also called “Ground Zero.”

Heather Rogers provides a detailed description of a landfill that challenges the reader to consider his or her own consumption and waste in this excerpt from the book Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage.

This page titled 3.2: Description is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.3: Classification

The Purpose of Classification in Writing

The purpose of classification is to break down broad subjects into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts. We classify things in our daily lives all the time, often without even thinking about it. For example, cars can be classified by type (convertible, sedan, station-wagon, or SUV) or by the fuel they use (diesel, petrol, electric, or hybrid). Smaller categories, and the way in which these categories are created, help us make sense of the world. Keep both of these elements in mind when writing a classification essay. It's best to choose topics that you know well when writing classification essays. The more you know about a topic, the more you can break it into smaller, more interesting parts. Adding interest and insight will enhance your classification essays.

Exercise 7

On a separate sheet of paper, break the following categories into smaller classifications.

- The United States
- Colleges and universities
- Beverages
- Fashion

The Structure of a Classification Essay

The classification essay opens with a paragraph that introduces the broader topic. The thesis should then explain how that topic is divided into subgroups and why. Take the following introductory paragraph, for example:

Example 3.3.1:

When people think of New York, they often think of only New York City. But New York is actually a diverse state with a full range of activities to do, sights to see, and cultures to explore. In order to better understand the diversity of New York State, it is helpful to break it into these five separate regions: Long Island, New York City, Western New York, Central New York, and Northern New York.

The underlined thesis explains not only the category and subcategory, but also the rationale for breaking the topic into those categories. Through this classification essay, the writer hopes to show the readers a different way of considering the state of New York.

Each body paragraph of a classification essay is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subcategories. In the previous example, then, each region of New York would have its own paragraph. To avoid settling for an overly simplistic classification, make sure you break down any given topic at least three different ways. This will help you think outside the box and perhaps even learn something entirely new about a subject.

The conclusion should bring all of the categories and subcategories back together again to show the reader the big picture. In the previous example, the conclusion might explain how the various sights and activities of each region of New York add to its diversity and complexity.

Exercise 8

Using your classifications from Exercise 7, write a brief paragraph explaining why you chose to organize each main category in the way that you did.

Writing a Classification Essay

Start with an engaging opening that will adequately introduce the general topic that you will be dividing into smaller subcategories. Your thesis should come at the end of your introduction. It should include the topic, your subtopics, and the reason you are choosing to break down the topic in the way that you are. Identifying the reason or rationale for breaking down the topic in a particular way builds the argument that will become your thesis. Use the following classification equation to craft your thesis statement:

$$\text{topic} + \text{subtopics} + \text{rationale for the subtopics} = \text{thesis}. \tag{3.3.1}$$

The organizing strategy of a classification essay is dictated by the initial topic and the subsequent subtopics. Each body paragraph is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subtopics. In a way, coming up with a strong topic pays double rewards in a classification essay. Not only do you have a good topic, but you also have a solid organizational structure to use as your outline while drafting. Be sure you use **strong d**etails and **explanations** for each subcategory paragraph that help explain and support your thesis. Also, be sure to give examples to illustrate your points.

Finally, write a conclusion that links all the subgroups together again. The conclusion should successfully wrap up your essay by connecting it to your topic initially discussed in the introduction. See the sample professional essays at the end of the section for examples of the classification essay.

Exercise 9

Building on Exercise 7 and Exercise 8, write a five-paragraph classification essay about one of the four original topics. In your thesis, make sure to include the topic, subtopics, and rationale for your breakdown. And make sure that your essay is organized into paragraphs that each describe a subtopic

Online Classification Essay Examples

Amy Tan describes her relationship with her heritage, her mother, and her languages in “Mother Tongue.”

This page titled 3.3: Classification is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.4: Process Essay

The Purpose of the Process Essay

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

Almost everything we do involves following a step-by-step process. From learning to ride a bike as a child to starting a new job as an adult, we initially needed instructions to effectively execute the task. Likewise, we have likely had to instruct others, so we know how important good directions are—and how frustrating it is when they are poorly put together.

Exercise 10

On a separate sheet of paper, make a bulleted list of all the steps that you feel are required to clearly illustrate three of the following four processes (note that the first three are directional and the fourth is informative).

- Tying a shoelace
- Parallel parking
- Planning a successful first date
- How a historical event occurred (pick one you know well!)

The Structure of a Process Essay

The process essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the goal of the process. The organization of a process essay typically follows chronological order. The steps of the process are conveyed in the order in which they usually occur, and so your body paragraphs will be constructed based on these steps. If a particular step is complicated and needs a lot of explaining, then it will likely take up a paragraph on its own. But if a series of simple steps is easy to understand, then the steps can be grouped into a single paragraph.

The time transition phrases covered in the Narration section are also helpful for organizing process analysis essays (see Table of Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time). Words such as first, second, third, next, and finally are cues to orient readers and organize the content of the essay.

Finally, it's a good idea to always have someone else read your process analysis to make sure it makes sense. Once we get too close to a subject, it is difficult to determine how clearly an idea is coming across. Having a peer read over your analysis will serve as a good way to troubleshoot any confusing spots.

Exercise 11

Choose two of the lists you created in Exercise 10 and start writing out the processes in paragraph form. Try to construct paragraphs based on the complexity of each step. For complicated steps, dedicate an entire paragraph. If less complicated steps fall in succession, group them into a single paragraph.

Writing a Process Essay

Choose a topic that is interesting, is relatively complex, and can be explained in a series of steps. As with other rhetorical writing modes, it is best to choose a process that you know well so that you can more easily describe the finer details about each step in the process. Your thesis statement should come at the end of your introduction, and it should state the final outcome of the process you are describing.

Body paragraphs are composed of the steps in the process. Each step should be expressed using strong details and clear examples. If you are writing a directional essay, you should provide every detail necessary for your reader to complete the process. If you are writing an instructional essay, your body paragraphs should explain the process and how it works, although you should not expect your reader to be actually performing the process. Use time transition phrases to help organize steps in the process and to orient readers. The conclusion should thoroughly describe the result of the process described in the body paragraphs. See the student paper below, "Keep Them in Stitches," or one of the sample professional essays to read an example of a process analysis essay.

Exercise 12

Choose one of the expanded lists from Exercise 11. Construct a full process essay from the work you have already done. That means adding an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, time transition phrases, body paragraphs, and a solid conclusion.

Sample Process Essay

"Keep Them in Stitches," by Jacob Gallman-Dreiling, describes the process of finding the perfect yarn for a knitting project. As you read, pay attention to the words and phrases the author uses to help orient the reader, as well as the strong details that bring the subject to life.

Outline:

Jacob Gallman-Dreiling

English 1101

Dr. Cox

24 February 2013

Outline

Thesis statement: Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the preferences of the person for whom the project is being made, the availability of the yarn, and the type of yarn called for by the pattern.

I. Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the preferences of the person for whom the project is being made.
   A. The knitter must determine if the recipient has any allergies or sensitivities.
      1. Wool yarn will aggravate allergies to lanolin.
      2. Acrylic yearns can be scratchy or leave splinters.
   B. The knitter must consider the type of project.
      1. Warmer items should be made with animal fibers.
      2. Lighter items should be made with cotton.
   C. The knitter must consider the care of the finished garment.
      1. Wool yarn should be hand washed with cold water.
      2. Cotton and acrylic yarns are machine washable.
   D. The knitter must determine what color the recipient prefers.
      1. Solid colors are great for sweaters and accessories like professional iPad cases.
      2. Variegated yarn makes for show-stopping pieces and can help maintain the knitter's interest through the end of the project.
II. Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the availability of the yarn.
   A. Many people prefer to shop for yarn at a local yarn store.
      1. An advantage to shopping in person is the ability to touch the yarn.
      2. An advantage to shopping at the local yarn store is the knowledgeable staff, many of whom have been knitting for years.
      3. An advantage to shopping at the yarn store is that the staff can provide ready assistance and often have first-hand knowledge of the yarn the knitter intends to use.
   B. Other people prefer to shop at one of the many online retailers.

1. Online retailers typically have greater stock availability.
2. Online retailers also provide tutorial videos.

II. Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the type of yarn called for by the pattern.
   A. The knitter must determine the proper yarn weight for the project.
      1. Fingering, sport, and DK weight yarns are good for smaller projects like socks or baby clothes.
      2. Worsted, bulky, and super bulky are great for sweaters, scarves, blankets, and washcloths.
   B. The knitter must determine the recipient's preferences.
      1. Some people prefer sweaters with a small gauge.
      2. Some people prefer socks with a large gauge

Essay

Jacob Gallman-Dreiling

English 1101

Dr. Cox

24 February 2013

Keep Them in Stitches

The popularity of knitting is cyclical, rising and falling according to the prevailing opinion of women's places in society. Though internationally a unisex hobby, knitting is pervasively thought of as a woman's hobby in the United States. Knitting is currently enjoying a boost in popularity as traditionally minded women pick up the craft while women who enjoy subverting traditional gender roles have also picked up the needles to reclaim "the lost domestic arts" and give traditionally feminine crafts the proper respect. American men are also picking up the needles in greater numbers, with men's knitting guilds and retreats nationwide. This rise in popularity has made the receiving of hand-knit items special, and many people enjoy receiving these long-lasting, painstakingly crafted items. For any knitters, the perfect gift starts by choosing the perfect yarn. Choosing the perfect yarn for a knitting project relies on the preferences of the person for whom the project is being made, the availability of the yarn, and the type of yarn recommended by the pattern.

In order to select the right yarn for a knitting project, the knitter must take into account the preferences of the recipient of the knitted item. The most basic choice is the composition of the yarn to be used. Natural fibers are luxurious and tend to age better. Nevertheless, the knitter must determine if the recipient has any allergies or sensitivities. Wool yarn, for example, will aggravate allergies in those sensitive to lanolin, but mohair, alpaca, cotton, or angora will not cause discomfort. Acrylic is a synthetic yarn, but it can be scratchy or leave splinters. A second consideration is the type of project the knitter plans to complete: each project requires a specific type of yarn. For warmer items such as sweaters, blankets, or mittens, animal fibers are best. Socks, warmer-weather items, and household accessories are best served using cotton. One must also give thought to the care of the finished project. Items made from wool yarn survive best when hand washed in cold water whereas cotton and acrylic items are machine washable.

Once the type of yarn has been chosen, the knitter should consider what color yarn the recipient prefers. A solid color garment looks more professional and functions as a base piece in a wardrobe or interior design. Sweaters, iPad and tablet cases, as well as belts are well-suited to solid colors. Pieces made with variegated colors, in which the yarn has either multiple colors or shades of the same basic color, make for show pieces and accessories. Socks, gloves, scarves, and cowls are great projects for variegated yarn. Variegated yarn colors tend to keep the knitter's interest, but multicolored yarn can be difficult to use when working on larger projects which require multiple skeins of yarn. Due to the way yarn is dyed, the color at the end of one skein may not match the color at the beginning of the next skein.

The next step in determining the right yarn for a project is availability, particularly where to purchase the yarn. Some people prefer to shop at a local store for yarn because it offers many advantages. Shopping in person allows the knitter to feel the yarn he or she intends to purchase. This can help sway the knitter's opinion in regards to yarn choice. The staff at a local shop is often knowledgeable; many of them have been knitting for years, and they are usually ready to offer assistance with projects or yarn selection. If a knitter does not live near a yarn store, there are many online retailers who can fulfill their orders. Online retailers typically have a larger selection of yarns and patterns available for download. Since they cannot give personal assistance, many compensate for this deficiency by providing free tutorial videos.

Finally, choosing the right yarn for a project relies on the type of yarn called for in the knitting pattern. Patterns are highly

adaptable. Most things in a pattern can be substituted: yarn type, yarn weight, color, and number of stitches can all be substituted to fit the knitter's desire, but the pattern will provide a good place to start. The yarn weight, which determines the gauge of the project, is one of the most basic substitutions. Fingering or lace weight, sport, and DK weight are lighter weight yarns typically good for smaller projects like socks or baby clothes. Those types of yarn tend to be knit on smaller needles and produce a smaller stitch. Worsted, bulky, and super-bulky yarns are chunkier, knit on larger needles, and provide beautiful, large stitches. They are well suited for sweaters, scarves, blankets, and washcloths. The preferences of the recipient must also be taken into account. Some people prefer sweaters with a small stitch, while others prefer thick, warm socks to wear around the house.

The right yarn for a knitting project is one that meets the preferences of the recipient of the project, is readily available, and matches the needs of the pattern. After the project is completed and given to the intended recipient, both the knitter and receiver can bask in the adulation the finished garment brings. These hand-knit items can be passed down for several generations, truly becoming a gift that keeps on giving.

Online Process Essay Alternatives:

Stanley Fish, an American literary theorist, public intellectual, and professor of humanities and law, tells us why "Getting Coffee Is Hard to Do."

This page titled 3.4: Process Essay is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.5: Definition

The Purpose of Definition in Writing

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

Take, for example, a word like *alcoholism*. The way in which one defines alcoholism depends on its legal, moral, and medical contexts. Lawyers may define alcoholism in terms of its legality; parents may define alcoholism in terms of its morality; and doctors will define alcoholism in terms of symptoms and diagnostic criteria. Think also of terms that people tend to debate in our broader culture. How we define words, such as *marriage* and *climate change*, has enormous impact on policy decisions and even on daily decisions. Debating the definition of a word or term might have an impact on your relationship or your job, or it might simply be a way to understand an unfamiliar phrase in popular culture or a technical term in a new profession.

Defining terms within a relationship, or any other context, can be difficult at first, but once a definition is established between two people or a group of people, it is easier to have productive dialogues. Definitions, then, establish the way in which people communicate ideas. They set parameters for a given discourse, which is why they are so important.

When writing definition essays, avoid terms that are too simple, that lack complexity. Think in terms of concepts, such as hero, immigration, or loyalty, rather than physical objects. Definitions of concepts, rather than objects, are often fluid and contentious, making for a more effective definition essay. For definition essays, try to think of concepts in which you have a personal stake. You are more likely to write a more engaging definition essay if you are writing about an idea that has value and importance to you.

Writing at Work

Definitions play a critical role in all workplace environments. Take the term sexual harassment, for example. Sexual harassment is broadly defined on the federal level, but each company may have additional criteria that define it further. Knowing how your workplace defines and treats all sexual harassment allegations is important. Think, too, about how your company defines lateness, productivity, or contributions.

Exercise 13

On a separate sheet of paper, write about a time in your own life in which the definition of a word, or the lack of a definition, caused an argument. Your term could be something as simple as the category of an all-star in sports or how to define a good movie. Or it could be something with higher stakes and wider impact, such as a political argument. Explain how the conversation began, how the argument hinged on the definition of the word, and how the incident was finally resolved.

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your responses.

The Structure of a Definition Essay

The definition essay opens with a general discussion of the term to be defined. You then state your definition of the term as your thesis.

The rest of the essay should explain the rationale for your definition. Remember that a dictionary's definition is limiting, so you should not rely strictly on the dictionary entry. Indeed, unless you are specifically addressing an element of the dictionary definition (perhaps to dispute or expand it), it is best to avoid quoting the dictionary in your paper. Instead, consider the context in which you are using the word. Context identifies the circumstances, conditions, or setting in which something exists or occurs. Often words take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. For example, the ideal leader in a battlefield setting could likely be very different from a leader in an elementary school setting. If a context is missing from the

essay, the essay may be too short or the main points could be vague and confusing.

The remainder of the essay should explain different aspects of the term's definition. For example, if you were defining a good leader in an elementary classroom setting, you might define such a leader according to personality traits: patience, consistency, and flexibility. Each attribute would be explained in its own paragraph. Be specific and detailed: flesh out each paragraph with examples and connections to the larger context.

Writing at Work

It is a good idea to occasionally assess your role in the workplace. You can do this through the process of definition. Identify your role at work by defining not only the routine tasks but also those gray areas where your responsibilities might overlap with those of others. Coming up with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities can add value to your résumé and even increase productivity in the workplace.

Exercise 14

On a separate sheet of paper, define each of the following items in your own terms. If you can, establish a context for your definition.

1. Bravery
2. Adulthood
3. Consumer culture
4. Violence
5. Art

Writing a Definition Essay

Choose a topic that will be complex enough to discuss at length. Keep in mind that choosing a word or phrase of personal relevance often leads to a more interesting and engaging essay.

After you have chosen your word or phrase, start your essay with an introduction that establishes the relevancy of the term in the chosen specific context. Your thesis comes at the end of the introduction, and it should clearly state your definition of the term in the specific context. Establishing a context from the beginning will orient readers and minimize misunderstandings; for example, if you are defining the word childhood, you will need to explain if you are discussing the developmental stages of childhood, the history and evolution of the notion of childhood, or the cultural attitudes towards childhood in a certain country.

The body paragraphs should each be dedicated to explaining a different facet of your definition. Make sure to use clear examples and strong details to illustrate your points. Your concluding paragraph should pull together all the different elements of your definition to ultimately reinforce your thesis and explain why your definition is a compelling interpretation of your chosen word or term.

Exercise 15

Create a full definition essay from one of the items you already defined in Exercise 14. Be sure to include an interesting introduction, a clear thesis, a well-explained context, distinct body paragraphs, and a conclusion that pulls everything together.

Sample Definition Essay

In the following essay, the writer chose to define justice in a specific context: the prison system and mass incarceration. Notice how he begins the essay with a more general definition of justice and then moves into a detailed analysis of his chosen topic, using facts, statistics, and quotations to support his argument.

Darius Porter

English 1101

Dr. Jones

September 24, 2015

Mass Incarceration: The Real Trends of the United States Justice System

The favorite part of the national anthem by most people is “the land of the free,” but how much freedom do you really have in a country that has the highest incarceration rate in the world? Record levels of incarceration have proven that the U.S justice system is a failed system in need of serious reform. The justice system was designed to punish individuals equally for their crimes and then rehabilitate them back into society. However, today’s perception of the justice system is that it promotes mass incarceration which results in a billion dollar prison industry, unjust mandatory sentencing, and racial and low income targeting. Government officials’ desire for higher conviction rates have had a negative impact on their sense of morality, which has altered their idea of justice.

The definition of justice will differ from person to person, but no matter who is giving the definition, the word “equality” should not be left out. Justice is the golden rule – treat others how you would like to be treated. Justice is blind; it does not see age, race, or social classification. Justice should punish criminals, teach them a lesson, the rehabilitate them into society. It is the balance of fairness and righteousness, a scale that should not tip to the left or the right, a scale that has been broken by the United States of America.

America’s justice system has lost its deeply rooted values, which are, “to keep communities safe, to respect and restore victims, and to return offenders who leave prison to be self-sufficient and law-abiding” (DeRoche). The shifts behind the justice system began in the 1980’s when the U.S. was battling against a drug war. The methods the government used to overcome the drug war were higher conviction rates, mandatory minimum sentences, and mass incarceration. Although these were once solutions to a major problem, today the implementation of these policies has caused negative effects on both society and the justice system.

For a country with trillions of dollars of debt, does a billion dollar prison industry sound productive, especially when both crime rates and incarceration rates are increasing? “The United States incarcerates 2.3 million individuals – more people, both per capita and in absolute terms, than any other nation in the world including Russia, China and Iran,” (Shapiro) with a ratio of ,“1 in 100 residents [in prison] and… 1 in 31 citizens on parole or probation” (DeRoche). How do the aforementioned statistics relate to a billion prison dollar industry? Well, “government employment in criminal justice has grown by 1 million employees since 1980” (Alexander qtd. in DeRoche). That’s an extensive increase in capital, funds that will be deducted from hard earned tax payer dollars. Another costly fact is, “prosecutors and police budgets are rewarded for convictions, and they are not held to account for their contribution to spending in prisons” (DeRoche). So far, our price tag is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but this only amounts to a minor chunk of the billions that are poured into the prison industry yearly. Spending billions on a prison industry is an economic failure, “but mass incarceration provides a gigantic windfall for one special interest group: the private prison industry. As current incarceration levels harm the nation as a whole, for-profit prisons obtain taxpayer dollars in ever greater amounts,” (Shapiro). A huge amount of the billions that go into the prison industry goes into private prisons that the government pays to house inmates. While our local, state, and federal governments are in deep fiscal deficits, according to Shapiro, private prison executives are enjoying yearly bonuses of over 3 million dollars each. Shapiro cites the Securities and Exchange Commission, the largest private prison company, which reports that: “The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by … leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices…” As, we, citizens are concerned over prison spending cost and mass incarceration rates, private prison companies get to have their cake and eat it too.

United States mandatory sentencing laws are one of the leading contributors to the billion dollar prison industry and private prison executives even admit it, “[private prison companies] profits depend on locking up more people,” (Shapiro); on the other hand, mandatory sentencing laws pose a prejudice upon the accused. To give someone a minimum sentence before they are found guilty of a crime is cruel, bias, and unfair. Essentially, it is the crime that you are guilty of that sentences you, not the judge. These minimum sentences do not take into account your character, criminal history, or your reason for committing the crime. It is a problem when first time offenders and repeat offenders receive the same sentence for a crime. Nevertheless, prisons are filled with first time, non-violent, offenders subject to unjust minimum sentences; which is another reason the United States is in need of serious criminal justice reform.

A drastic effect on society that results from mass incarceration and mandatory sentencing laws is the targeting of people based race and/or income level. As stated by DeRoche, “Our minority population is a reliably easier target for getting the numbers by

which society measures law enforcement today," so when police departments are pressured about high crime rates they pursue marijuana and petty crime convictions from minorities. In a further detailed study by Palta "Arrest rates for marijuana possession are four times as high for black Americans as for whites. [Although] black men spend an average of 20 percent longer behind bars in federal prisons than their white peers [even though they committed] the same crimes." Although these are interesting facts, the more shocking facts estimate that, "1 in 3 black men will spend time behind bars during their lifetime, compared with 1 in 6 Latino men and 1 in 17 white men" (Palta). While racial targeting is a major contributor of the statistics mentioned, income levels are also a component.

The U.S. Constitution states that all citizens are entitled to equal protection under the law. The reality though, is that the accused lower income citizen will experience the justice system differently than the accused higher income citizen. A wealthier citizen will have more money to pay for a better, more experienced, lawyer which is important because your lawyer is the person who is most important in defending you against the charges brought against you. In many instances, a person of a lower income bracket cannot afford a lawyer, so they are forced to continue the judicial process with a public defender. A public defender is an appointed lawyer who is provided by, and works for, the courts. It is widely argued that public defenders are on the side of the prosecutors. Regardless of the fact, "Statistically, trolling for low-level law breakers has distracted the public from demanding justice where it is most needed," (DeRoche). Your income will determine your experience in the justice system. People of a lower social classification may not get the protection under the law, which is needed so that the corruption will not continue.

When the crime rate and the incarceration rate are rising simultaneously, it is apparent that the United States criminal justice system is not very effective. In conclusion, DeRoche states, "Beyond the dollars spent, our failing criminal justice system contributes to our cultural decline." A true justice system is one that lowers the crime rate by punishing criminals while promoting equality, fairness, and rehabilitation skills. Robbing individuals of their freedom through record levels of mass incarceration results in a billion dollar prison industry, mandatory sentencing, and racial and low income targeting. Higher convictions rates will not solve the problem, only criminal justice reform will.

Online Definition Essay Alternatives

Judy Brady provides a humorous look at responsibilities and relationships in "I Want a Wife."

This page titled 3.5: Definition is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.6: Comparison and Contrast

The Purpose of Comparison and Contrast in Writing

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

The key to a good compare-and-contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities. For example, if you wanted to focus on contrasting two subjects you would not pick apples and oranges; rather, you might choose to compare and contrast two types of oranges or two types of apples to highlight subtle differences. For example, Red Delicious apples are sweet, while Granny Smiths are tart and acidic. Drawing distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience's understanding of that category, which is the purpose of the compare-and-contrast essay.

Similarly, to focus on comparison, choose two subjects that seem at first to be unrelated. For a comparison essay, you likely would not choose two apples or two oranges because they share so many of the same properties already. Rather, you might try to compare how apples and oranges are quite similar. The more divergent the two subjects initially seem, the more interesting a comparison essay will be.

Exercise 16

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward contrast. Choose one of the following three categories. Pick two examples from each. Then come up with one similarity and three differences between the examples.

- Romantic comedies
- Internet search engines
- Cell phones

Exercise 17

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward comparison. Choose one of the following three items. Then come up with one difference and three similarities.

- Department stores and discount retail stores
- Fast food chains and fine dining restaurants
- Dogs and cats

The Structure of a Comparison-and-Contrast Essay

The compare-and-contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both, and the reason for doing so. The thesis could lean more toward comparing, contrasting, or both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example that leans more toward contrasting.

Thesis statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny.

Here the thesis sets up the two subjects to be compared and contrasted (organic versus conventional vegetables), and it makes a claim about the results that might prove useful to the reader.

You may organize compare-and-contrast essays in one of the following two ways:

1. According to the subjects themselves, discussing one and then the other
2. According to individual points, discussing each subject in relation to each point

See the "Comparison and Contrast Diagram," which diagrams ways to organize our organic versus conventional vegetables thesis. The organizational structure you choose depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

Given that compare-and-contrast essays analyze the relationship between two subjects, it is helpful to have some phrases on hand that will cue the reader to such analysis. See Table of "Phrases of Comparison and Contrast" for examples.

Table of Phrases of Comparison and Contrast

Comparison	Contrast
one similarity	one difference
Both	conversely
Like	in contrast
Likewise	unlike
Similarly	while
in a similar fashion	whereas

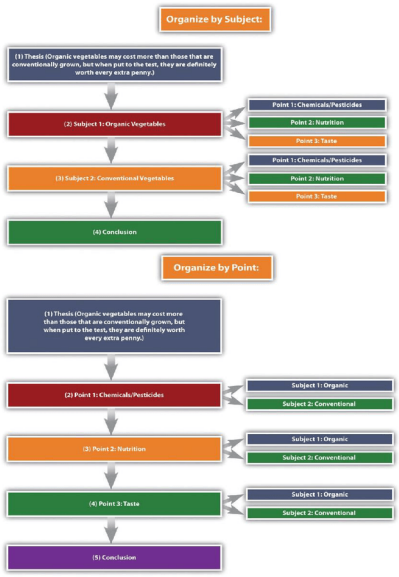


Figure 3.6.1 - Comparison and Contrast Diagram

Exercise 18

Create an outline for each of the items you chose in Exercise 16 and Exercise 17 Use the pointby-point organizing strategy for one of them, and use the subject organizing strategy for the other.

Writing a Comparison-and-Contrast Essay

First choose whether you want to compare seemingly disparate subjects, contrast seemingly similar subjects, or compare and contrast subjects. Once you have decided on a topic, introduce it with an engaging opening paragraph. Your thesis should come at the end of the introduction, and it should establish the subjects you will compare, contrast, or both, as well as state what can be learned from doing so. Be sure to make an argument in your thesis; explain to the reader what's at stake in analyzing the relationship between your stated subjects.

The body of the essay can be organized in one of two ways: by subject or by individual points. The organizing strategy that you

choose will depend on, as always, your audience and your purpose. You may also consider your particular approach to the subjects as well as the nature of the subjects themselves; some subjects might better lend themselves to one structure or the other. Make sure to use comparison and contrast phrases to cue the reader to the ways in which you are analyzing the relationship between the subjects.

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay and reinforces your thesis. See the student essay that follows, "Batman: A Hero for Any Time," as well as the professional essays at the end of this chapter to read some examples of the compare-and-contrast essay.

Exercise 19

Choose one of the outlines you created in Exercise 18 and write a full compare-and-contrast essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, well-defined and detailed paragraphs, and a fitting conclusion that ties everything together.

Sample Comparison-and-Contrast Essay

In "Batman: A Hero for Any Time," Jacob Gallman-Dreiling compares the traditional portrayal of the superhero Batman with the modern version. As you read, look for the comparison and contrast phrases that the author uses to help the reader understand the argument he is making. What kind of organizational structure does the essay follow?

Outline

Jacob Gallman-Dreiling

English 1101

Dr. Cox

16 March 2013

Outline

Thesis: Although the framework of the Batman story always remains the same, the character has been re-imagined over time to suit the changing expectations of a hero through his characterization as well as that of those who surround him, both friends and foes.

I. The backstory for Batman has always remained the same.
   A. Bruce Wayne is the son of wealthy socialites.
      1. Bruce Wayne's parents are murdered in front of him.
      2. Bruce Wayne grows up to inherit his parents' fortune.
   B. Bruce Wayne becomes Batman to avenge the violence of his parents' death.
      1. Batman fights crime with the help of Commissioner Gordon and others.
      2. Batman employs an arsenal of non-lethal weapons to aid him.
II. The characterization of Batman has changed to fit the changing expectations of a hero.
   A. In the Silver Age of comic books, Batman was portrayed as a sunny, pulpy character.
      1. Batman's stories had to adhere to the guidelines of the Comics Code Authority.
         a. Characters could not use concealed weapons.
         b. Stories required "morals."
         c. Stories could not use kidnapping or excessive violence.
         d. Stories incorporated elements of science fiction.
         e. Stories had limitations on the portrayal of female characters.
      2. Batman's suits often had ridiculous properties he conveniently prepared for the upcoming mission.
   B. In modern portrayals, Batman is a tortured and flawed character.
      1. Batman is haunted by the death of his parents.
      2. Batman has become a skilled detective and fighter.

3. Batman's suit is more armor than spandex.
4. Batman is haunted by his mistakes.
5. Batman and Commissioner Gordon conspire to hide the truth about Harvey Dent from the people of Gotham.

II. The characterization of Batman's associates has changed to fit the changing expectations of a hero.
   A. In the Silver Age of comic books, Batman's associates were correspondingly lighthearted.
      1. Characters like Ace the Bat-Hound, Bat-Mice, and Batwoman were created to draw in children.
      2. Issues were built around a villain-of-the-week.
   B. In modern portrayals, Batman's associates deal with real consequences and changes.
      1. Dick Grayson grows up and goes to college.
      2. Batgirl is paralyzed by the Joker.
      3. Joker is given several conflicting backstories explaining his psychosis.
      4. Catwoman has changed from a harmless cat-burglar to a reformed prostitute.

Student Essay

Jacob Gallman-Dreiling

English 1101

Dr. Cox

16 March 2013

Batman: A Hero for Any Time

Few ideas in this world are as timeless as that of a superhero. The ancient Greeks had Odysseus and Hercules. The British have Sherlock Holmes and Allan Quatermain. The Americans developed the modern concept of the superhero with characters like Superman and Spider-Man and created elaborate stories for the origin of their powers, much like the Greeks used when creating their heroes. While the world of superheroes was originally a white man's club, the creation of Wonder Woman ushered in a new era of diversity. Now men, women, people of color, even those of differing sexual orientations are represented among the ranks of those who fight against evil. Though teams of superheroes like the Justice League of America and the XMen have enduring popularity, few superheroes have captured the imagination like Batman. Created in 1939 by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, a boy orphaned by violence grows to become the Caped Crusader, avenger of the fictional of Gotham. This comic book hero has spurred film, radio, and television adaptations, has spawned action figures and video games, and has maintained an uninterrupted comic book publication, something few other superhero titles can boast. Although the framework of the Batman story always remains the same, the character has been re-imagined over time to suit the changing expectations of a hero through his characterization as well as through the portrayal of those who surround him, both friends and foes.

The basic framework of the Batman story has stayed the same since his debut in May, 1939. At the age of eight, Bruce Wayne, the son of wealthy socialites, witnesses his parents' murder at the hands of a desperate mugger and swears to avenge their deaths by waging war on all criminals. He grows up to inherit their fortune and the family company, using the money to fund charitable efforts and to reside in stately Wayne Manor. By night, he becomes Batman, ridding the Gotham City streets of menacing foes like the Joker, the Riddler, and Two-Face. He is aided in his fight by his sidekick Robin, Batgirl, and Commissioner Gordon, as well as his butler Alfred Pennyworth. His most enduring love interest is Selina Kyle, who is also known as the notorious cat-burglar, Catwoman. Batman eschews lethal weaponry such as guns, instead preferring to outwit his foes using his intellect to bring them to justice.

While the key details of Batman's backstory have remained unchanged for almost seventy-five years, his characterization has changed to suit the ever-evolving expectations of a superhero. When the character debuted in the Silver Age of comics—the decades between 1950 and 1970—he was a sunny, pulpy character: he was billed as the "World's Greatest Detective" and performed as such, while reflecting what is considered to be a more innocent time. His villains were grand, but he outsmarted them using his intelligence and science. The introduction of the Comics Code Authority in 1954 restricted not only the way that stories were presented but also the types of stories that could be presented. For instance, concealed weapons were forbidden, stories were required to have "morals," and kidnapping and excessive violence were forbidden. As such, Batman's stories began incorporating elements of science fiction. As the comics demonstrate, Batman famously repels aliens and an island of animatronic dinosaurs during this period. Also, female characters in the Batman stories of this time are poorly treated. The villain Catwoman had to be shelved due to regulations regarding women and violence, while the original Batwoman was brought on as a potential love interest to quiet the growing assertion of conservative culture warriors that Batman and Robin were, in fact, lovers. When this

version of Batwoman was deemed unnecessary, she was written out. This period is also famous for Batman having “batsuits” with heretofore unseen special properties, such as fireproofing and thermal heating.

Modern portrayals of Batman show him as a deeply flawed, psychologically scarred hero. During the 1980s the Comics Code’s influence was waning, and writers like Frank Miller took advantage of this to tell brutal, psychological stories. Haunted by the murder of his parents, a modern Batman is dangerous and calculating. He has returned to his roots as a skilled detective and fighter, which has made him suspicious and paranoid. He is often depicted as having calculated how to defeat his allies, should the need arise, with contingency plans for everyone from Robin to Superman. Modern writers have a young Bruce Wayne train as a ninja before returning to Gotham to become Batman, so greater emphasis is placed on his stealth and fighting skills. The batsuit has reflected this change as well, shifting from a cloth/spandex suit to one that is very clearly body armor, built to withstand bullets and knives.

He is also haunted by his mistakes. After the death of Jason Todd, the second sidekick to go by the codename Robin, Batman spirals into anger and depression over not being able to prevent Jason’s death at the hands of the Joker. For the next decade, Jason’s murder haunts Batman alongside that of his parents as his greatest failure. He puts Jason’s costume on display in the Batcave as motivation. In the 2008 Christopher Nolan film *The Dark Knight*, Batman and Commissioner Gordon conspire to hide the truth of the popular District Attorney Harvey Dent’s descent into madness so that Gotham City will have a symbol of hope. While that decision is for the good of the city, it leads to Bruce Wayne’s reclusion and an eight year hiatus as Batman. Such dark, psychological stories would never have been allowed during the heyday of the Comics Code Authority.

Just as the portrayal of Batman has shifted to meet the current expectations of a superhero, so too have the depictions of the characters around him, both allies and enemies. During the Silver Age, Batman’s associates are, like Batman himself, light-hearted. Characters like Ace the Bat-Hound and the Bat-Mice were introduced to bring in more young readers, though these characters were rarely seen after 1964. Issues were built around a villain-of-the-week who is purely evil and has no outside motivation. These stories also tend to be episodic with no story arcs or even character arcs. The Joker is originally a calculating murderer, but his character becomes a gleeful trickster to comply with the Code.

As readers matured, the creative forces driving the various Batman outlets were able to tell more complex, meaningful stories. Thus, in modern portrayals, Batman’s associates deal with real, lasting consequences and changes. Beginning with Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight* comic series, Batman’s friends begin their trials. Dick Grayson, the original Robin, grows up and goes to college, being replaced by the ill-fated Jason Todd. He becomes a hero in his own right, going by the codename Nightwing and becoming the leader of the Teen Titans. In the seminal 1988 graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, Batgirl is partially paralyzed by the Joker, who shoots her through her spine as part of an effort to drive her father, Commissioner Gordon, insane. This condition lasts until the DC-Universe-wide reboot in 2011, and she is now able to walk and has resumed the mantle of Batgirl. The Joker himself has been given many different backstories, all of them horrific. Filmmakers give a nod to the Joker’s varied backstories in the film *The Dark Knight* by having the Joker give conflicting accounts of how he received his trademark scars. Catwoman is originally just a bored housewife who turns to crime, but beginning in the 1980s her story retroactively changes to her being a prostitute who turns to burglary to buy freedom for herself and her sister. Once a staunch villain of Batman, this new version of the character is portrayed more as an antihero; though she is not necessarily an upstanding citizen, the new Catwoman will join forces with Batman to fight evil when it suits her. These stories appeal to an audience craving depth and substance to their characters, far different from the Pre-Vietnam War era Batman stories.

While the key details to the Batman story never change, the way the character has been presented has changed over time, as has the way his associated characters have been presented. It is perhaps this adaptability that has allowed Batman to flourish in popularity for almost seventy-five years, with no signs of that popularity waning. As the demographic for Batman’s stories matures, the power wielded by the Comics Code Authority has diminished, making darker, more meaningful stories possible. Previously one dimensional characters were given subtleties and nuances, much in the way modern film versions depict the heroes of old, from Odysseus to Sherlock Holmes. As society’s norms change, this change is reflected in the way films, stories, and comic books depict superheroes. With all the changes occurring in culture worldwide, who knows what the next generation’s Batman will be like?

Online Compare-and-Contrast Essay Alternatives

Deborah Tannen compares and contrasts conversation styles in “Sex, Lies and Conversation: Why Is It So Hard for Men and Women to Talk to Each Other?”

Alex Wright examines communication patterns, old and new, in “Friending, Ancient or Otherwise.”

This page titled 3.6: Comparison and Contrast is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.7: Cause and Effect

The Purpose of Cause and Effect in Writing

It is often considered human nature to ask, “why?” and “how?” We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why our colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

A cause is something that produces an event or condition; an effect is what results from an event or condition. The purpose of the cause-and-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena relate in terms of origins and results. Sometimes the connection between cause and effect is clear, but often determining the exact relationship between the two is very difficult. For example, the following effects of a cold may be easily identifiable: a sore throat, runny nose, and a cough. But determining the cause of the sickness can be far more difficult. A number of causes are possible, and to complicate matters, these possible causes could have combined to cause the sickness. That is, more than one cause may be responsible for any given effect. Therefore, cause-and-effect discussions are often complicated and frequently lead to debates and arguments. Indeed, you can use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. Often it is not necessary, or even possible, to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. So, when formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary, or main, cause or effect. As soon as you claim that one cause or one effect is more crucial than the others, you have developed a thesis.

Exercise 20

Consider the causes and effects in the following thesis statements. List a cause and effect for each one on your own sheet of paper.

- The growing childhood obesity epidemic is a result of technology.
- Much of the wildlife is dying because of the oil spill.
- The town continued programs that it could no longer afford, so it went bankrupt.
- More young people became politically active as use of the Internet spread throughout society.
- While many experts believed the rise in violence was due to the poor economy, it was really due to the summer-long heat wave.

Exercise 21

Write three cause-and-effect thesis statements of your own for each of the following five broad topics.

- Health and nutrition
- Sports
- Media
- Politics
- History

The Structure of a Cause-and-Effect Essay

The cause-and-effect essay opens with a general introduction to the topic, which then leads to a thesis that states the main cause, main effect, or various causes and effects of a condition or event.

The cause-and-effect essay can be organized in one of the following two primary ways:

1. Start with the cause and then talk about the effects.
2. Start with the effect and then talk about the causes.

For example, if your essay were on childhood obesity, you could start by talking about the effect of childhood obesity and then discuss the cause, or you could start the same essay by talking about the cause of childhood obesity and then move to the effect.

Regardless of which structure you choose, be sure to explain each element of the essay fully and completely. Explaining complex relationships requires the full use of evidence, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and anecdotes. Be careful of resorting to empty speculation. In writing, speculation amounts to unsubstantiated guessing. Writers are particularly prone to such trappings in cause-and-effect arguments due to the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.

Because cause-and-effect essays determine how phenomena are linked, they make frequent use of certain words and phrases that denote such linkage. See Table of Phrases of Causation for examples of such terms.

Table of Phrases of Causation

as a result	consequently
because	due to
hence	since
thus	therefore

The conclusion should wrap up the discussion and reinforce the thesis, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the relationship that was analyzed.

Exercise 22

Look at some of the cause-and-effect relationships from Exercise 21. Outline the links you listed. Outline one using a cause-then-effect structure. Outline the other using the effect-thencause structure.

Writing a Cause-and-Effect Essay

Choose an event or condition that you think has an interesting cause-and-effect relationship. Introduce your topic in an engaging way. End your introduction with a thesis that states the main cause, the main effect, or both.

Organize your essay by starting with either the cause-then-effect structure or the effectthen-cause structure. Within each section, you should clearly explain and support the causes and effects using a full range of evidence. If you are writing about multiple causes or multiple effects, you may choose to sequence either in terms of order of importance. In other words, order the causes from least to most important (or vice versa), or order the effects from least to most important (or vice versa).

Use the phrases of causation when trying to forge connections between various events or conditions. This will help you to organize your ideas and orient the reader. End your essay with a conclusion that summarizes your main points and reinforces your thesis. At the end of this section you can read some online cause-and-effect essays.

Exercise 23

Choose one of the ideas that you outlined in Exercise 22 and write a full cause-and-effect essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, strong evidence and examples, and a thoughtful conclusion.

Online Cause-and-Effect Essay Examples

Norman Cousins examines cause and effect in boxing in “Who Killed Benny Paret?”

Alan Weisman examines the human impact on the planet and its effects in “Earth without People.”

This page titled 3.7: Cause and Effect is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.8: Persuasion (Part 1)

The Purpose of Persuasive Writing

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion. The act of trying to persuade automatically implies that more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we enter. On some level, we all want to be right, and we want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the right one.

The Structure of a Persuasive Essay

The following five features make up the structure of a persuasive essay:

- Introduction and thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- Strong evidence in support of claim
- Style and tone of language
- A compelling conclusion

Creating an Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and clearly states the writer's point of view.

Acknowledging Opposing Ideas and Limits to Your Argument

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must be sure to acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your own because it allows you to focus on countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word.

Acknowledging points of view different from your own also has the effect of fostering more credibility between you and the audience. Readers will know from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space. It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience ("ethos"). Audience members will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and they will trust your argument as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but she admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

> Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation alone cannot end these problems since guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might disagree with this writer's argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be realistic in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to their

ideas. See Table of Phrases of Concession for some useful phrases of concession.

Table of Phrases of Concession

although	granted that
of course	still
though	yet

Exercise 24

Try to form a thesis for each of the following topics. Remember the more specific your thesis, the better.

- Foreign policy
- Television and advertising
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Gender roles and the workplace
- Driving and cell phones

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Choose the thesis statement that most interests you and discuss why.

Bias in Writing

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward listening to music radio stations rather than talk radio or news programs. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful and reasonable address of opposing sides.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you will put forth and the better the final product will be.

The weakness of bias is when the bias begins to take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using I too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

The Use of “I” in Writing

The use of “I “in writing is a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can potentially have on your writing. Be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound overly biased. There are two primary reasons:

Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader’s attention--and usually not in a good way. The use of “I” is no different. 2. The insertion of “I” into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. “I” is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentence is underlined:

Smoking is bad.

I think smoking is bad.

In the first sentence, the rightful subject, smoking, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of I and think replaces smoking as the subject, which draws attention to I and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate. Indeed, your argument will be stronger if you remove the I think and simply assert "Smoking is bad." For more information about pronoun focus in an essay see Chapter 1 "Introduction to Writing."

Key Takeaways

Developing Sound Arguments

Does my essay contain the following elements?

- An engaging introduction
- A reasonable, specific thesis that is able to be supported by evidence
- A varied range of evidence from credible sources
- Respectful acknowledgement and explanation of opposing ideas
- A style and tone of language that is appropriate for the subject and audience
- Acknowledgement of the argument's limits
- A conclusion that will adequately summarize the essay and reinforce the thesis

This page titled 3.8: Persuasion (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.8: Persuasion (Part 2)

Facts and Opinions

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, 2 + 2 = 4. This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views, or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation must have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions. Experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience; this credibility is sometimes called "**ethos**" and is one way that we make our arguments persuasive. For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and vice versa. In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

Exercise 25

On a separate sheet of paper, take three of the theses you formed in Exercise 24 and list the types of evidence you might use in support of that thesis.

Exercise 26

Using the evidence you provided in support of the three theses in Exercise 25, come up with at least one counter-argument to each. Then write a concession statement, expressing the limits to each of your three arguments.

Using Visual Elements to Strengthen Arguments

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. An appeal based on logic is called "**logos**," and it persuades the reader using reasoning. Often we can provide information in data form to persuade the reader through logic. Quantitative visuals help display the information clearly. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if you can see how the disparity looks graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions. Persuading your reader based on an emotional appeal is called "**pathos**." Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals that can create an emotional appeal. Such images often try to convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.

Writing at Work

You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace. When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get across your idea. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective timesaving tool. Quantitative visuals in business presentations serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing.

They should make logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Qualitative visuals should be pictures that might appeal to your audience's emotions.

Writing a Persuasive Essay

Choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction. Be sure to have a clear thesis that states your position and previews the main points your essay will address.

Start by acknowledging and explaining points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. Also state the limits of your argument. This too helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated. See Chapters 1.3 and 4.7 for information on how to correctly incorporate outside sources into your writing.

Make sure that your style and tone are appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice.

Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis. See the sample persuasive essay at the end of this chapter, "The Value of Technical High Schools in Georgia's Business Marketplace," by student Elizabeth Lamoureux. Please note that this essay uses the MLA style of documentation, for which you can find guidelines at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) website: http://owl.english.purdue.edu.

Exercise 27

Choose one of the topics you have been working on throughout this section. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, clear explanations of all the evidence you present, and a strong conclusion.

Sample Persuasive Essay

In this student paper, the student makes a persuasive case for the value of technical high schools in Georgia. As you read, pay attention to the different persuasive devices the writer uses to convince us of her position. Also note how the outline gives a structure to the paper that helps lead the reader step-by-step through the components of the argument.

Outline

Elizabeth Lamoureux

Dr. Cox

English 1101 Honors

April 25, 2013

Outline

Thesis: Technical high schools should be established in every county in Georgia because they can provide the technical training that companies need, can get young people into the workforce earlier, and can reduce the number of drop outs.

I. Technical high schools can provide the technical training that companies in Georgia need.

A. Businesses can provide input regarding jobs needed in specific technical fields.
   1. Education can focus on these specific technical fields.
   2. Education can work with business to fill these positions.
B. Businesses can provide apprenticeship programs.
   1. Apprenticeship programs can be a vital part of a student's education.
   2. Apprenticeship programs are integral to Germany's educational program, providing a realistic model for technical high schools in Georgia.

II. Technical high schools can prepare students to enter the workforce earlier.
A. Students not interested in college can enter the workforce upon high school graduation.
   1. Students train during their high school years for their chosen profession.
   2. Students begin to work in a profession or trade where there is a need.
B. Students can begin to earn a living upon graduation.
   1. Students will become independent and self-supporting at the age of eighteen when many of their peers are still dependent upon their parents.
   2. Students can make more money over the course of their lifetimes.

II. Technical high schools can reduce the number of drop outs.
A. Students would stay in school because they take courses that they enjoy.
   1. Students are more motivated to take courses in which they have an interest.
   2. Students will find both core and specialized classes more interesting and valuable when they can see the practical application of the subjects.
B. Students would no longer need to drop out to support their families.
   1. Students would be able to earn a living wage while still taking classes that would eventually lead to full-time employment.
   2. Students would learn financial skills through experience with money management.

Student Essay

Elizabeth Lamoureux

Dr. Cox

English 1101 Honors

April 25, 2013

The Value of Technical High Schools in Georgia's Business Marketplace

Businesses need specialized workers; young people need jobs. It seems like this would be an easy problem to solve. However, business and education are not communicating with each other. To add to this dilemma, emphasis is still put on a college education for everyone. Samuel Halperin, study director of the Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship for the W. T. Grant Foundation, co-authored two reports: "The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America" and "The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families." Halperin states: "While the attention of the nation was focused on kids going to college . . . the truth is that 70 percent of our adults never earn a college degree" (qtd. in Rogers). According to an article in Issues in Science and Technology, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that there will be more need for skills obtained through "community colleges, occupational training, and work experience" (Lerman). As Anne C. Lewis points out, although the poor job situation is recognized as detrimental to American youth, President Bush tried to get rid of career and technical education (CTE) and "promote strictly academic programs." Luckily, Congress did not support it (Lewis 5). The figure for U.S. teen joblessness in October 2009 was 27.6 percent, the highest since World War II (Karaim). According to Thomas E. Persing, Americans are "disregarding the 50 percent who enter college and fail to graduate. . . ." Since everyone does not want or need to go to college, young people need an alternative choice, namely, technical high schools. Technical high schools should be established in every county in Georgia because they can provide the technical training that companies need, can get young people into the work force earlier, and can reduce the number of drop outs.

Technical high schools provide students with the technical training that companies need. By getting input from businesses on exactly what their specialized needs are, school systems could adapt their curricula to accommodate the needs of businesses. According to an article in Issues in Science and Technology, "employers report difficulty in recruiting workers with adequate skills." The article goes on to say that "the shortage of available skills is affecting their ability to serve customers, and 84% of the firms say that the K-12 school system is not doing a good job preparing students for the workplace" (Lerman). Education can work

with businesses to provide them with the workforce they need, and students can learn the skills they need through apprenticeship programs.

Business can be further involved by providing these apprenticeship programs, which can be a vital part of a student's education. Currently, Robert Reich, economist and former Secretary of Labor, and Richard Riley, Secretary of Education, have spoken up for apprenticeship programs (Persing). In these programs, not only do students learn job-specific skills, but they also learn other skills for success in the work place, such as "communication, responsibility, teamwork, allocating resources, problem-solving, and finding information" (Lerman). Businesses complain that the current educational system is failing in this regard and that students enter the workforce without these skills.

The United States could learn from other countries. Apprenticeship programs are integral to Germany's educational program, for example. Because such large numbers of students in a wide array of fields take advantage of these programs, the stigma of not attending college is reduced. Timothy Taylor, the Conversable Economist, explains that most German students complete this program and still have the option to pursue a postsecondary degree. Many occupations are represented in this program, including engineering, nursing, and teaching. Apprenticeship programs can last from one to six years and provide students with a wage for learning. This allows both business and student to compete in the market place. According to Julie Rawe, "under Germany's earn-while-you-learn system, companies are paying 1.6 million young adults to train for about 350 types of jobs. . . ."

A second important reason technical high schools should be promoted in Georgia is that they prepare students to enter the work force earlier. Students not interested in college enter the work force upon high school graduation or sooner if they have participated in an apprenticeship or other cooperative program with a business. Students train during their high school years for their chosen profession and often work for the company where they trained. This ensures that students begin to work in a profession or trade where there is a need.

Another positive factor is that jobs allow students to earn a living upon graduation or before. Even though students are considered adults at eighteen, many cannot support themselves. The jobs available to young people are primarily minimum wage jobs which do not provide them with enough resources to live independently. One recent study indicates that the income gap is widening for young people, and "In March 1997, more than one-fourth of out-ofschool young adults who were working full-time were earning less than the poverty line income standard of just over $16,000 annually for a family of four" ("The Forgotten Half Revisited"). Conversely, by entering the work force earlier with the skills businesses need, young people make more money over their lifetimes. Robert I. Lerman considers the advantages:

> Studies generally find that education programs with close links to the world of work improve earnings. The earnings gains are especially solid for students unlikely to attend or complete college. Cooperative education, school enterprises, and internship or apprenticeship increased employment and lowered the share of young men who are idle after high school.

Young people can obviously profit from entering the work force earlier.

One of the major benefits of promoting technical high schools in Georgia is that they reduce the number of dropouts. According to an article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the figure for dropouts for the Atlanta metro area is about thirty-four percent (McCaffrey and Badertscher A16). The statistic for Germany's dropout rate is less than nine percent (Rawe). As Rawe maintains, students stay in school because they cannot get the job if they do not have the diploma. Beyond the strong incentive of a job, students are more motivated to take courses in which they have an interest. In addition to the specialized career classes, students are still required to take core classes required by traditional high schools. However, practical application of these subjects makes them more interesting and more valuable to the students.

Another reason students drop out is to support their families. By participating in a program in which they are paid a wage and then entering that job full time, they no longer need to drop out for this reason. It is necessary for many students to contribute financially to the family: by getting a job earlier, they can do this. Joining the work force early also provides students with financial skills gained through experience with money management.

The belief of most Americans that everyone needs to have a college education is outdated. The United States needs skilled employees at all levels, from the highly technical to the practical day to day services society needs to sustain its current standard of living. Germany is doing this through its apprenticeship programs which have proven to be economically successful for both businesses and workers. If the State of Georgia put technical high schools in every county, businesses would get employees with the skills they need; young people would get into good paying jobs earlier, and schools would have fewer dropouts.

Works Cited

"The Forgotten Half Revisited: American Youth and Young Families, 1988-2008." *American Youth Policy Forum*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.

Karaim, Reed. "Youth Unemployment." *CQ Global Researcher* 6 Mar. 2012: 105-28. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.

Lerman, Robert I. "Building a Wider Skills Net for Workers: A Range of Skills Beyond Conventional Schooling Are Critical to Success in the Job Market, and New Educational Approaches Should Reflect These Noncognitive Skills and Occupational Qualifications." *Issues in Science and Technology* 24.4 (2008): 65+. *Gale Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.

Lewis, Anne C. "Support for CTE." *Tech Directions* 65.3 (2005): 5-6. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 Apr. 2012.

McCaffrey, Shannon, and Nancy Badertscher. "Painful Truth in Grad Rates." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 15 Apr. 2012: A1+. Print.

Persing, Thomas E. "The Role of Apprenticeship Programs." *On Common Ground*. Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Fall 1994. Web. 16 Apr. 2012.

Rawe, Julie. "How Germany Keeps Kids From Dropping Out." *Time Magazine U.S.* Time Magazine, 11 Apr. 2006. Web. 16 Apr. 2012.

Rogers, Betsy. "Remembering the 'Forgotten Half.'" *Washington University in St. Louis Magazine* Spring 2005. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.

Taylor, Timothy. "Apprenticeships for the U.S. Economy." *Conversableeconomist.blogspot.com. Conversable Economist*, 18 Oct. 2011. Web. 16 Apr. 2012.

Online Persuasive Essay Alternatives

Martin Luther King, Jr. writes persuasively about civil disobedience in "Letter from Birmingham Jail." You can see the original document here.

Michael Levin argues "The Case for Torture."

Alisa Solomon argues "The Case against Torture"

Exercise 28

The thesis statement is a fundamental element of writing regardless of what rhetorical mode in which you write. Formulate one more thesis for each of the modes discussed in this chapter.

Exercise 29

Which rhetorical mode seems most aligned with who you are as a person? That is, which mode seems most useful to you? Explain why in a paragraph.

Exercise 30

Look closely at the texts and articles you have read. Document in a journal exactly what type of rhetorical mode is being used. Sometimes one mode is used for an entire article, but other times you will see different modes within one article. The more you can detect various ways of communicating ideas, the easier it will be to communicate ideas yourself.

This page titled 3.8: Persuasion (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4: WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

4.1: The Purpose of Research Writing
4.2: Choosing Your Topic
4.3: Managing Your Research
4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 1)
4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 2)
4.5: Evaluating and Processing Your Sources
4.6: Applying Your Research
4.7: Writing Your Draft
4.8: Documenting Your Source Material
4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 1)
4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 2)

This page titled 4: Writing a Research Paper is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.1: The Purpose of Research Writing

Who has written poetry about exile? **What** roles did women play in the American Revolution? **Where** do cicadas go during their 'off' years? **When** did bookmakers start using movable type? **Why** was the Great Wall of China built? **How** does the human brain create, store, and retrieve memories?

You may know the answers to these questions off the top of your head. If you are like most people, however, you find answers to tough questions like these by searching the Internet, visiting a library, or asking others for information. To put it simply, you perform research.

Whether or not you realize it, you probably already perform research in your everyday life. When your boss, your instructor, or a family member asks you a question that you don't know the answer to, you locate relevant information, analyze your findings, and share your results. Locating, analyzing, and sharing information are key steps in the research process. In this chapter, you will learn more about each step. By developing your research writing skills, you will prepare yourself to answer challenging questions.

Sometimes you perform research simply to satisfy your own curiosity. Once you find the answer to your questions, your search may be over, or it may lead to more in-depth research about that topic or about another topic. Other times, you want to communicate what you have learned to your peers, your family, your teachers, or even the editors of magazines, newspapers, or journals. In your personal life, you might simply discuss the topic with your friends. In more formal situations, such as in business and school, you communicate your findings in writing or in a presentation. A report may simply relay the results of your research in an organized manner. In contrast, a research paper presents an original thesis about a topic and develops that thesis with ideas and information gathered from a variety of sources. In a research paper, you use facts, interpretations, and opinions you encounter in your research to create a narrative and support an argument about your topic.

A student in an art history course might write a research paper about an artist's work or an aesthetic movement. A student in a psychology course might write a research paper about current findings in childhood development. No matter what field of study you pursue, you will most likely be asked to write a research paper in your college degree program and to apply the skills of research and writing in your career. For similar reasons as professionals, students do research to answer specific questions, to share their findings with others, to increase their understanding of challenging topics, and to strengthen their analytical skills.

Having to write a research paper may feel intimidating at first. After all, researching and writing a long paper requires a lot of time, effort, and organization. However, its challenges have rewards. The research process allows you to gain expertise on a topic of your choice. The writing process helps you to remember what you learned and to understand it on a deeper level. Thus writing a research paper can be a great opportunity to explore a topic that particularly interests you and to grow as a person.

Writing at Work

Knowing how to write a good research paper is a valuable skill that will serve you well throughout your career. For example, laboratory technicians and information technology professionals do research to learn about the latest technological developments in their fields. A small business owner may conduct research to learn about the latest trends in his or her industry. A freelance writer will need to research his or her topics to write informed, up-to-date articles. Whether you are developing a new product, studying the best way to perform a procedure, discovering the challenges and opportunities in your field of employment, or learning about how to find a job, you will use research techniques to guide your exploration. Because effective communication is essential to any company, employers seek to hire people who can write clearly and professionally.

Exercise 1

Think about the job of your dreams. How might you use research writing skills to perform that job? Create a list of ways in which strong researching, organizing, writing, and critical thinking skills could help you succeed at your dream job. How might these skills help you obtain that job?

Process Overview

How does a research paper grow from a folder of notes to a polished final draft? No two projects are identical, but most writers of research papers follow six basic steps.

Step 1: Choosing a Topic

To narrow the focus of your topic, brainstorm using Prewriting Techniques. Starting with your topic, formulate a specific research question—a broad, open-ended question that will guide your research—as well as propose a possible answer, or a working thesis.

Step 2: Planning and Scheduling

Before you start researching your topic, take time to plan your researching and writing schedule. Research projects can take days, weeks, or even months to complete. Creating a schedule is a good way to ensure that you do not end up being overwhelmed by all the work you have to do as the deadline approaches. During this step of the process, it is also a good idea to plan the resources and organizational tools you will use to keep yourself on track throughout the project. Flowcharts, calendars, and checklists can all help you stick to your schedule.

Step 3: Conducting Research

When going about your research, you will likely use a variety of sources—anything from books and periodicals to video presentations and in-person interviews. However, you should pay close attention to instructions; instructors often specify what kinds of sources they require for research papers. Some may assign you to only use scholarly (peerreviewed) sources. For some assignments, your sources might include both primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources provide firsthand information or raw data. For example, surveys, in-person interviews, historical documents, works of art, and works of literature are primary sources. Secondary sources, such as biographies, literary reviews, or news articles, include some analysis or interpretation of the information presented. As you conduct research, you should take detailed, careful notes about your discoveries. You should also evaluate the reliability of each source you find, especially sources that are not peer-reviewed.

Step 4: Organizing Your Research and Ideas

When your research is complete, you will organize your findings and decide which sources to cite in your paper. You will also have an opportunity to evaluate the evidence you have collected and determine whether it supports your thesis, or the focus of your paper. You may decide to adjust your thesis or conduct additional research to ensure that your thesis is well supported.

Step 5: Drafting Your Paper

Now you are ready to combine your research findings with your critical analysis of the results in a rough draft. You will incorporate source materials into your paper and discuss each source thoughtfully in relation to your thesis or purpose statement. It is important to pay close attention to standard conventions for citing sources in order to avoid plagiarism, which is the practice of using someone else's words without acknowledging the source. Later in this chapter, you will learn how to incorporate sources in your paper and avoid some of the most common pitfalls of attributing information.

Step 6: Revising and Editing Your Paper

In the final step of the research writing process, you will revise and polish your paper. You might reorganize your paper's structure or revise for unity and cohesion, ensuring that each element in your paper smoothly and logically flows into the next. You will also make sure that your paper uses an appropriate and consistent tone. Once you feel confident in the strength of your writing, you will edit your paper for proper spelling, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and formatting. When you complete this final step, you will have transformed a simple idea or question into a thoroughly researched and well-written paper of which you can be proud.

Writing a good research paper takes time, thought, and effort. Although this assignment is challenging, it is manageable. Focusing on one step at a time will help you develop a thoughtful, informative, well-supported research paper.

This page titled 4.1: The Purpose of Research Writing is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.2: Choosing Your Topic

Your first step is to choose a topic and then to develop research questions and a working thesis. It's important to set aside adequate time for this part of the process. Fully exploring ideas will help you build a solid foundation for your paper.

Identifying Potential Topics

When you choose a topic for a research paper, you are making a major commitment. Your choice will help determine whether you enjoy the lengthy process of research and writing—and whether your final paper fulfills the assignment requirements. If you choose your topic hastily, you may later find it difficult to work with your topic. By taking your time and choosing carefully, you can ensure that this assignment is not only challenging but also rewarding.

Writers understand the importance of choosing a topic that fulfills the assignment requirements and fits the assignment's purpose and audience. Choosing a topic that genuinely interests you is also crucial. You instructor may provide a list of suggested topics or ask you to develop a topic on your own. You may find inspiration for topic ideas in your everyday life, by browsing magazines, or looking at lists of topics or themes in online databases such Opposing Viewpoints, CQ Researcher Online, Bloom's Literary Reference Online, and Literature Resource Center. In addition to Prewriting Techniques, use tools on the Web, such as Topic-o-rama and Wridea, to help you brainstorm your topic.

You may benefit from identifying several possibilities before committing to one idea. Building a list of potential topics will help you to identify additional, related topics. In this chapter, you will follow a writer named Jorge, who is studying healthcare administration, as he prepares a research paper. Jorge was assigned to write a research paper on current debates about healthy living for an introductory course in health care. Although a general topic was selected for the students, Jorge had to decide which specific issues interested him. He brainstormed the following list of possibilities:

Example 4.2.1:

- Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) in the news
- Sexual education programs
- Hollywood and eating disorders
- Americans' access to public health information
- Medial portrayals of health care reform
- Depictions of drugs on television
- The effect of the Internet on mental health
- Popularized diets (such as low-carbohydrate diets)
- Fear of pandemics (bird flu, H1N1, SARS)
- Electronic entertainment and obesity
- Advertisements for prescription drugs
- Public education and disease prevention

Focusing on a Topic

After identifying potential topics, you will need to evaluate your list and choose one topic to pursue as the focus of your research paper. Discussing your ideas with your instructor, peers, and tutors will help ensure that you choose a manageable topic that fits the requirements of the assignment. The following are some questions to consider:

- Will you be able to find enough information about the topic?
- Can you take an arguable position on the topic?
- Is the topic too broad or too narrow for the scope of the assignment? If so, can you modify the topic so it is more manageable?

You will also need to narrow your topic so you can formulate a concise, manageable thesis about it. Most writers find that the topics they listed during brainstorming or idea mapping are broad—too broad for the scope of the assignment. Working with an

overly broad topic, such as sexual education programs or popularized diets, can be frustrating and overwhelming. Each topic has so many facets that it would be impossible to cover them all in a college research paper. However, more specific choices, such as the pros and cons of sexual education in kids' television programs or the physical effects of the South Beach diet, are specific enough to write about without being so narrow that they can't sustain an entire research paper. A good research paper provides focused, in-depth information and analysis. If your topic is too broad, you will find it difficult to do more than skim the surface when you research it and write about it. To narrow your focus, explore your topic in writing. Also, conduct preliminary research, including discussing the topic with others.

You may be asking yourself, "How am I supposed to narrow my topic when I haven't even begun researching yet?" In fact, you may already know more than you realize. Review your list and identify your top two or three topics. Set aside some time to explore each one through Prewriting Techniques. Taking the time to focus on your topic may yield fresh angles. For example, Jorge knew that he was especially interested in the topic of diet fads, but he also knew that it was much too broad for his assignment. He used freewriting to explore his thoughts so he could narrow his topic. Read Jorge's following ideas from freewriting.

> Our instructors are always saying that accurate, up-to-date information is crucial in encouraging people to make better choices about their health. I don't think the media does a very good job of providing that, though. Every time I go on the Internet, I see tons of ads for the latest 'miracle food'. One week it's acai berries, the next week it's green tea, and then six months later I see a news story saying all the fabulous claims about acai berries and green tea are overblown! Advice about weight loss is even worse. Think about all the diet books that are out there! Some say that a low-fat diet is best; some say you should cut down on carbs; and some make bizarre recommendations like eating half a grapefruit with every meal. I don't know how anybody is supposed to make an informed decision about what to eat when there's so much confusing, contradictory information. I bet even doctors, nurses, and dieticians have trouble figuring out what information is reliable and what is just the latest hype.

Another way that writers focus on a topic is by conducting preliminary research. Talk about your ideas with your classmates, friends, and family. Like freewriting, exploratory reading can help you identify interesting angles. Surfing the web is a good way to start. Find out what people are saying about your topic in online newspapers, magazines, blogs, and discussion boards. Keep in mind that the reliability of online sources varies greatly. In this exploratory phase of your research, you do not need to evaluate sources as closely as you will later; however, use common sense as you refine your paper topic. If you read a fascinating blog comment that gives you a new idea, search for some fully developed sources on that topic to see if it's worth pursuing. If you are writing a research paper for a specialized course, look back through your notes and course activities to identify potential topics. Remind yourself of reading assignments and class discussions that especially engaged you. Doing so can help you identify topics to pursue. If the readings or viewings assigned in your course deal with your topic, then review and take notes on those materials. Librarians and instructors can help you to determine if there are enough sources available on your topic, or if there are so many sources that it would be wise to narrow your topic further.

Jorge's freewriting exercise helped him realize that the assigned topic of current debates about healthy living intersected with a few of his own interests—diet, nutrition, and obesity. Preliminary online research and discussions with his classmates strengthened his impression that many people are confused or misled by media coverage of these subjects. Jorge decided to focus his paper on a topic that had garnered a great deal of media attention—low-carbohydrate diets. He wanted to find out whether low-carbohydrate diets were as effective as their proponents claimed.

Writing at Work

At work, you may need to research a topic quickly to find general information. This information can be useful in understanding trends in a given industry or generating competition. For example, a company may research a competitor's prices and use the information when pricing their own product. You may find it useful to skim a variety of sources and take notes on your findings.

Exercise 2

Set a timer for five minutes. Use prewriting techniques to create a list of topics you would be interested in researching for a paper about the influence of the Internet on social networking. Which social networking sites do you and your friends use? Do you closely follow a particular social media website, such as Twitter? Would you like to learn more about a certain industry, such as online dating? Would you like to learn more about people's use of the Internet to build support for social causes? List as many ideas related to this topic as you can.

Exercise 3

Choose two topics from the list you created above. Spend five minutes freewriting about each of these topics. Choose the topic about which you more enjoyed freewriting. Then, review your freewriting to identify possible areas of focus.

Exercise 4

Collaborative exercise: Swap lists of potential topics with a classmate. Select one or two topics on your classmate's list about which you would like to learn more. Explain to your classmate why you find those topics interesting. Ask your classmate which of the topics on your list s/he would like to learn more about and why.

Determining Paths of Inquiry

Your freewriting and preliminary research have helped you choose a focused, manageable topic for your research paper. To work with your topic successfully, you will need to determine what exactly you want to learn about it—and what you want to say about it. Before you begin conducting in-depth research, you will further define your focus by developing research questions and a working thesis.

By forming research questions about your topic, you are setting a goal for your research. Determine your main question—the primary focus of your paper—and several subquestions that you will need to research in more depth to answer your main question. Your main research question should be substantial enough to form the guiding principle of your paper—but focused enough to guide your research. A strong research question requires you not only to find information but also to put together different pieces of information, interpret and analyze them, and figure out what you think. As you consider potential research questions, ask yourself whether they would be too hard or too easy to answer. Review the results of your prewriting, and skim through your preliminary research. From these, write both simple, factual questions and more complex questions that would require analysis and interpretation to answer.

Below are the research questions Jorge will use to focus his research. Notice that his main research question has no obvious, straightforward answer. Jorge will need to research his subquestions, which address narrower topics, to answer his main question.

Topic: Low-carbohydrate diets

Main question: Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?

Subquestions:

- Who can benefit from following a low-carbohydrate diet?
- What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet?
- When did low-carbohydrate diets become a 'hot' topic in the media?
- Where do average consumers get information about diet and nutrition?
- Why has the low-carb approach received so much media attention?
- How do low-carb diets work?

A working thesis concisely states a writer's initial answer to the main research question. It does not merely state a fact or present a subjective opinion. Instead, it expresses a debatable idea or claim that you hope to prove through research. Your working thesis is called a working thesis for a reason: it is subject to modification. You may adapt your thinking in light of your research findings. Let your working thesis serve as a guide to your research, but do not hesitate to change your path as you learn about your topic.

One way to determine your working thesis is to consider how you would complete statements that begin, "I believe..." or "My opinion is...". These first-person phrases are useful starting points even though you may eventually omit them from sentences in your research paper. Generally, formal research papers use an assertive, objective voice and, therefore, do not include first-person pronouns. Some readers associate I with informal, subjective writing. Some readers think the first-person point of view diminishes the impact of a claim. For these reasons, some instructors will tell you not to use I in research papers.

Jorge began his research with a strong point of view based on his preliminary writing and research. Read his working thesis

statement, below, which presents the point he will argue. Notice how it states Jorge's tentative answer to his research question.

Main research question: Are low-carb diets as effective as they have sometimes been portrayed to be by the mass media?

Working thesis statement: Low-carb diets do not live up to the media hype surrounding them.

Writing at Work

Before you begin a new project at work, you may have to develop a project summary document that states the purpose of the project, explains why it would be a wise use of company resources, and briefly outlines the steps involved in completing the project. This type of document is similar to a research proposal for an academic purpose. Both define and limit a project, explain its value, discuss how to proceed, and identify what resources you will use.

Exercise 5

Using the topic you have selected, write your main research question and at least four subquestions. Check that your main research question is appropriately complex for your assignment.

Exercise 6

Write a working thesis statement that presents your preliminary answer to the research question you wrote above. Think about whether your working thesis statement presents an idea or claim that could be supported or refuted by evidence from research.

This page titled 4.2: Choosing Your Topic is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.3: Managing Your Research

Step 1 “Choosing a Topic,” helped you begin to plan the content of your research paper—your topic, research questions, and preliminary thesis. It is equally important to plan out the process of researching and writing the paper. Although some types of writing assignments can be completed relatively quickly, developing a good research paper is a complex process that takes time and attention. Careful planning helps ensure that you will keep your project running smoothly and produce your best work. Think about how you will complete each step and what resources you will use. Resources may include anything from online databases and digital technologies to interview subjects and writing tutors.

Scheduling Research and Writing

Set up a project schedule that shows when you will complete each step. To develop your schedule, use a calendar and work backward from the date your final draft is due. Generally, it is wise to divide half of the available time on the research phase of the project and half on the writing phase. For example, if you have a month to work, plan for two weeks for each phase. If you have a full semester, plan to begin research early and to start writing by the middle of the term. You might think that no one really works that far ahead, but try it. You will probably be pleased with the quality of your work and with the reduction in your stress level.

Plan your schedule realistically, and consider other commitments that may sometimes take precedence. A business trip or family visit may mean that you are unable to work on the research project for a few days. Make the most of the time you have available. Plan for unexpected interruptions, but keep in mind that a short time away from the project may help you come back to it with renewed enthusiasm. Another strategy many writers find helpful is to finish each day’s work at a point when the next task is an easy one. That makes it easier to start again.

As you plan, break down major steps into smaller tasks if necessary. For example, Step 3, Conducting Research, involves locating potential sources, evaluating their usefulness and reliability, reading, and taking notes. Defining these smaller tasks makes the project more manageable by giving you concrete goals to achieve.

Jorge had six weeks to complete his research project. Working backward from a due date of May 2, he mapped out a schedule for completing his research by early April so that he would have ample time to write. Jorge chose to write his schedule in his weekly planner to help keep himself on track. Review Jorge’s schedule. Key target dates are shaded. Note that Jorge planned times to use available resources by visiting the library and writing center and by meeting with his instructor.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
March 20	21	22 Choose Topic	23 Preliminary research	24 Write research questions and working thesis	25 Write research proposal	26
27	28 Research proposal due	29 Look for sources online	30 Library	31 Evaluate sources; make source cards	April 1 Take notes →	2
3 →	4 →	5 Finish note cards	6 Organize notes →	7 →	8 Write outline	9 →
10	11 Outline due	12 Write draft →	13 →	14 →	15 Off - Trip to NYC	16 Off - Trip to NYC
17	18 Conference with Prof. Habib 2:00	19 Finish writing draft	20	21 Revise draft →	22 →	23 Library?
24	25	26 Finish revising draft	27 Edit draft	28 Writing Center 4:30	29 Finish editing draft	30 Create Works Cited page
May 1	2 Final draft due	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 4.3.1 - Sample Schedule for Writing a Research Paper

Staying Organized

Although setting up a schedule is relatively easy, sticking to one is challenging. Even if you are the rare person who never procrastinates, unforeseen events may interfere with your ability to complete tasks on time. A self-imposed deadline may slip your mind despite your best intentions. Organizational tools (e.g., calendars, checklists, note cards, software) and setting up a buddy system with a classmate can help you stay on track.

Throughout your project, organize both your time and resources systematically. Review your schedule frequently and check your progress. It helps to post your schedule in a place where you will see it every day. Email systems usually include a calendar feature where you can record tasks, arrange to receive daily reminders, and check off completed tasks. Electronic devices such as smartphones have similar features. There are online task-management tools you may use for free on the Web, such as Google Tasks, HiTask, Nirvana, and Remember the Milk. Some people enjoy using the most up-to-date technology to help them stay organized. Other people prefer simple methods, such as crossing off items on a checklist. The key to staying organized is finding a system you like enough to use daily. The particulars of the method are not important as long as you are consistent.

Organize project documents in a binder or digital folder. Label these clearly. Use note cards, an electronic document, an online database folder (this will require you to set up a free account on the database), or free downloadable software such as Colwiz and Zotero to record bibliographical information for sources you want to use in your paper. Tracking this information during the research process will save you time when Creating a List of References.

Writing at Work

When you create a project schedule at work, you set target dates for completing certain tasks and identify the resources you plan to use on the project. It is important to build in some flexibility. Materials may not be received on time because of a shipping delay. An employee on your team may be called away to work on a higher-priority project. Essential equipment may malfunction. You should always plan for the unexpected.

Exercise 7

Working backward from the date your final draft is due, create a project schedule. You may choose to write a sequential list of tasks, record tasks on a calendar, or set up your project's timeline using an online task-management tool, such as Google Tasks, HiTask, Nirvana, and Remember the Milk. Select a format you think will help you stay on track from day to day. Use a calendar accessible on your smartphone, record your schedule in a weekly planner, post it by your desk, or set your email or task-management tool to send you reminders. Review your schedule to be sure you have broken each step into smaller tasks and assigned a target completion date to each key task. Review your target dates to make sure they are realistic. Allow more time than you think you will need.

Anticipating Challenges

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? You have identified a book that would be a great resource for your project, but it is currently checked out of the library. You planned to interview a subject-matter expert on your topic, but she calls to cancel. You have begun writing your draft, but now you realize that you will need to modify your thesis and conduct additional research. Or, you have finally completed your draft when your computer crashes, and days of hard work disappear in an instant. These troubling situations are all too common. No matter how carefully you plan your schedule, you may encounter a glitch or setback. Managing your project effectively means anticipating potential problems, taking steps to minimize them where possible, and allowing time in your schedule to handle any setbacks.

Many times a situation becomes a problem due only to lack of planning. For example, if a book is checked out of your college's library, you can request it through interlibrary loan to have it delivered to your campus in a few days. Alternatively, you might locate another equally useful source. If you have allowed enough time for research, a brief delay will not become a major setback.

You can manage other potential problems by staying organized and maintaining a takecharge attitude. Take the time to save a backup copy of your work on a portable flash drive. Or, instead of using the hard drive of one computer to save your work, create your word-processing files using cloud storage such as Dropbox or Google Drive, which you can access with a username and password from any computer with an Internet connection. If you don't have a reliable Internet connection off campus, then visit a

computer lab on campus or a public library with desktop computers, or you can go to a coffee shop with a laptop; it is important to find a space where you can concentrate and that is open during times that work with your schedule. As you conduct research, maintain detailed records and notes of sources—doing so will make citing sources in your draft infinitely easier. If you run into difficulties with your research or your writing, ask your instructor or a librarian for help, or meet with a peer or writing tutor.

Writing at Work

In the workplace, documents prepared at the beginning of a project often include a detailed plan for risk management. When you manage a project, it makes sense to anticipate and prepare for potential setbacks. For example, to roll out a new product line, a software development company must strive to complete tasks on a schedule in order to meet the new product release date. The project manager may need to adjust the project plan if one or more tasks fall behind schedule.

Exercise 8

Identify five potential problems you might encounter in the process of researching and writing your paper. Write them on a separate sheet of paper. For each problem, write at least one strategy for solving the problem or minimizing its effect on your project.

This page titled 4.3: Managing Your Research is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 1)

Now that you have planned your research project, you are ready to begin the research. This phase can be both exciting and challenging. As you read this section, you will learn ways to locate sources efficiently, so you will have enough time to read the sources, take notes, and think about how to use them in your research paper. In addition to finding sources, research entails determining the relevance and reliability of sources, organizing findings, as well as deciding whether and how to use sources in your paper. The technological advances of the past few decades—particularly the rise of online media—mean that, as a twenty-first-century student, you have countless sources of information available at your fingertips. But how can you tell whether a source is reliable? This section will discuss strategies for finding and evaluating sources so that you can be a media-savvy researcher.

Depending on your assignment, you will likely search for sources by using

- **Internet search engines** to locate sources freely available on the web.
- **A library's online catalog** to identify print books, ebooks, periodicals, DVDs, and other items in the library's collection. The catalog will help you find journals by title, but it will not list the journal's articles by title or author.
- **Online databases** to locate articles, ebooks, streaming videos, images, and other electronic resources. These databases can also help you identify articles in print periodicals.

Your instructor, as well as writing tutors and librarians, at your college can help you determine which of these methods will best fit your project and learn to use the search tools available to you. You can also find research guides and tutorials on library websites and *YouTube* channels that can help you identify appropriate research tools and learn how to use them. As you gather sources, you will need to examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers continually ask themselves two questions: "Is this source relevant to my purpose?" and "Is this source reliable?" The first question will help you avoid wasting valuable time reading sources that stray too far from your specific topic and research questions. The second question will help you find accurate, trustworthy sources.

Writing at Work

Businesses, government organizations, and nonprofit organizations produce published materials that range from brief advertisements and brochures to lengthy, detailed reports. In many cases, producing these publications requires research. A corporation's annual report may include research about economic or industry trends. A charitable organization may use information from research in materials sent to potential donors. Regardless of the industry you work in, you may be asked to assist in developing materials for publication. Often, incorporating research in these documents can make them more effective in informing or persuading readers.

Identifying Primary and Secondary Sources

When you chose a paper topic and determined your research questions, you conducted preliminary research to stimulate your thinking. Your research plan included some general ideas for how to go about your research—for instance, interviewing an expert in the field or analyzing the content of popular magazines. You may even have identified a few potential sources. Now it is time to conduct a more focused, systematic search for informative primary and secondary sources. Writers classify research resources in two categories: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources are direct, firsthand sources of information or data. For example, if you were writing a paper about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, the text of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights would be a primary source. Other primary sources include the following:

- Data
- Works of visual art
- Literary texts
- Historical documents such as diaries or letters
- Autobiographies, interviews, or other personal accounts

Secondary sources discuss, interpret, analyze, consolidate, or otherwise rework information from primary sources. In researching a paper about the First Amendment, you might read articles about legal cases that involved First Amendment rights, or editorials expressing commentary on the First Amendment. These sources would be considered secondary sources because they are one

step removed from the primary source of information. The following are examples of secondary sources:

- Literary criticism
- Biographies
- Reviews
- Documentaries
- News reports

Your topic and purpose determine whether you must cite both primary and secondary sources in your paper. Ask yourself which sources are most likely to provide the information that will answer your research questions. If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as a primary source, but secondary sources, such as a reviewer's critique, are also important. If you are writing about the health effects of nicotine, you will probably want to read the published results of scientific studies, but secondary sources, such as magazine articles discussing the outcome of a recent study, may also be helpful.

Some sources could be considered primary or secondary sources, depending on the writer's purpose for using them. For instance, if a writer's purpose is to inform readers about how the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has affected elementary education in the United States, then a *Time* magazine article on the subject would be a secondary source. However, suppose the writer's purpose is to analyze how the news media has portrayed the effects of NCLB. In that case, articles about the legislation in news magazines like *Time, Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report* would be primary sources. They provide firsthand examples of the media coverage the writer is analyzing.

Once you have thought about what kinds of sources are most likely to help you answer your research questions, you may begin your search for sources. The challenge here is to conduct your search both efficiently and thoroughly. On the one hand, effective writers use strategies to help them find the sources that are most relevant and reliable while steering clear of sources that will not be useful; on the other hand, they are open to pursuing different lines of inquiry that come up along the way than those that seemed relevant at the start of research. As a process of discovery, good research requires critical thinking about, and often revising of, writers' plans and ideas.

Reading Popular and Scholarly Periodicals

When you search for periodicals, be sure to distinguish among different types. Mass-market publications, such as newspapers and popular magazines, differ from scholarly publications in their accessibility, audience, and purpose. Newspapers and magazines are written for a broader audience than scholarly journals. Their content is usually quite accessible and easy to read. Trade magazines that target readers within a particular industry may presume the reader has background knowledge, but these publications are still reader-friendly for a broader audience. Their purpose is to inform and, often, to entertain or persuade readers as well.

Scholarly or academic journals are written for a much smaller and more expert audience. The creators of these publications are experts in the subject and assume that most of their readers are already familiar with the main topic of the journal. The target audience is also highly educated. Informing is the primary purpose of a scholarly journal. While a journal article may advance an agenda or advocate a position, the content will still be presented in an objective style and formal tone. Entertaining readers with breezy comments and splashy graphics is not a priority.

Because of these differences, scholarly journals are more challenging to read. That doesn't mean you should avoid them. On the contrary, they can provide in-depth information unavailable elsewhere. Because knowledgeable professionals carefully review the content before publication in a process called "peer-review," scholarly journals are far more reliable than much of the information available in popular media. Seek out academic journals along with other resources. Just be prepared to spend a little more time processing the information.

Writing at Work

Periodicals databases are not just for students writing research papers. They also provide a valuable service to workers in various fields. The owner of a small business might use a database such as *Business Source Premiere* to find articles on management, finance, or trends within a particular industry. Health care professionals might consult databases such as MedLine to research a particular disease or medication. Regardless of what career path you plan to pursue, periodicals databases can be a useful tool for researching specific topics and identifying periodicals that will help you keep up with the latest news in your industry.

Using Sources from the Open Web

When faced with the challenge of writing a research paper, some students rely on popular search engines, such as Google, as their only source of information. Typing a keyword or phrase into a search engine instantly pulls up links to dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of related websites—what could be easier? While the Web is useful for retrieving information, you should be wary of limiting your research to sources from the open Web.

For example, **wikis**, including online encyclopedias, such as *Wikipedia*, and community-driven question-and-answer sites, such *Yahoo Answers*, are very easy to access on the Web. They are free, and they appear among the first few results when using a search engine. Because these sites are created and revised by a large community of users, they cover thousands of topics, and many are written in an informal and straightforward writing style. However, these sites may not have a reliable control system for researching, writing, and reviewing posts. While wikis may be a good starting point for finding other, more trustworthy, more fully developed sources, usually they should not be your final sources.

Despite its apparent convenience, researching on the open Web has the following drawbacks to consider:

- Results do not consider the reliability of the sources. The first few hits that appear in search results often include sites whose content is not always reliable. Search engines cannot tell you which sites have accurate information.
- Results may be influenced by popularity or advertisers. Search engines find websites that people visit often and list the results in order of popularity rather than relevance to your topic.
- Results may be too numerous for you to use. Search engines often return an overwhelming number of results. Because it is difficult to filter results for quality or relevance, the most useful sites may be buried deep within your search results. It is not realistic for you to examine every site.
- Results do not include many of the library's high quality electronic resources that are only available through password-protected databases or on campus.
- Because anyone can publish anything on the Web, the quality of the information varies greatly and you will need to evaluate web resources carefully.

Nevertheless, a search on the open Web can provide a helpful overview of a topic and may pull up genuinely useful sources. You may find specialized search engines recommended on your college library's website. For example, http://www.usa.gov will search for information on United States government websites. If you are working at your personal computer, use the Bookmarks or Favorites feature of your web browser to save and organize sites that look promising.

To get the most out of a search engine, use strategies to make your search more efficient. Depending on the specific search engine you use, the following options may be available:

- Limit results to websites that have been updated within a particular time frame.
- Limit results by language or region.
- Limit results to scholarly works available online. Google Scholar is an example.
- Limit results by file type.
- Limit results to a particular site or domain type, such as .edu (school and university sites) or .gov (government sites). This is a quick way to filter out commercial sites that often lead to less objective results.

Types and Formats of Library Sources

Information accessible through a college library comes in a variety of types and formats of sources. Books, DVDS, and various types of periodicals can be found in physical form at the library. Many of these same materials are available in electronic format in the form of ebooks, electronic journal articles, and streaming videos. Your college library may have some resources in both print and electronic formats while others may be available exclusively in one format. The following lists different types of resources available at college libraries. In addition to the resources noted, library holdings may include primary sources such as historical documents, letters, diaries, and images.

Types of sources

- **Reference works** provide a summary of information about a particular topic. Almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, medical reference books, and scientific abstracts are examples of reference works. In most cases, reference books may not be checked out of a library. Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief,

so these should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.
    - **Examples**: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2010*; *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, published by the American Psychiatric Association.
- **Nonfiction books** provide in-depth coverage of a topic. Trade books, biographies, and how-to guides are usually written for a general audience. Scholarly books and scientific studies are usually written for an audience that has specialized knowledge of a topic.
    - **Examples**: *The Low-Carb Solution: A Slimmer You in 30 Days; Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins: Exploring the Relationship Between Macronutrient Ratios and Health Outcomes.*
- **Periodicals** are published at regular intervals—daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Newspapers, magazines, and academic journals are different kinds of periodicals. Some periodicals provide articles on subjects of general interest while others are more specialized.
    - **Examples**: *The New York Times; PC Magazine; JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association.*
- **Government publications** by federal, state, and local agencies publish information on a variety of topics. Government publications include reports, legislation, court documents, public records, statistics, studies, guides, programs, and forms.
    - **Examples**: *The Census 2000 Profile; The Business Relocation Package,* published by the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.
- **Business publications** and publications by nonprofit organizations are designed to market a product, provide background about the organization, provide information on topics connected to the organization, or promote a cause. These publications include reports, newsletters, advertisements, manuals, brochures, and other print documents.
    - **Examples**: a company's instruction manual explaining how to use a specific software program; a news release published by the Sierra Club.
- **Documentaries** are the moving-image equivalent of nonfiction books. They cover a range of topics and can be introductory or scholarly. Newsreels can be primary sources about then-current events. Feature-length programs or episodes of a series can be secondary sources about historical phenomena or life stories. You may view a documentary in a movie theater, on television, on an open website, or in a subscription-accessed database such as Films on Demand.
    - **Examples**: *Freedom Riders*, directed by Stanley Nelson; *Finding Your Roots*, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

As you gather information, strive for a balance of accessible, easy-to-read sources and more specialized, challenging sources. Relying solely on lightweight books and articles written for a general audience will drastically limit the range of useful, substantial information. However, restricting oneself to dense, scholarly works could make the research process overwhelming. An effective strategy for unfamiliar topics is to begin your reading with works written for the general public, and then move to more scholarly works as you learn more about your topic.

Using Databases

While library catalogs can help you locate print and electronic book-length sources, as well as some types of non-print holdings, such as CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks, the best way to locate shorter sources, such as articles in magazines, newspapers, and journals, is to search online databases accessible through a portal to which your college's library subscribes. In many cases, the full texts of articles are available from these databases. In other instances, articles are indexed, meaning there is a summary and publication information about the article, but the full text is not immediately available in the database; instead, you may find the indexed article in a print periodical in your college's library holdings, or you can submit an online request for an interlibrary loan, and a librarian will email a digitized copy of the article to you.

When searching for sources using a password-protected portal, such as the University System of Georgia's GALILEO, it's important to understand where and how to look up your topic. On its homepage, GALILEO contains a general search bar called the "Discover" tool, which allows you to search many (but not all) databases at once. If you don't find useful sources using the portal's general search bar, then you may retrieve better results by going to specific databases within the portal. This video tutorial, titled "GALILEO at GPC Libraries, Including the Discover Tool," created by the Georgia Perimeter College (GPC) Libraries, explains how to search for sources using GALILEO. For specific guidance on using a password-protected portal to find sources for a literary research paper, watch videos in the GPC Libraries' "Literature Research Series" on *YouTube*. As these tutorials show, on a portal such as GALILEO, you can choose specific databases by going to "Databases A-Z" or "Databases by Subject." Databases may be general, including many types of resources on a broad range of subjects, or they may be specialized, focusing on a particular format of resource or a specific subject area. The following list describes some commonly used indexes and databases accessible through libraries' research portals.

- **Academic Search Complete** includes articles on a wide variety of topics published in various forums, both scholarly and popular.
- **Opposing Viewpoints** includes articles, statistics, and recommended websites related to a wide range of controversial

issues.

- **CQ Researcher Online** has full-text articles about issues in the news.
- **Lexis Nexis** has articles from newspapers and other periodicals, news transcripts, and business and legal information.
- **Business Source Complete** comprises business-related content from magazines, journals, and trade publications.
- **Films on Demand** has streaming video of documentaries and historic newsreels.
- **Artstor** has high-quality images of works of visual art of various media, as well as information on the creators, subjects, materials, and holdings of artworks.
- **JSTOR** includes full-text scholarly secondary sources, including books and articles, as well as primary sources on a wide variety of topics, mostly in the humanities and social sciences.
- **History Reference Center** has full-text articles from reference books, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, as well as images and streaming videos on most of the world's cultures and time periods.
- **Literature Resource Center** includes full-text print and electronic sources relevant to literature, such as biographies of authors, reviews of works, overviews of plots and characters, analyses of themes, and scholarly criticism.
- **Science and Technology Collection** has full-text articles from journals in various scientific and technical fields.
- **MEDLINE, Proquest Nursing**, and **Consumer Health Source** contain articles in medicine and health.

Sometimes you will know exactly which source you are looking for, for example, if your instructor or another writer references that source. Having the author (if available), title, and other information about the source included in an end-of-text citation will help you to find that source. The sequence of images below shows how to use the research portal GALILEO to find two sources with given citations, which indicate the sources are from the databases *Academic Search Complete* and *History Reference Center*.

This page titled 4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 2)

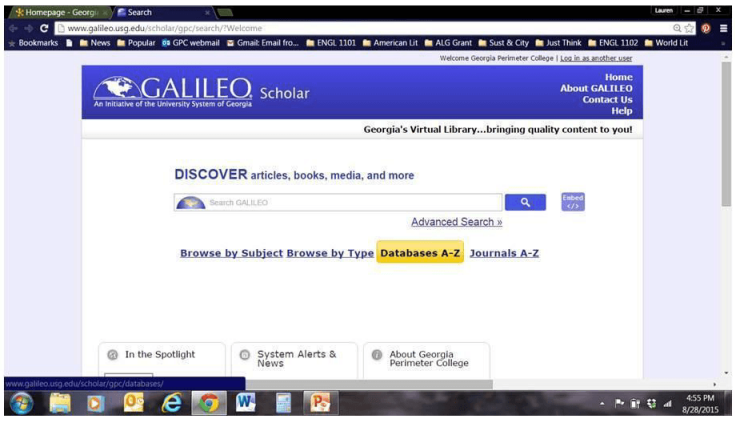
Finding Specific Sources in GALILEO

by Dr. Curtright

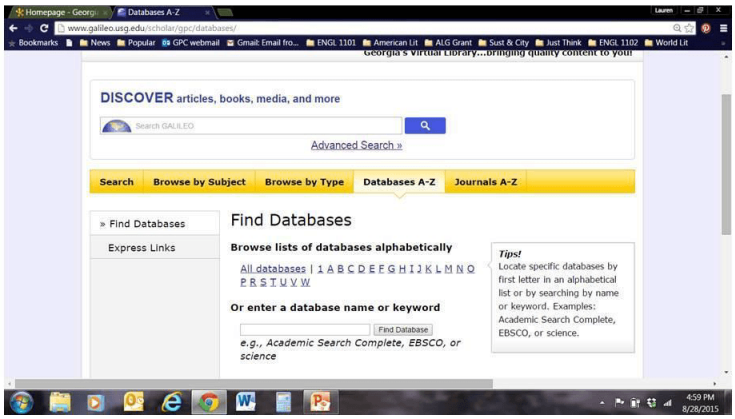
Using the following citations as examples, this presentation explains how to use GALILEO to find sources whose citations show they are from online library databases. Note: the item before "Web" in the citation is the title of the database.

"Alabama's Scandal." *Time* 67.8 (1956): 42. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 23 July 2015.

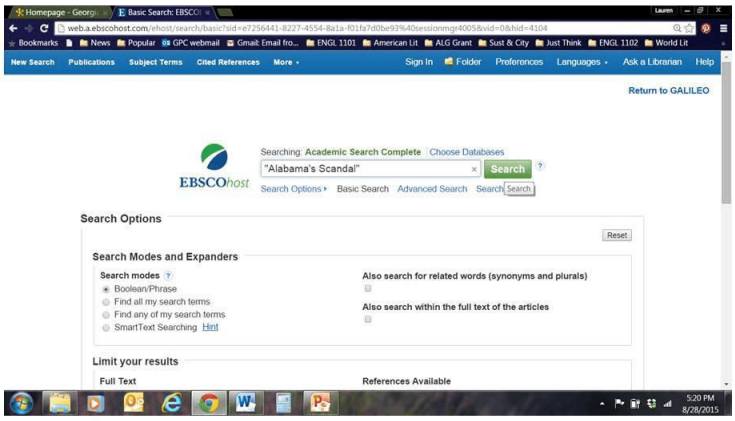
Wynn, Linda T. "Foster, Autherine Juanita Lucy (1929-)." *Freedom Facts & Firsts: 400 Years of the African American Civil Rights Experience* (2009): 103-104. *History Reference Center*. Web. 23 July 2015.



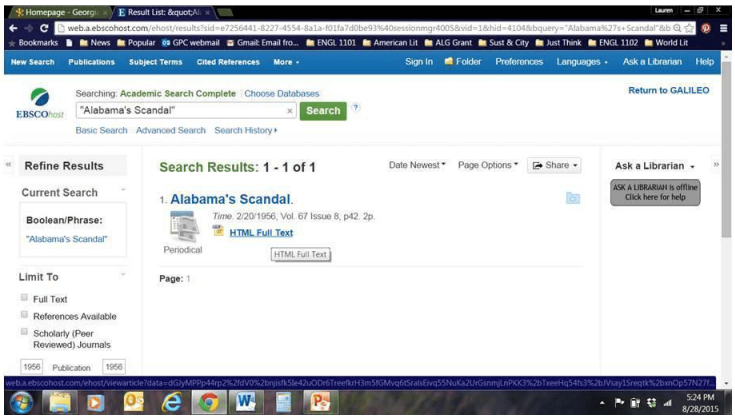
Once the GALILEO website loads in the browser, click on **Databases A-Z**.



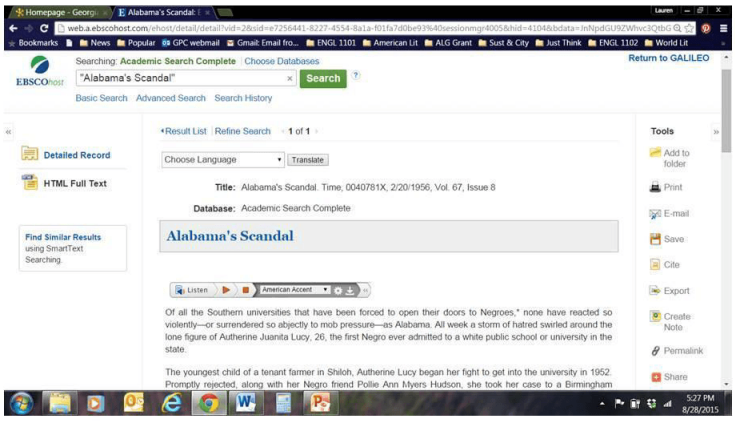
Search by first letter of the database or by words in its title at “Find Database”.



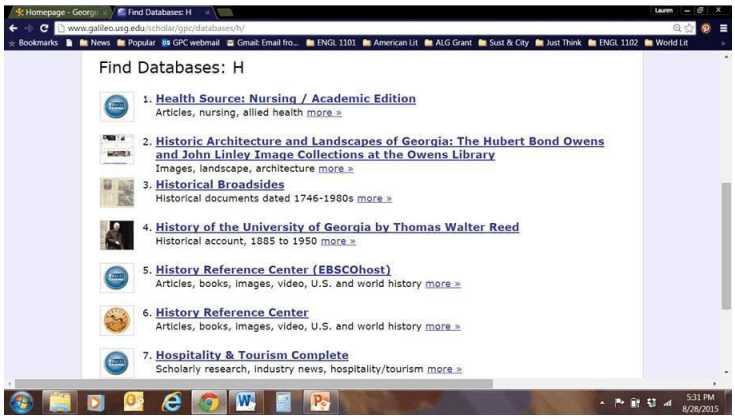
In the search bar, enter the first item of the citation, e.g. the source’s title, in quotation marks; then click Search.



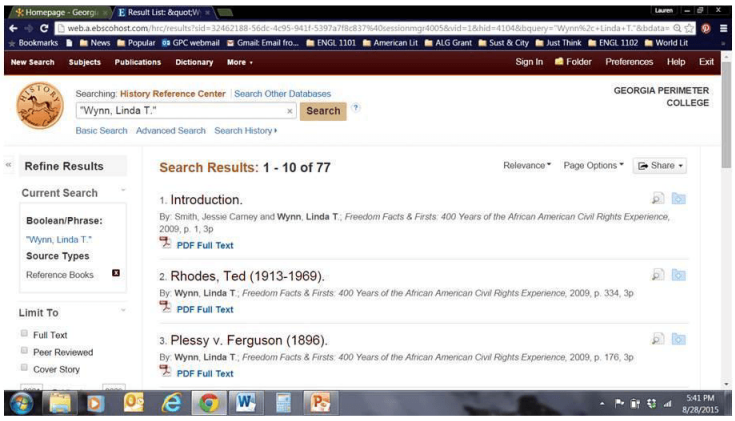
From the list of results, click on
"HTML Full Text" to view the source.



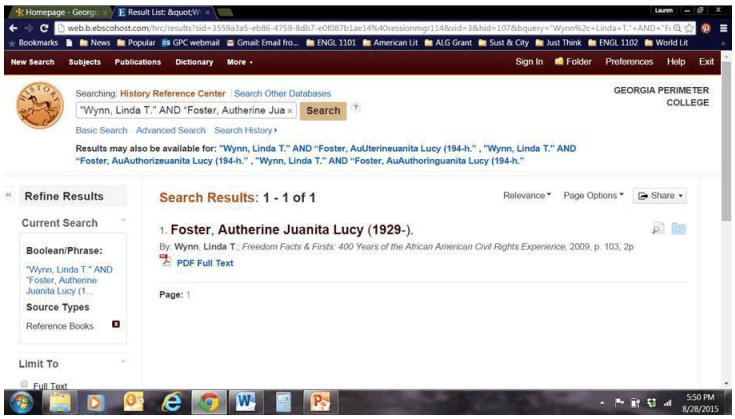
Read the source, or use tools in the
column at right to read it elsewhere.



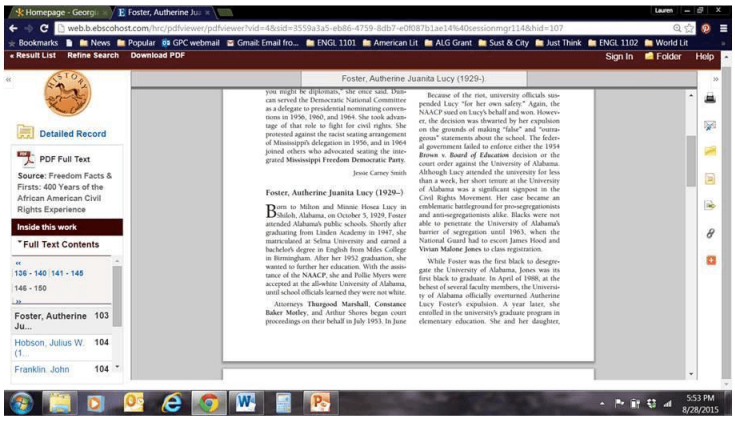
To find the next source, return to GALILEO; then look up the database **History Reference Center**.



Search the author's name (the first item in the citation) in quotations.



To narrow your search, add the source's title in quotations; type AND in-between the search phrases.



Click on "PDF Full Text" to open the source; then scroll down to read it. Note the tools at right to read it later.

As you go through the process of gathering sources, you will likely need to find specific sources referenced by others to build your list of useful sources; use the steps above to help you do this. However, keep in mind that, especially when you first start researching, you will also need to find sources about your topic having little or no idea what sources are out there. Therefore, rather than authors and titles, you will need to enter keywords, or subject search terms, related to your topic. The next section instructs you on how to do that.

Entering Search Terms

One of the most important steps in conducting research is to "learn how to speak database," as the sock puppet explains to the student in this video tutorial, titled "How to Use a Database," created by the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) Library. As the video shows, to find reliable sources efficiently, you must identify single words or phrases that represent the major concepts of your research—that is, your keywords, or subject search terms. Your starting points for developing search terms are the topic and the research questions you identify, but you should also think of synonyms for those terms. Furthermore, as you begin searching for sources, you should notice additional terms in the subjects listed in the records of your results. These subjects will help you find additional sources.

As Jorge used his library's catalog and databases, he worked to refine his search by making note of subjects associated with sources about low-carb dieting. His search helped him to identify the following additional terms and related topics to research:

- Low-carbohydrate diet
- Insulin resistance reducing diets
- Glycemic index
- Dietary carbohydrates

Searching the library's online resources is similar in many ways to searching the Internet, except some library catalogs and databases require specific search techniques. For example, some databases require that you use **Boolean operators** to connect your search terms. In other databases, Boolean operators are optional, but can still help you get better search results. Here are some of the ways you can use Boolean operators:

- **Connect keywords with AND** to limit results to citations that include both keywords—for example, carbohydrates AND diet.
- **Connect keywords with OR** to search for results that contain either of two terms. For example, searching for diet OR nutrition locates articles that use "diet" as a keyword as well as articles that use "nutrition" as a keyword.
- **Connect keywords with NOT** to search for the first word without the second. This can help you eliminate irrelevant results based on words that are similar to your search term. For example, searching for obesity NOT childhood locates materials on obesity but excludes materials on childhood obesity.
- **Enclose a phrase in quotation marks** to search for an exact phrase, such as "morbid obesity."

Many databases offer tools for improving your search. Make your search in library catalogs and databases more effective by using the following tips:

- **Use limiters** (often located on the left side of the search results) to further refine your results after searching.
- **Change the sort of your results** so the order of the articles best fits your needs. Sorting by date allows you to put the most recent or the oldest articles at the top of the results list. Other types of sorts include relevance, alphabetical by author's name or alphabetical by article title.
- **Use the Advanced Search** functions of your database to further refine your results or to create more complex combinations of search terms.
- **Use the Help section of the database** to find more search strategies that apply to that particular database.

Here is an example of using Boolean operators in an Advanced Search:

Figure 4.4.1

Consulting a Reference Librarian

Sifting through library stacks and database search results to find the information you need can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Knowing the right keywords can sometimes make all the difference in conducting a successful search. If you are not sure how you should begin your search, or if your search is yielding too many, or too few, results, then you are not alone. Many students find this process challenging, although it does get easier with experience. One way to learn better search strategies is to consult a reference librarian and watch online tutorials that research experts have created to help you. If you have trouble finding sources on a topic, consult a librarian.

Reference librarians are intimately familiar with the systems that libraries use to organize and classify information. They can help you locate a particular book in the library stacks, steer you toward useful reference works, and provide tips on how to use databases and other electronic research tools. Take the time to see what resources you can find on your own, but if you encounter difficulties, ask for help. Many academic librarians are available for online chatting, texting, and emailing as well as face-to-face reference consultations. To make the most of your reference consultation, be prepared to explain, to the librarian, the assignment and your timeline as well as your research questions and ideas for keywords. Because they are familiar with the resources available, librarians may be able to recommend specific resources that fit your needs and tailor your keywords to the

search tools you are using.

Exercise 9

At the Library of Congress's website, search for results on a few terms related to your topic. Review your search results to identify six to eight additional terms you might use when you search for sources using your college library's catalog and databases.

Exercise 10

Visit your library's website or consult with a reference librarian to determine which databases would be useful for your research. Depending on your topic, you may rely on a general database, a specialized database for a particular subject area, or both. Identify at least two relevant databases. Conduct a keyword search in these databases to find potentially relevant sources on your topic. Also, search your college's online library catalog. If the catalog or database you are using provides abstracts of sources, then read them to determine how useful the sources are likely to be. Print out, email to yourself, or save your search results.

Exercise 11

In your list of results, identify three to five sources to review more closely. If the full text is available online, set aside time to open, save, and read it. If not, use the "Find It" tool to see if the source is available through your college's library. Visit the library to locate any sources you need that are only available in print. If the source is not available directly through your school's library, then use the library's online tool to request an interlibrary loan of the source: librarians will send the source in digital form to your email address for you to open and save, or they will send it in print form to your campus library for you to check out.

This page titled 4.4: Gathering Your Sources (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.5: Evaluating and Processing Your Sources

Determining Whether a Source Is Relevant

At this point in your research process, you may have identified dozens of potential sources. It is easy for writers to get so caught up in checking out books and printing out articles that they forget to ask themselves how they will use these resources in their research. Now is a good time to get a little ruthless. Reading and taking notes takes time and energy, so you will want to focus on the most relevant sources.

You may benefit from seeking out sources that are current, or up to date. Depending on your topic, sources may become outdated relatively soon after publication, or they may remain useful for years. For instance, online social networking sites have evolved rapidly over the past few years. An article published in 2002 about this topic will not provide current information. On the other hand, a research paper on elementary education practices might refer to studies published decades ago by influential child psychologists. When using websites for research, look on the webpage to see when the site was last updated. Many non-functioning links are a sign that a website is not regularly updated. Do not be afraid to ask your instructor, tutors, and librarians for suggestions if you find that many of your most relevant sources are not especially reliable, or that your most reliable sources are not relevant.

To weed through your collection of books and articles, skim their contents. Read quickly with your research questions and subtopics in mind. The following tips explain how to skim to get a quick sense of what topics are covered. If a book or article is not especially relevant, put it aside. You can always come back to it later if you need to.

Tips for Skimming Books

1. Read the book cover and table of contents for a broad overview of the topics covered.
2. Use the index to locate more specific topics and see how thoroughly they are covered.
3. Flip through the book and look for subtitles or key terms that correspond to your research.

Tips for Skimming Articles

1. Journal articles often begin with an abstract or summary of the contents. Read it to determine the article's relevance to your research.
2. Skim the introduction and conclusion for summary material.
3. Skim through subheadings and text features such as sidebars.
4. Look for keywords related to your topic.

Determining Whether a Source Is Reliable

All information sources are not created equal. Sources can vary greatly in terms of how carefully they are researched, written, edited, and reviewed for accuracy. Common sense will help you identify obviously questionable sources, such as tabloids that feature tales of alien abductions, or personal websites with glaring typos. Sometimes, however, a source's reliability—or lack of it—is not so obvious. To evaluate your research sources, you will use critical thinking skills consciously and deliberately.

Sources you encounter will be written for distinct purposes and with particular audiences in mind, which may account for differences such as the following:

- How thoroughly writers cover a given topic
- How carefully writers research and document facts
- How editors review the work
- What biases or agendas affect the content

A journal article written for an academic audience for the purpose of expanding scholarship in a given field will take an approach quite different from a magazine feature written to inform a general audience. Textbooks, hard news articles, and websites

approach a subject from different angles as well. To some extent, the type of source provides clues about its overall depth and reliability. Use the following descriptions of types of sources to help you determine the quality of your sources.

- **High Quality Sources** provide the most in-depth information. They are written and reviewed by subject-matter experts. Examples: books published by University presses and articles in scholarly journals, such as *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*; trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as *Smithsonian Magazine*; government documents; documents by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes.
- **Varied Quality Sources** are often useful; however, they do not cover subjects in as much depth as high-quality sources, and they are not always rigorously researched and reviewed. Some, such as popular magazine articles or company brochures, may be written to market a product or a cause. Textbooks and reference books are usually reliable, but they may not cover a topic in great depth. Use them with caution. Examples: news stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as *The New York Times* or the *Public Broadcasting Service*; popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked; documents by businesses and nonprofit organizations.
- **Questionable Sources** are often written primarily to attract a large readership or to present the author's opinions, and they are not subject to careful review. Generally, avoid using these as final sources. If you want to use a source that fits into this category, then carefully evaluate it using criteria below. Examples: loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms.

Even when you are using a type of source that is generally reliable, you will still need to evaluate the author's credibility and the publication itself on an individual basis. To examine the author's credibility—that is, how much you can believe of what the author has to say—examine his or her credentials. What career experience or academic study shows that the author has the expertise to write about this topic? Keep in mind that expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another, unrelated area. For instance, an author may have an advanced degree in physiology, but this credential is not a valid qualification for writing about psychology. Check credentials carefully.

Just as important as the author's credibility is the publication's overall reputability. Reputability refers to a source's standing and reputation as a respectable, reliable source of information. An established and well-known newspaper, such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, is more reputable than a college newspaper put out by comparatively inexperienced students. A website that is maintained by a well-known, respected organization and regularly updated is more reputable than one created by an unknown author or group.

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's or authors' purpose in presenting the information. Few sources present facts completely objectively. In some cases, the source's content and tone are significantly influenced by biases or hidden agendas. Bias refers to favoritism or prejudice toward a particular person or group. For instance, an author may be biased against a certain political party and present information in a way that subtly—or not so subtly—makes that organization look bad. Bias can lead an author to present facts selectively, edit quotations to misrepresent someone's words, and distort information. Hidden agendas are goals that are not immediately obvious but influence how an author presents the facts. For instance, an article about the role of beef in a healthy diet would be questionable if it were written by a representative of the beef industry—or by the president of an animalrights organization. In both cases, the author would likely have a hidden agenda.

As Jorge conducted his research, he read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. He also noticed that many studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. Jorge read these studies with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

In sum, to evaluate a source, you should consider not only how current the source is but also criteria such as the type of source, its intended purpose and audience, the author's (or authors') qualifications, the publication's reputation, any indications of bias or hidden agendas, and the overall professionalism of the source's language, ideas, and design. You should consider these criteria as well as your overall impressions of sources' quality. Read carefully, and notice how well authors present and support their statements. Stay actively engaged—do not simply accept sources' words as truth.

Writing at Work

The critical thinking skills you use to evaluate research sources as a student are equally valuable when you conduct research on the job. If you follow certain periodicals or websites, you have probably identified publications that consistently provide reliable

information. Reading blogs and online discussion groups is a great way to identify new trends and hot topics in a particular field, but these sources should not be your final sources if you're doing substantial research.

Exercise 12

Choose a source you found that you think is relevant but you're unsure if it's reliable. Answer the following questions about the source:

a. Can you establish that the author is credible and the publication is reputable?
b. Does the author support ideas with specific facts and details that are carefully documented? Is the source of the author's information clear? When you use secondary sources, look for sources that are not too removed from primary research.
c. Does the author leave out any information that you would expect to see in a discussion of this topic?
d. Does the source include any factual errors or instances of faulty logic?
e. Do the author's conclusions logically follow from the evidence that is presented? Can you see how the author gets to one point from another?
f. Is the writing clear and free from errors, clichés, and empty buzzwords?
g. Is the tone objective, balanced, and reasonable? Does the source convey any biases? Be on the lookout for extreme, emotionally-charged language.
h. Based on what you know about the author, is he or she likely to have any hidden agendas?
i. Is the source's design professional? Are graphics informative, useful, and easy to understand? If the source is a website, is it well-organized, easy to navigate, and free of clutter like flashing ads and unnecessary sound effects?
j. Is the source contradicted by information you found in other sources? If so, it is possible that your sources are presenting similar information but taking different perspectives, which requires you to think carefully about which sources you find more convincing and why. Be suspicious, however, of any source that presents facts you cannot confirm elsewhere.

Keeping Track of Sources

As you determine which sources you will rely on most, it is important to establish a system for keeping track of your sources and taking notes. There are several ways to go about it, and no one system is necessarily superior. Here's what matters: you keep materials in order; record bibliographical information you will need later; and take detailed, organized notes.

Think ahead to a moment a few weeks from now, when you've written your research paper and are almost ready to submit it for a grade. There is just one task left—writing your list of sources. As you begin typing your list, you realize you need to include the publication information for a book you cited frequently. Unfortunately, you already returned it to the library several days ago. You do not remember the URLs for some of the websites you used or the dates you accessed them—information that also must be included in your bibliography. With a sinking feeling, you realize that finding this information and preparing your bibliography will require hours of work.

This stressful scenario can be avoided. Taking time to organize source information now will ensure that you are not scrambling to find it at the last minute. Throughout your research, record bibliographical information for each source as soon as you begin using it. You may use pen-and-paper methods, such as a notebook or note cards, or maintain an electronic list. (If you prefer the latter option, many office software packages include separate programs for recording bibliographic information.) The following table shows the specific details you should record for commonly used source types. Use these details to develop a working bibliography—a preliminary list of sources that you will later use to develop the references section of your paper. It will save you time later on to record, from the start, all information you will need about your sources to create a Works Cited page. The following lists what you should record for some common types of sources. Your research may involve other types of sources not listed below. **For more information on formatting citations**, consult the APA website at http://www.apa.org or the APA Guide or MLA Guide on the Purdue University Online Writing Lab website at http://owl.english.purdue.edu.

- **Book**: the author(s), title, subtitle, publisher, city of publication, and year of publication.
- **Work** (e.g., article) in an anthology (i.e., book): the work's author(s), title, and subtitle; the book's title, subtitle, editor(s); any edition and volume numbers of the book; the book's publisher, city of publication, and year of publication; the pages on which the work appears in the book.
- **Periodical**: the author(s), title of the article, title of the publication, date of publication, volume and issue number, and range of page numbers of the article.

- **Online source**: the author(s); the title of the work or web page; the title of the website; the organization that sponsors the website; the database name; the date of publication or date of last update; the date you accessed the source.
- **Interview**: the name of the person interviewed; the method of communication (e.g., in-person, video chat, email, or phone call); the date of the interview.

As you conduct research, you may wish to record additional details, such as a book's call number, the contact information for a person you interviewed, or the URL of an online source. That will make it easier for you to quickly locate the source again. You may also wish to assign each source a code (e.g., a number, letter, symbol, or color) to use when taking notes.

Taking Notes Efficiently

Writers sometimes get caught up in taking extensive notes, so much so that they lose sight of how their sources help them to answer their research questions. The challenge is to stay focused and organized as you gather information from sources. Before you begin taking notes, take a moment to step back and remind yourself of your goal as a researcher: to find information that will help you answer your research questions. That goal will determine what information you record and how you organize it. When you write your paper, you will present your conclusions about the topic supported by research. Therefore, you do not need to write down every detail of your sources; some of the information in relevant sources will be irrelevant to your research questions.

There are several formats you can use to take notes. No technique is necessarily better than the others—it is more important to choose a format you are comfortable using. Choose a note-taking method from among those listed below that works best for you, and use it as you gather sources. Using the techniques discussed in this section will prepare you for the next step in writing your research paper: organizing and synthesizing the information you find.

Use index cards. This traditional format involves writing each note on a separate index card. It takes more time than copying and pasting into an electronic document, which encourages you to be selective in choosing which ideas to record. Recording notes on separate cards makes it easy to later organize your notes according to major topics. Some writers color-code their cards to make them still more organized.

Maintain a research notebook. Instead of using index cards or electronic note cards, you may wish to keep a notebook or electronic folder, allotting a few pages (or one file) for each of your sources. This method makes it easy to create a separate column or section of the document where you add your responses to the information you encounter in your research.

Annotate your sources. This method involves making handwritten notes in the margins of sources that you have printed or photocopied. If using electronic sources, you can make comments within the source document. For example, you might add comment boxes to a PDF version of an article. This method works best for experienced researchers who have already thought a great deal about the topic because it can be difficult to organize your notes later when starting your draft.

Use note-taking software. There are many options for taking and organizing notes electronically. These include word-processing software that you can use offline on a computer. They also include tools like Diigo, Evernote, and Mindomo, available on the Web for free or reduced prices if you will use the tool for educational purposes. Although you may need to set aside time to learn how to use them, digital tools offer you possibilities that handwritten note cards do not, such as searching your notes, copying and pasting your notes into your paper, and saving and sharing your notes online.

Whether you use old-fashioned index cards or organize your notes digitally, you should keep all your notes in one place, and use topic headings to group related details. Doing so will help you identify connections among different sources. It will also help you make connections between your notes and the research questions and subtopics you identified earlier. Throughout the process of taking notes, be scrupulous about making sure you have correctly attributed each idea or piece of information to its source. Always include source information or use a code system (e.g., numbers, letters, symbols, or colors) so you know exactly which claims or evidence came from which sources.

Effective researchers make choices about which types of notes are most appropriate for their purpose. Your notes may fall into three categories:

Summary notes sum up the main ideas in a source in a few sentences or a short paragraph. A summary is considerably shorter than the original text and captures only the major ideas. Use summary notes when you do not need to record specific details but you intend to refer to broad concepts the author discusses.

Paraphrased notes restate a fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure.

Direct quotations use the exact wording used by the original source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. It is a good strategy to copy direct quotations when an author expresses an idea in an especially lively or memorable way. However, do not rely exclusively on direct quotations in your note taking.

Summarizing and **paraphrasing** as you take notes is usually a better strategy than copying direct quotations because it forces you to think through the claims and evidence in your source and to understand it well enough to restate it. In short, these methods of note-taking help you to stay engaged with your topic instead of simply copying and pasting text from sources. Using them will help you when you draft your paper.

Paraphrase ideas carefully, and check your paraphrased notes against the original text to make sure you have restated the author's ideas accurately.

Use quotation marks to set off any words for phrases taken directly from the source. With direct quotations, again, make sure your notes accurately reflect the content of the original text: check that quoted material is copied verbatim. If you omit words from a quotation, use ellipses to show the omission, and make sure the omission does not change the author's meaning. If you add your own responses and ideas to your notes, mark them as such so that your own thinking about the topic stands out from ideas you summarized or paraphrased.

Exercise 13

Review your research, then set a timer for ten minutes and freewrite about your topic, using your questions and thesis to guide your writing. Complete this exercise without looking over your notes or sources. Base your writing on the overall impressions and concepts you have absorbed while conducting research. If additional, related questions come to mind, jot them down.

This page titled 4.5: Evaluating and Processing Your Sources is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.6: Applying Your Research

At this point in your project, you are preparing to move from the research phase to the writing phase. You have gathered much of the information you will use, and soon you will be ready to begin writing your draft. This section helps you transition smoothly from one phase to the next.

Beginning writers sometimes attempt to transform a pile of note cards into a formal research paper without any intermediary step. This approach presents problems. The writer's original question and thesis may be buried in a flood of disconnected details taken from researched sources. The first draft may present redundant or contradictory information. Worst of all, the writer's ideas and voice may be lost.

An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas—from the question that sparked the research process to how the writer answers that question based on the research findings. Before beginning a draft, or even an outline, good writers pause and reflect. They ask themselves questions such as the following:

- How has my thinking changed based on my research? What have I learned?
- Was my working thesis on target? Do I need to rework my thesis based on what I have learned?
- How does the information in my sources mesh with my research questions and help me answer those questions?
- Have any additional important questions or subtopics come up that I will need to address in my paper?
- How do my sources complement each other? What ideas or facts recur in multiple sources?
- Where do my sources disagree with each other, and why?

In this section, you will reflect on your research and review the source material you have gathered. You will determine what you now think about your topic. You will synthesize, or put together, different pieces of information that help you answer your research questions. Finally, you will determine the organizational structure that works best for your paper and begin planning your outline.

Selecting Useful Details

At this point in the research process, you have gathered evidence, ideas, and information from a wide variety of sources. Now it is time to think about how you will use your source materials as a writer. When you conduct research, you keep an open mind and seek out many promising sources. You take notes on any information that looks like it might help you answer your research questions. Often, new ideas and terms come up in your reading, and these, too, find their way into your notes. You may record claims or examples that catch your attention and seem relevant to your research questions. By now, you have probably amassed an impressively detailed collection of notes. However, you will not use all of your notes in your paper.

Effective writers are selective. They determine which information is most relevant and appropriate for their purpose. They include details that develop or explain their ideas— and they leave out details that do not. The writer, not the notes, is the controlling force. The writer shapes the content of the research paper. While gathering sources, you used strategies to filter out irrelevant and unreliable sources and details. Now you will apply your critical-thinking skills to the details you recorded—analyzing how it is relevant, determining the ways in which it meshes with your ideas and forms patterns.

As Jorge reviewed his research, he realized that some of the information was not especially useful for his purpose. His notes included several statements about the relationship between soft drinks that are high in sugar and childhood obesity—a subtopic that was too far outside of the main focus of the paper. Jorge decided to cut this material.

Do not feel anxious if you still have trouble seeing the big picture. Systematically looking through your notes will help you. Begin by identifying the notes that clearly support your thesis. Mark or group these, either physically or using the cut-and-paste function in your word-processing program. As you identify the crucial details that support your thesis, make sure you analyze them critically. Ask the following questions to focus your thinking:

- **Is this detail from a reliable, high-quality source?** Is it appropriate for me to cite this source in an academic paper? The bulk of the support for your thesis should come from reliable, reputable sources. You've already thought about and made choices in the quality of sources you gathered earlier in the research process. If most of the details that support your thesis are from less-reliable sources, you may need to do additional research or modify your thesis.
- **Is the link between this information and my thesis obvious—or will I need to explain it to my readers?** Remember,

you have spent more time thinking and reading about this topic than your audience. Some connections might be obvious to both you and your readers. More often, however, you will need to provide the analysis or explanation that shows how the information supports your thesis. As you read through your notes, jot down ideas you have for making those connections clear.

- **What personal biases or experiences might affect the way I interpret this information?** No researcher is 100 percent objective. We all have personal opinions and experiences that influence our reactions to what we read and learn. Good researchers are aware of this human tendency. They keep an open mind when they read opinions or facts that contradict their beliefs.

It can be tempting to ignore information that does not support your thesis or that contradicts it outright. However, such information is important. At the very least, it gives you a sense of what has been written about the topic. More importantly, it can help you question and refine your own thinking so that writing your research paper is a true learning process. Remember, your working thesis is not set in stone. You can and should change your working thesis throughout the research writing process if the evidence you find does not support your tentative thesis. Never try to force evidence to fit your argument. For example, suppose your tentative thesis is "Mars cannot support life-forms." Yet, a week into researching your topic, you find an article in *The New York Times* detailing new findings of bacteria under the Martian surface. Instead of trying to argue that bacteria are not life forms, you would do better to alter your thesis to "Mars cannot support complex life-forms." In sum, you should carefully consider how information that challenges your thesis fits into the big picture of your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is irrelevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What matters is that you give careful consideration to various perspectives and current research on the topic.

Writing at Work

When you create workplace documents based on research, selectivity remains important. A project team may spend months conducting market surveys to prepare for rolling out a new product, but few managers have time to read the research in its entirety. Most employees want the research distilled into a few well-supported points. Focused, concise writing is highly valued in the workplace.

Finding Connections between Sources

As you find connections between your ideas and information in your sources, also look for commonalities between your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper. Look for subtler ways your sources complement one another, too. Does one author refer to another's book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources?

Be aware of any redundancies in your sources. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from an online encyclopedia article that is many steps removed from any primary research. If a given source adds nothing new to your discussion and you can cite a stronger source for the same information, use the stronger source.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a sounder argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

Reevaluating Your Working Thesis

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

Jorge realized that his working thesis oversimplified the issues. He still believed that the media was exaggerating the benefits of low-carb diets. However, his research led him to conclude that these diets did have some advantages. Read Jorge's revised

thesis:

> Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

Exercise 14

Review your research questions and working thesis again. This time, keep them nearby as you review your research notes. Identify information that supports your working thesis. Identify details that call your thesis into question. Determine whether you need to modify your thesis. Use your research questions to identify key ideas in your paper. Begin categorizing your notes according to which topics are addressed. You may find yourself adding important topics or deleting unimportant ones as you proceed. Write out your revised thesis and at least two or three big ideas.

Synthesizing Source Material

By now, your ideas about your topic are taking shape. You have a sense of what major ideas to address in your paper, what points you can easily support, and what questions or subtopics might need a little more thought. In short, you have begun the process of synthesizing source material—that is, of putting the pieces together into a coherent whole.

It is normal to find this part of the process a little difficult. Some questions or concepts may still be unclear to you. You may not yet know how you will tie all of your research together. Synthesizing is a complex, demanding mental task, and even experienced researchers struggle with it at times. A little uncertainty is often a good sign. It means you are challenging yourself to work thoughtfully with your topic instead of simply restating the same information.

You have already considered how your notes fit with your working thesis. Now, take your synthesis a step further. Analyze how your notes relate to your major research question and the subquestions you identified at the start of the research process. Organize your notes with headings that correspond to those questions. As you proceed, you might identify some important subtopics that were not part of your original plan, or you might decide that some questions are not relevant to your paper.

Categorize information carefully, and continue to think critically about the material. Ask yourself whether the connections between ideas are clear. Remember, your ideas and conclusions will shape the paper. They are the glue that holds the rest of the content together. As you work, begin jotting down the big ideas you will use to connect the dots for your reader. (If you are not sure where to begin, try answering your major research question and subquestions. Add and answer new questions as appropriate.) You might record these big ideas on paper sticky notes or type them into a word-processing document or other digital format.

Jorge looked back on the list of research questions that he had written down earlier. He changed a few to match his new thesis, and he began the following rough outline for his paper:

Topic: Low-carbohydrate diets

Main question: Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?

Thesis: Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

Main points:

How do low-carb diets work? Low-carb diets cause weight loss by lowering insulin levels, causing the body to burn stored fat.

When did low-carbohydrate diets become a 'hot' topic in the media? The Atlkins diet was created by Richard Atkins in 1972, but it didn't gain wide-scale attention until 2003. The South Beach diet and other low-carb diets became popular around the same time, and led to a lowcarb craze in America from 2003 to 2004.

What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet? They are said to help you lose weight faster than other diets and allow people to continue eat protein and fats while dieting.

What are some of the negative effects of a low-carb diet? Eating foods higher in saturated fats can increase your cholesterol levels and lead to heart disease. Incomplete fat breakdown can lead to a condition called ketosis, which puts a strain on the liver and can be fatal.

Planning How to Organize Your Paper

You may be wondering how your ideas are supposed to shape the paper, especially since you are writing a research paper based on your research. Integrating your ideas and your information from research is a complex process, and sometimes it can be difficult to separate the two. Some paragraphs in your paper will consist mostly of details from your research. That is fine, as long as you explain what those details mean or how they are linked. You should also include sentences and transitions that show the relationship between different claims and evidence from your research by grouping related ideas or pointing out connections or contrasts. The result is that you are not simply presenting information; you are synthesizing, analyzing, and interpreting it.

The final step to complete before beginning your draft is to choose an organizational structure. For some assignments, this may be determined by the instructor's requirements. For instance, if you are asked to explore the impact of a new communications device, a cause-and-effect structure is obviously appropriate. In other cases, you will need to determine the structure based on what suits your topic and purpose. For more information about the structures used in writing, see the chapter on Rhetorical Modes of Writing.

The purpose of Jorge's paper was primarily to persuade. With that in mind, he planned the following outline.

I. Introduction
   A. Background
   B. Thesis
II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets
   A. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition guidelines
   B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines
      1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin
      2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity
III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss
   A. Short-term effectiveness for weight-loss
   B. Long-term effectiveness not established
IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes
   A. Cholesterol and heart disease
   B. Blood pressure
   C. Diabetes
V. Conclusion

Writing at Work

The structures described in this section and in the chapter on Rhetorical Modes can also help you organize information in different types of workplace documents. For instance, medical incident reports and police reports follow a chronological structure. If the company must choose between two vendors to provide a service, you might write an email to your supervisor comparing and contrasting the choices. Understanding when and how to use each organizational structure can help you write workplace documents efficiently and effectively.

Exercise 15

Review the organizational structures discussed in Rhetorical Modes. Working with the notes you organized earlier, follow these steps to begin planning how to organize your paper. Create an outline that includes your thesis, major subtopics, and supporting points. The major headings in your outline will become sections or paragraphs in your paper. Remember that your ideas should form the backbone of the paper. For each major section of your outline, write out a topic sentence stating the main point you will make in that section. You may find that some points are too complex to explain in a sentence. Consider whether any major sections of your outline need to be broken up, and jot down additional topic sentences as needed. Review your notes and determine how the different pieces of information fit into your outline as supporting points.

Exercise 16

Collaborative exercise: Exchange outlines of your research papers with a classmate. Examine your classmate's outline to see if any questions come to mind and if you see any levels that would benefit from additional support, elaboration, or clarification. Return outlines to each other and compare observations.

This page titled 4.6: Applying Your Research is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.7: Writing Your Draft

At last, you are ready to begin writing the rough draft of your research paper. Putting your thinking and research into words is exciting. It can also be challenging. In this section, you will learn strategies for drafting your research paper, such as integrating material from your sources, citing information correctly, and avoiding misuse of your sources.

The Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure: an introduction that presents the writer's thesis; a body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence; and a conclusion that revisits the thesis and provides additional insights or suggestions for further research.

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your **introduction** and **conclusion** as you work to attract your readers' interest and establish your thesis. These sections usually do not cite sources at length. They focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should get readers' attention, provide background information, and present the writer's thesis. Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question
- An attention-getting quote
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between your topic and your readers' experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know in what direction the paper is headed.

Jorge decided to begin his research paper by connecting his topic to readers' daily experiences. Read the **first draft of his introduction**. The thesis is in bold. Note how Jorge progresses from the opening sentences, to background information, to his thesis.

Introduction Draft

Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carb Diets

> Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Some studies, such as those conducted by Lisa Sanders and David L. Katz and by Julie Hirsch, estimate that approximately forty million Americans, or about twenty percent of the population, are attempting to restrict their intake of food high in carbohydrates. Proponents of low-carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight, but they also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low-carb diets are overrated and caution that their long-term effects are unknown. **Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.**

Writers often work out of sequence when writing a research paper. If you find yourself struggling to write an engaging introduction, you may wish to write the body of your paper first. Writing the body sections first will help you clarify your main points. Writing the introduction should then be easier. You may have a better sense of how to introduce the paper after you have drafted some or all of the body.

Exercise 17

Draft the introductory paragraph of your research paper. Use one of the common techniques for writing an engaging introduction. Be sure to include background information about the topic that leads to your thesis.

Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction. However, this method may not work for all writers. Other writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should revisit your thesis and sum up your main ideas. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on bland summary statements, such as "In this paper, I have demonstrated that...." In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.

Using Primary and Secondary Research

As you write your draft, be mindful of how you are using primary and secondary source material to support your points. Recall that primary sources present firsthand information. Secondary sources are one step removed from primary sources. They present analyses or interpretations of primary sources. How you balance primary and secondary source material in your paper will depend on the topic and assignment.

Some types of research papers must use primary sources extensively to achieve their purpose. Any paper that analyzes a primary text or presents the writer's own experimental research falls in this category. Here are a few examples:

- A paper for a **literature** course analyzing several poems by Emily Dickinson
- A paper for a **political science** course comparing televised speeches delivered by two presidential candidates
- A paper for a **communications** course discussing gender biases in television commercials
- A paper for a **business administration** course that discusses the results of a survey the writer conducted with local businesses to gather information about their work-from-home and flextime policies
- A paper for an **elementary education** course that discusses the results of an experiment the writer conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different methods of mathematics instruction

For these types of papers, primary research is the main focus. If you are writing about a work (including non-print works, such as a movie or a painting), it is crucial to gather information and ideas from the original work, rather than relying solely on others' interpretations. And, of course, if you take the time to design and conduct your own field research, such as a survey, a series of interviews, or an experiment, you will want to discuss it in detail. Interviews may provide interesting responses that you want to share with your readers.

Even if your paper is largely based on primary sources, you may use secondary sources to develop your ideas. For instance, an analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's films would focus on the films themselves as primary sources, but it might also cite commentary and interpretations by critics. A paper that presents an original experiment would include some discussion of similar prior research in the field.

For some assignments, it makes sense to rely more on secondary sources than primary sources. If you are not analyzing a text or conducting your own field research, then you will need to use secondary sources extensively. As much as possible, use secondary sources that are closely linked to primary research, such as a journal article that presents the results of the authors' scientific study or a book that cites interviews and case studies. These sources are more reliable and add more value to your paper than sources that are further removed from primary research. For instance, a popular magazine article on junk-food addiction might be several steps removed from the original scientific study on which it is loosely based. As a result, the article may distort, sensationalize, or misinterpret the scientists' findings.

Jorge knew he did not have the time, resources, or experience needed to conduct original experimental research for his paper. Because he was relying on secondary sources to support his ideas, he made a point of citing sources that were not far removed from primary research.

Incorporating Source Material into Your Body Paragraphs

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

You have already taken a step in the right direction if you have drafted your introduction and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context. However, you may choose to wait to write your introduction and conclusion until after writing your body paragraphs. Either way, as you draft your body paragraphs, you must express your critical thinking about the ideas and information that you incorporate from your sources. You must offer claims of your own that either challenge or extend points from your sources.

In the body paragraphs of your paper, you will need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. Use topic sentences and concluding sentences of body paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or points you cite. In particular, you must continually explain how source material relates to your thesis. Indicate your interpretation of, and attitude toward, source material within and between sentences in which you summarize, paraphrase, or quote material from your sources. You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or from one paragraph to the next. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce your summarized, paraphrased, and quoted material.

You have already learned about summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources when taking notes. Here, you will learn how to use these techniques in the body of your paper to weave in source material to develop your ideas.

Introducing Cited Material Effectively

Including a signal phrase in your text, such as “Jackson wrote” or “Copeland found,” often helps you integrate source material smoothly. This citation technique also helps convey that you are actively engaged with your source material. Unfortunately, during the process of writing your research paper, it is easy to fall into a rut and use the same few dull verbs repeatedly, such as “Jones said,” “Smith stated,” and so on. Punch up your writing by using strong verbs that help your reader understand how the source material presents ideas. There is a world of difference between an author who “suggests” and one who “claims,” one who “questions” and one who “criticizes.” You do not need to consult your thesaurus every time you cite a source, but do think about which verbs will accurately represent the ideas and make your writing more engaging.

The following list includes some possibilities:

- argue
- ask
- assert
- assess
- believe
- claim
- compare
- conclude
- contrast
- determine
- evaluate
- explain
- find
- hypothesize
- insist
- measure
- point out
- propose

- question
- recommend
- study
- suggest
- sum up
- warn

Summarizing Sources

When you summarize material from a source, you zero in on the main points and restate them concisely in your own words. This technique is appropriate when only the major ideas are relevant to your paper or when you need to simplify complex information into a few key points for your readers. Be sure to review the source material as you summarize it. Identify the main idea and restate it as concisely as you can— preferably in one sentence. Depending on your purpose, you may also add another sentence or two condensing any important details or examples. Check your summary to make sure it is accurate and complete.

In his draft, Jorge summarized research materials that presented scientists' findings about low-carbohydrate diets. Read the following passage from a trade magazine article and Jorge's summary of the article.

Assessing the Efficacy of Low-Carbohydrate Diets (from Adrienne Howell, Ph.D.)

Over the past few years, a number of clinical studies have explored whether high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets are more effective for weight loss than other frequently recommended diet plans, such as diets that drastically curtail fat intake (Pritikin) or that emphasize consuming lean meats, grains, vegetables, and a moderate amount of unsaturated fats (the Mediterranean diet). A 2009 study found that obese teenagers who followed a low-carbohydrate diet lost an average of 15.6 kilograms over a six-month period, whereas teenagers following a low-fat diet or a Mediterranean diet lost an average of 11.1 kilograms and 9.3 kilograms respectively. Two 2010 studies that measured weight loss for obese adults following these same three diet plans found similar results. Over three months, subjects on the low-carbohydrate diet plan lost anywhere from four to six kilograms more than subjects who followed other diet plans.

Sample Summary

> Adrienne Howell points out that in three recent studies, researchers compared outcomes for obese subjects who followed either a low-carbohydrate diet, a low-fat diet, or a Mediterranean diet and found that subjects following a low-carbohydrate diet lost more weight in the same time.

A summary restates ideas in your own words—but for specialized or clinical terms, you may need to use terms that appear in the original source. For instance, Jorge used the term obese in his summary because related words such as heavy or overweight have a different clinical meaning.

Paraphrasing Sources

When you paraphrase material from a source, restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words, using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them. Again, it is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing—that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources. A true paraphrase restates ideas using the writer's own language and style.

In his draft, Jorge frequently paraphrased details from sources. At times, he needed to rewrite a sentence more than once to ensure he was paraphrasing ideas correctly. Read the following passage from a website. Then read Jorge's initial attempt at paraphrasing it, followed by the final version of his paraphrase.

Original Source (from Tracy Niethercott) Some insulin users in particular find that their blood glucose is far easier to control when they limit the carbs in their diet.

Initial Paraphrase

> According to one source, some people find they can control their blood glucose when they limit the carbs they eat (Neithercott).

After reviewing the paraphrased sentence, Jorge realized he was following the original source too closely. He did not want to quote the full passage verbatim, so he again attempted to restate the idea in his own style.

Revised Paraphrase

> Some people with diabetes are better able to control their blood sugar when they reduce their carb intake (Neithercott).

Quoting Sources Directly

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase source material instead of quoting directly. Doing so shows that you understand your research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. However, direct quotes can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose.

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colorful way. If an author's words are especially vivid, memorable, or well phrased, quoting them may help hold your reader's interest. Direct quotations from an interviewee or an eyewitness may help you personalize an issue for readers. And when you analyze primary sources, such as a historical speech or a work of literature, quoting extensively is often necessary to illustrate your points. These are valid reasons to use quotations.

Less experienced writers, however, sometimes overuse direct quotations in a research paper because it seems easier than paraphrasing. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact. When you do choose to quote directly from a source, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
- Represent the author's ideas honestly. Quote enough of the original text to reflect the author's point accurately.
- Never use a stand-alone, or "dropped in," quotation. Always integrate the quoted material into your own sentence.
- Use ellipses (...) if you need to omit a word or phrase. Use brackets [ ] if you need to replace a word or phrase or add any explanation or clarification of the original.
- Make sure any omissions or changed words do not alter the meaning of the original text. Omit or replace words only when absolutely necessary to shorten the text or to make it grammatically correct within your sentence.
- Remember to include correctly formatted citations that follow the assigned style guide.

Jorge wanted to use the following information from an article on the American Heart Association's website.

Original Source (from the American Heart Association)

> A high carbohydrate diet that includes fruits, vegetables, nonfat dairy products and whole grains also has been shown to reduce blood pressure.

Because this particular sentence would be difficult to paraphrase properly, Jorge decided to quote it instead.

Quotation from the Source

> According to the American Heart Association, "A high carbohydrate diet that includes fruits, vegetables, nonfat dairy products and whole grains also has been shown to reduce blood pressure."

Notice how Jorge smoothly integrated the quoted material by starting the sentence with an introductory, or "**signal**," phrase.

Writing at Work

It is important to accurately represent a colleague's ideas or communications in the workplace. When writing professional or academic papers, be mindful of how the words you use to describe someone's tone or ideas carry certain connotations. Do not

say a source argues a particular point unless an argument is, in fact, presented. Use lively language, but avoid language that is emotionally charged. Doing so will ensure you have represented your colleague's words in an authentic and accurate way.

Exercise 18

Write a one-sentence summary of a useful passage in one of your sources.

Exercise 19

To practice paraphrasing, choose an important idea or detail from your notes. Without looking at the original source, restate the idea in your own words. Check your paraphrase against the original text in the source. Make sure both your language and your sentence structure are original. Revise your paraphrase if necessary.

This page titled 4.7: Writing Your Draft is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.8: Documenting Your Source Material

A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be aware of the works that you used to create it. Readers may want to enter the discussion on your topic, using some of the same sources that you have. They also may want to examine your sources to see if you know your subject, if you missed anything, or if you offer anything new and interesting. Your sources may offer the reader additional insight on the subject being considered. It also demonstrates that you, as the author, are up-todate on what is happening in the field or on the subject. In sum, giving credit where it is due contributes to research on your topic and enhances your credibility.

Throughout the writing process, be scrupulous about documenting information taken from sources.

Again, there are multiple reasons for doing so:

- To give credit to others for their ideas
- To allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired
- To build your own reputation as a writer

It is important to indicate the source both in your essay and in a bibliography, list of references, or Works Cited, to prevent the possibility of plagiarism. If you follow the appropriate style guide (e.g., APA, Chicago Manual, and MLA), pay attention to detail, and clearly indicate your sources, then this approach to formatting and citation offers a proven way to demonstrate your respect for others and earn their respect in return.

Citing Sources in Your Paper

You need to cite all your information: if someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge, but if you are ever in doubt, go ahead and document the material.

If you are using MLA style, then your citation of the source in the body of the essay will point to the Works Cited page at the end. You must cite your sources as you use them, mentioning the author or title of the source by name if you summarize its ideas and giving the author or title of the source as well as the page number (if available) in parentheses if you paraphrase or directly quote the source. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to readers that information has been incorporated from a separate source. It also provides readers with the information they need to locate the source in the Works Cited at the end of your essay where they can find the complete reference.

Rules for In-Text Citations:

The following examples illustrate basic rules for documenting sources within the text of your paper in MLA style:

Author named in the introduction to the paraphrase or quote: Jacob Leibowitz found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (56). Leibowitz states, “People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels” (56).

Author named in parentheses: One source indicates that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (Leibowitz 56). A noted nutritionist advises diabetics: “People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels” (Leibowitz 56).

Unknown author: One website points out that a low-carbohydrate diet may aggravate a heart condition by raising a person’s bad cholesterol (“Cholesterol and the Low-carb Diet”).

Unknown or No Page Reference: The risks of following a low-carbohydrate diet outweigh any benefits according to one researcher (Jones). Gerald Jones believes that “a balanced diet is still the safest and most effective approach to good health.”

A source quoted in another source (an indirect quotation): “For the chronically overweight,” states Martin Rogers, “a low-carbohydrate diet may provide a viable option for weight loss” (qtd. in Evans 46).

Exercise 20

Review in-text citations in your draft. Look for places where you introduce source material using a signal phrase in your sentence. Highlight the verbs used in your signal phrases, and make note of any that seem to be overused throughout the paper. Identify places where a stronger verb could be used. Revise your draft accordingly.

Creating a List of References

Each of the sources you cite in the body of your paper should appear in a list of references at the end of your paper. If you're using MLA style, then your Works Cited should list the sources alphabetically by last name, or by title if the author is not identified. While in-text citations provide the most basic information about the source, your Works Cited will include more complete publication details. There are a number of ways to learn how to properly cite your sources on your Works Cited:

- The MLA Guide at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL)
- A current edition of The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.
- Online videos found by searching for "MLA style" on YouTube.
- For an overview of citing sources in MLA style and APA style, watch this module created in 2008 by Aline Soules of California State University, East Bay, and licensed under a Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States.

One of the many advantages of using sources from databases is that the databases themselves, or the platforms which host them, usually include a citation of the source at the bottom of the HTML full text of the source or a "Cite" tool accessible from the record of the source in the list of search results. When using these automatically-generated citations, be sure to select and copy the citation in the style that you have been assigned to use. Also, be sure to review the citation that the database or platform has generated, as it may include some errors in it. An error that consistently occurs using a "Cite" tool is the capitalization of titles; in the United States, the first letters of the first and last words of titles are always capitalized, and so are the first letters of all words inbetween except for articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, but, or), and prepositions (at, by, for, in, of, on, etc.). The "Cite" tool does not distinguish between parts of speech when capitalizing words in titles, so you will need to change some letters in titles to lowercase in order to properly format your citations.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Your research paper presents your thinking about a topic, supported and developed by other people's ideas and information. It is crucial to always distinguish between the two—as you conduct research, as you plan your paper, and as you write. Failure to do so can lead to plagiarism.

If you incorporate the words or ideas of a source into your own writing without giving full credit, then you are plagiarizing that source. In both professional and academic settings, the penalties for plagiarism are severe. In the professional world, plagiarism may result in loss of credibility, diminishment in compensation, and even loss of employment, including future opportunities. That is, employees may be fired for plagiarism and do irreparable damage to their professional reputation. In a class, a student's plagiarism may result in a range of sanctions, from the loss of points on an assignment to a failing grade in the course to expulsion from college.

The concepts and strategies discussed in this section connect to a larger issue— academic integrity. You maintain your integrity as a member of an academic community by representing your work and others' work honestly and by using other people's work only in legitimately accepted ways. It is a point of honor taken seriously in every academic discipline and career field. Even when cheating and plagiarism go undetected, they still result in a student's failure to learn necessary research and writing skills. In short, it is never worth the risk to plagiarize. For more information about Academic Integrity, consult your college's Student Handbook.

Working with Sources Carefully

Disorganization and carelessness sometimes lead to plagiarism. For instance, writers may be unable to provide complete, accurate citations if they did not record bibliographical information. Writers may cut and paste passages from websites into their papers and later forget where the material came from. Writers who procrastinate may rush through drafts; this easily leads to sloppy paraphrasing and inaccurate quotations. Any of these actions can create the appearance of plagiarism and lead

to negative consequences. Carefully organizing your time and notes is the best guard against these forms of plagiarism. As discussed above, you should maintain a detailed working bibliography and thorough notes throughout the research process. As you incorporate source material into your draft, check original sources again to clear up any uncertainties. Schedule plenty of time for writing your draft so there is no temptation to cut corners.

Intentional and Accidental Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of misrepresenting someone else's work as your own. Sometimes a writer plagiarizes work on purpose—for instance, by purchasing an essay from a website and submitting it as original course work. In other cases, a writer may commit accidental plagiarism due to carelessness, haste, or misunderstanding. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

- Understand what types of information must be cited.
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source.
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized.
- Follow guidelines for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources.

When to Cite

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

Fair Use

In recent years, issues related to the fair use of sources have been prevalent in popular culture. Recording artists, for example, may disagree about the extent to which one has the right to sample another's music. For academic purposes, however, the guidelines for fair use are reasonably straightforward. Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. Fair use means that the writer legitimately uses brief excerpts from source material to support and develop his or her own ideas. For instance, a columnist may excerpt a few sentences from a novel when writing a book review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

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

Initial Use of Source Material

> Heinz found that "subjects in the low-carbohydrate group (30% carbohydrates; 40% protein, 30% fat) had a mean weight loss of 10 kg (22 lbs) over a 4-month period." These results were "noticeably better than results for subjects on a low-fat diet (45% carbohydrates, 35% protein, 20% fat)" whose average weight loss was only "7 kg (15.4 lbs) in the same period." From this, it can be concluded that "low-carbohydrate diets obtain more rapid results." Other researchers agree that "at least in the short term, patients following low-carbohydrate diets enjoy greater success" than those who follow alternative plans (Johnson and Crowe).

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

Revised Use of Source Material

> Low-carbohydrate diets may indeed be superior to other diet plans for short-term weight loss. In a study comparing low-carbohydrate diets and low-fat diets, Heinz found that subjects who followed a low-carbohydrate plan (30% of total

calories) for four months lost, on average, about three kilograms more than subjects who followed a low-fat diet for the same time. Heinz concluded that these plans yield quick results, an idea supported by a similar study conducted by Johnson and Crowe. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this initial success can be sustained for longer periods.

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

Writing at Work

Citing other people's work appropriately is just as important in the workplace as it is in school. If you need to consult outside sources to research a document you are creating, follow the general guidelines already discussed, as well as any industry-specific citation guidelines. For more extensive use of others' work—for instance, requesting permission to link to another company or organization's website on your own employer's website—always follow your employer's established procedures.

This page titled 4.8: Documenting Your Source Material is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 1)

Given all the time and effort you have put into your research paper, you will want to make sure that your final draft represents your best work. This requires taking the time to revise and edit your paper carefully. You may feel that you need a break from your paper before you revise and edit it. That is understandable—but leave yourself with enough time to complete this important stage of the writing process. In this section, you will learn the following specific strategies that are useful for revising and editing a research paper:

- How to evaluate and improve the overall organization and cohesion
- How to maintain an appropriate style and tone
- How to use checklists to identify and correct any errors in language, citations, and formatting

Revising Your Paper's Organization and Cohesion

When writing a research paper, it is easy to become overly focused on editorial details, such as the proper format for bibliographic entries. These details do matter. However, before you begin to address them, it is important to spend time reviewing and revising the content of the paper. A good research paper is both organized and cohesive. Organization means that your argument flows logically from one point to the next. Cohesion means that the elements of your paper work together smoothly and naturally. In a cohesive research paper, information from research is seamlessly integrated with the writer's ideas.

When you revise to improve organization, you look at the flow of ideas throughout the essay as a whole and within individual paragraphs. You check to see that your essay moves logically from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion, and that each section reinforces your thesis. Writers choose transitions carefully to show the relationships between ideas—for instance, to make a comparison or elaborate on a point with examples. Make sure your transitions suit your purpose, and avoid overusing the same ones. You can reference the Table of Common Transitional Words and Phrases to help find a variety of transition words.

Jorge reread his draft paragraph by paragraph. As he read, he highlighted the main idea of each paragraph so he could see whether his ideas proceeded in a logical order. For the most part, the flow of ideas was clear. However, he did notice that one paragraph did not have a clear main idea. It interrupted the flow of the writing. During revision, Jorge added a topic sentence that clearly connected the paragraph to the one that had preceded it. He also added transitions to improve the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence. Read the following paragraphs: the first example is Jorge's first draft without any changes, and the second paragraph shows his revisions underlined.

First Draft:

> Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. (You can't help but notice that the low carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad? Some researchers estimate that approximately forty million Americans, or about one fifth of the population, have attempted to restrict their intake of foods high in carbohydrates (Sanders and Katz; Hirsch). Proponents of low carb diets say they are the most effective way to lose weight. They yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Some doctors claim that low carbohydrate diets are overrated and caution that their long term effects are unknown. Although following a low carbohydrate diet can have many benefits—especially for people who are obese or diabetic—these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

Revised Paragraph:

> Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. (You can't help but notice that the low carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad?

> Proponents of low carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight but also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low carbohydrate diets are overrated and caution that their long term effects are unknown. Although following a low carbohydrate diet can have many benefits—especially for people who are obese or diabetic—these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

When you revise to improve cohesion, you analyze how the parts of your paper work together. You look for anything that seems awkward or out of place. Revision may involve deleting unnecessary material or rewriting parts of the paper so that the out-of-place material fits in smoothly. In a research paper, problems with cohesion usually occur when a writer has trouble integrating source material. If facts or quotations have been awkwardly dropped into a paragraph, they distract or confuse the reader instead of working to support the writer's point. Overusing paraphrased and quoted material has the same effect.

As Jorge reread his draft, he looked to see how the different pieces fit together to prove his thesis. He realized that he had too much information on the popularity of low-carb diets and the debate over their effect on weight loss, when his focus only emphasized the various health risks of low-carb diets, so he had to eliminate some material. He also realized that some of his supporting information needed to be integrated more carefully. Read the following paragraph, first without Jorge's revisions and then with them.

Initial Paragraph:

> One likely reason for these lackluster long-term results is that a low carbohydrate diet— like any restrictive diet—is difficult to adhere to for any extended period. Most people enjoy foods that are high in carbohydrates, and no one wants to be the person who always turns down that slice of pizza or birthday cake. In commenting on the Gardner study, experts at the Harvard School of Public Health noted that women in all four diet groups had difficulty following the plan. They further comment that because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short lived. Medical professionals caution that low carbohydrate diets are difficult for many people to follow consistently and that, to maintain a healthy weight, dieters should try to develop nutrition and exercise habits they can incorporate in their lives in the long term (Mayo Foundation). "For some people, [low carbohydrate diets] are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well" (Kwon 78).

Revised Paragraph:

> One likely reason for these lackluster long-term results is that a low carbohydrate diet— like any restrictive diet—is difficult to adhere to for any extended period. In commenting on the Gardner study, experts at the Harvard School of Public Health noted that women in all four diet groups had difficulty following the plan. They further comment that because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short lived. Medical professionals caution that low carbohydrate diets are difficult for many people to follow consistently and that, to maintain a healthy weight, dieters should try to develop nutrition and exercise habits they can incorporate in their lives in the long term (Mayo Foundation).

Jorge decided that his comment about pizza and birthday cake came across as subjective and was not necessary to make his point, so he deleted it. He also realized that not only was the quotation at the end of the paragraph "dropped in," but also it was awkward and ineffective. How would his readers know who Kwon was or why her opinion should be taken seriously? Adding a signal phrase helped Jorge integrate this quotation smoothly and establish the credibility of his source.

Writing at Work

Understanding cohesion can also benefit you in the workplace, especially when you have to write and deliver a presentation. Speakers sometimes rely on cute graphics or funny quotations to hold their audience's attention. If you choose to use these elements, make sure they work well with the substantive content of your presentation. For example, if you are asked to give a financial presentation and the financial report shows that the company lost money, then funny illustrations would not be relevant or appropriate for the presentation.

Exercise 21

Read your paper paragraph by paragraph. Highlight your thesis and the topic sentence of each paragraph. Using the thesis and topic sentences as starting points, outline the ideas you presented—just as you would do if you were outlining a chapter in a textbook. Do not look at the outline you created during prewriting. You may write in the margins of your draft or create a formal outline on a separate sheet of paper. Next, reread your paper more slowly, looking for how ideas flow from sentence to sentence. Identify places where adding a transition or recasting a sentence would make the ideas flow more logically. Review the topics on your outline. Is there a logical flow of ideas? Identify any places where you may need to reorganize ideas.

Exercise 22: Collaborative Exercise

Exchange papers with a classmate. Apply the steps in Exercise 21 to your peer's draft. Share and discuss your observations about the draft's organization and clarity with your peer.

Exercise 23

Read the body paragraphs of your paper first. Each time you come to a place that cites information from sources, ask yourself what purpose this information serves. Check that it helps support a point and that it is clearly related to the other sentences in the paragraph. Identify unnecessary information from sources that you can delete. Identify places where you need to revise your writing so that readers understand the significance of the details cited from sources. Skim the body paragraphs once more, looking for any paragraphs that seem packed with citations. Review these paragraphs carefully for cohesion. Review your introduction and conclusion. Make sure the information presented works with ideas in the body of the paper.

Exercise 24: Collaborative Exercise

Exchange papers with a classmate. Identify places your peer needs to revise so that readers understand the significance of the details cited from sources. Share and discuss your observations about the draft's incorporation of source material with your peer.

Revising to Improve Style and Tone

Once you are certain that the content of your paper fulfills your purpose, you can begin revising to improve style and tone. Together, your style and tone create the voice of your paper, or how you come across to readers. Style refers to the way you use language as a writer—the sentence structures you use and the word choices you make. Tone is the attitude toward your subject and audience that you convey through your word choice.

Although accepted writing styles will vary within different disciplines, the underlying goal is the same—to come across to your readers as a knowledgeable, authoritative guide. Writing about research is like being a tour guide who walks readers through a topic. A stuffy, overly formal tour guide can make readers feel put off or intimidated. Too much informality or humor can make readers wonder whether the tour guide really knows what he or she is talking about. Extreme or emotionally charged language comes across as unbalanced.

To help prevent being overly formal or informal, determine an appropriate style and tone at the beginning of the research process. Consider your topic and audience because these can help dictate style and tone. For example, a paper on new breakthroughs in cancer research should be more formal than a paper on ways to get a good night's sleep. A strong research paper comes across as straightforward, appropriately academic, and serious.

Using plural nouns and pronouns or recasting a sentence can help you keep your language gender neutral while avoiding awkwardness. For example, the following sentence is gender-biased: "When a writer cites a source in the body of his paper, he must list it on his references page." The following is less gender biased but awkward: "When a writer cites a source in the body of his or her paper, he or she must list it on his or her references page." Making the subject third-person plural avoids bias and awkwardness: "Writers must list any sources cited in the body of a paper on the references page."

As you revise your paper, make sure your style is consistent throughout. Look for instances where a word, phrase, or sentence just does not seem to fit with the rest of the writing. It is best to reread for style after you have completed the other revisions so you are not distracted by any larger content issues. Revising strategies to use include the following:

- **Read your paper aloud**. Sometimes your ears catch inconsistencies that your eyes miss.
- **Share your paper** with another reader whom you trust to give you honest feedback. It is often difficult to evaluate one's own style objectively—especially in the final phase of a challenging writing project. Another reader may be more likely to notice instances of wordiness, confusing language, or other issues that affect style and tone.
- **Line edit** your paper slowly, sentence by sentence. You may even wish to use a sheet of paper to cover everything on the page except the paragraph you are editing—that forces you to read slowly and carefully. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

On reviewing his paper, Jorge found that he had generally used an appropriate academic style and tone. However, he noticed one glaring exception—his first paragraph. He realized there were places where his overly informal writing could come across as unserious or, worse, disparaging. Revising his word choice and omitting a humorous aside helped Jorge maintain a consistent tone. Read his revision below.

Initial Opening Paragraph:

> Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low-Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. (You can't help but notice that the low-carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad?

Revised Opening Paragraph:

> Picture this: standing in the aisle of your local grocery store, you see an overweight man nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low-Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad?

Editing Your Paper

After revising your paper to address problems in content or style, you will complete one final editorial review. Perhaps you have already caught and corrected minor mistakes during previous revisions. Nevertheless, give your draft a final edit to make sure it is error-free. Given how much work you have put into your research paper, you will want to check for any errors that could distract or confuse your readers. Using the spell-checking feature in your word-processing program can be helpful, but this should not replace a full, careful review of your document. Be sure to check for any errors that may have come up frequently for you in the past. Your final edit should focus on two broad areas:

- Errors in citing and formatting sources
- Errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling

For in-depth information on these topics, see the chapter on Grammar, the Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, or a print writing manual, such as *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

During the process of revising and editing, Jorge made changes in the content and style of his paper. He also gave the paper a final review to check for overall correctness and, particularly, correct style for his citations and formatting. Read the final draft of his paper.

This page titled 4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 2)

Sample Research Paper

Jorge Ramirez

Professor Thompson

English 1101

1 May 2014

Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carb Diets

Picture this: standing in the aisle of your local grocery store, you see an overweight man nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low-Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad? Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Regardless of whether or not low-carb diets are most effective for weight loss, their potential benefits for weight loss must be weighed against other long-term health outcomes such as hypertension, the risk of heart disease, and cholesterol levels. Research findings in these areas are mixed. For this reason, people considering following a low-carbohydrate diet to lose weight should be advised of the potential risks in doing so.

Research on how low-carbohydrate diets affect cholesterol levels is inconclusive. Some researchers have found that low-carbohydrate diets raise levels of HDL, or "good" cholesterol (Ebbeling et al. 2093). Unfortunately, they may also raise levels of LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, which is associated with heart disease (Ebbeling et al. 2094). A particular concern is that as dieters on a low-carbohydrate plan increase their intake of meats and dairy products—foods that are high in protein and fat—they are also likely to consume increased amounts of saturated fats, resulting in clogged arteries and again increasing the risk of heart disease. Studies have identified possible risks to cardiovascular health associated with low-carb diets, so the American Heart Association cautions that doctors cannot yet assess how following a low-carbohydrate diet affects patients' health over a long-term period.

Some studies have found that following a low-carb diet helped lower patients' blood pressure (Bell 32). Again, however, excessive consumption of foods high in saturated fats may, over time, lead to the development of clogged arteries and increase risk of hypertension. According to the American Heart Association, "a high carbohydrate diet that includes fruits, vegetables, nonfat dairy products and whole grains also has been shown to reduce blood pressure." Eliminating those foods in a low-carb diet may raise blood pressure because intake of sodium may increase and intake of minerals like calcium, potassium, and magnesium, all of which are important for maintaining healthy blood pressure, may be decreased. Choosing lean meats over those high in fat and supplementing the diet with high-fiber, lowglycemic index carbohydrates, such as leafy green vegetables, is a healthier plan for dieters to follow

Perhaps most surprisingly, low-carbohydrate diets are not necessarily advantageous for patients with Type II diabetes. According to Tracey Neithercott, some people with diabetes are better able to control their blood sugar when they reduce their carb intake, but others are not, and there are no studies that prove one single approach is best for everyone. One problem is that there are no long-term studies of a large scale that have examined this issue in detail. Neithercott advises diabetics to monitor blood sugar levels carefully and to consult with their health care provider or a registered dietitian to develop a plan for healthy eating.

Low-carb diets have garnered a great deal of positive attention, and it is not entirely undeserved. These diets do lead to rapid weight loss, and they often result in greater weight loss over a period of months than other diet plans. Significantly overweight or obese people may find low-carb eating plans the most effective for losing weight and reducing the risks associated with carrying excess body fat. However, because these diets are difficult for some people to adhere to and because their potential long-term health effects are still being debated, they are not necessarily the ideal choice for anyone who wants to lose weight. A moderately overweight person who wants to lose only a few pounds is best advised to choose whatever plan will help him stay active and consume fewer calories consistently—whether or not it involves eating low-carb ketchup.

Works Cited

Bell, John R. “Low Carb Beats Low Fat Diet for Early Losses but not Long Term.” *OBGYN News* 41.12 (2006): 32. *Medline with Full Text (at EBSCOhost)*. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Ebbeling, Charles B., et al. “Effects of a Low-glycemic Load vs Low-fat Diet in Obese Young Adults: A Randomized Trial.” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 297.19 (2007): 2092-2102. *Medline with Full Text (at EBSCOhost)*. Web. 25 Apr. 2014.

“High Protein Diets.” *American Heart Association*. American Heart Association, 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2014.

Neithercott, Tracey. “Are Carbs the Enemy? The Debate Over Eating and Diabetes.” *Diabetes Forecast: The Healthy Living Magazine*. March 2011. Web. 18 Apr. 2014.

Writing at Work

Following MLA style guidelines may require time and effort. However, it is good practice to learn how to follow accepted conventions in any professional field. Many large corporations create a style manual with guidelines for editing and formatting documents produced by that corporation. Employees should follow the style manual when creating internal documents and documents for publication.

Checklist for Revision

Ask yourself the following about your draft to help you revise for:

Organization

Overall:

- Does my introduction proceed clearly from the opening to the thesis?
- Does each body paragraph have a clear main idea that relates to the thesis?
- Do the main ideas in the body paragraphs flow in a logical order? Is each paragraph connected to the one before it?
- Do I need to add or revise topic sentences or transitions to make the overall flow of ideas clearer?
- Does my conclusion summarize my main ideas and revisit my thesis?

At the paragraph level:

- Does the topic sentence clearly state the main idea?
- Do the details in the paragraph relate to the main idea?
- Do I need to recast any sentences or add transitions to improve the flow of sentences?

Cohesion

- Does the opening of the paper clearly connect to the broader topic and thesis?
- Do entertaining quotations or anecdotes serve a purpose?
- Have I included support from research for each main point in the body of my paper?
- Have I included introductory material before any quotations so quotations do not stand alone in paragraphs?
- Does paraphrased and quoted material clearly serve to develop my own points?
- Do I need to add to or revise parts of the paper to help the reader understand how certain information from a source is relevant?
- Are there any places where I have overused material from sources?
- Does my conclusion make sense based on the rest of the paper?
- Are any new questions or suggestions in the conclusion clearly linked to earlier material?

Style and Tone

- Does my paper avoid excessive wordiness?

- Are my sentences varied in length and structure?
- Have I used points of view (pronouns) effectively and appropriately for the assignment?
- Have I used active voice whenever possible?
- Have I defined specialized terms that might be unfamiliar to readers?
- Have I used clear, straightforward language whenever possible and avoided unnecessary jargon?
- Does my paper support my argument using a balanced tone—neither too indecisive nor too forceful?
- Does my paper avoid vague or imprecise terms? Slang? Repetition of the same phrases ("Smith states..., Jones states...") to introduce quoted and paraphrased material? Exclusive use of masculine pronouns or awkward use of he or she? Use of language with negative connotations? Use of outdated or offensive terms?

Apply the following checklists to your paper before submitting your final draft:

Grammar, Mechanics, Punctuation, Usage, and Spelling

- My paper is free of grammatical errors, such as errors in subject-verb agreement and sentence fragments. For additional guidance, see: sentence writing, pronouns, verbs.
- My paper is free of errors in punctuation and mechanics, such as misplaced commas or incorrectly formatted source titles. For additional, see: commas, semicolons.
- My paper is free of common usage errors, such as alot and alright. For additional guidance, see: word choice, commonly confused words.
- My paper is free of spelling errors. I have proofread my paper for spelling in addition to using the spell-checking feature in my word-processing program. For additional guidance, see spelling.
- I have checked my paper for any editing errors that I know I tend to make frequently

Citations

- Within the body of my paper, each fact or idea taken from a source is credited to the correct source.
- Each in-text citation includes the source author's name (or, if no author is given, the organization name or source title).
- I have used the correct format for in-text and parenthetical citations. If my source gives page numbers, I have included page numbers in parentheses directly after the quote or paraphrase taken from that page or pages.
- Each source cited in the body of my paper has a corresponding entry in the Works Cited at the end of my paper.

Formatting

- All entries in my Works Cited are in alphabetical order by author's last name (or by title or organization if no author is listed).
- My Works Cited is consistently double spaced (both within and between entries), and each entry uses proper indentation ("hanging indent": indented on the second and all subsequent lines).
- Each entry in my Works Cited includes all the necessary information for that source type, in the correct sequence and format.
- My paper includes a heading (with your name, course information, and date) in the upper left-hand corner of the first page; if no heading is used or your instructor requests it, substitute a title page for the heading.
- My paper includes a title that reflects the topic of my paper.
- My paper includes a running head (page numbers, or a header in the upper right-hand corner of each page of the paper).
- The margins of my paper are set at one inch. The text is double spaced and set in a standard 12-point font.

Exercise 25

Re-read your paper line by line. Check for the issues noted in the questions about style and tone and the checklists about conventions, above, as well as any other sentence-level aspects of your writing that you have previously identified as areas for improvement. Mark any places in your paper where you notice problems in style, tone, or clarity and then take time to rework those sections.

This page titled 4.9: Revising Your Draft (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5: GRAMMAR

5.1: Syntax (Part 1)
5.1: Syntax (Part 2)
5.1: Syntax (Part 3)
5.2: Verbs (Part 1)
5.2: Verbs (Part 2)
5.3: Nouns and Article Use
5.4: Pronouns
5.5: Punctuation (Part 1)
5.5: Punctuation (Part 2)
5.6: Capitalization
5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 1)
5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 2)

This page titled 5: Grammar is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.1: Syntax (Part 1)

Components of a Sentence

A complete sentence consists of a subject and a predicate. The subject is the word or group of words that names the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about, and the predicate consists of the verb and any words that are necessary to complete its meaning. Both subject and predicate are necessary for the sentence to express a complete thought. In a way, every sentence can be compared to a story. Like a story, a sentence must be about someone or something, and that person or thing must have something said about it. In grammatical terms, a complete sentence is an independent clause, which is a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate and can stand on its own as a complete thought.

Example 5.1.1:

I could not play in the basketball game.

In this sentence the subject is *I*, and the rest of the sentence is the predicate. Now consider this clause:

Example 5.1.2:

Because I sprained my ankle

Here also the subject is *I*, and there is a predicate, *sprained my ankle*, but this clause is dependent (or subordinate), which means that in order to express its meaning completely it must be joined to an independent clause, as follows:

Example 5.1.3:

Because I sprained my ankle, I could not play in the basketball game.

As this example illustrates, a dependent (or subordinate) clause cannot stand on its own. It must be joined to an independent clause to make its meaning clear. All complete sentences must contain at least one independent clause.

Compound Subjects

A sentence may have more than one person, place, thing, or idea as the subject. When this occurs, the sentence has a compound subject.

Example 5.1.4:

The **students and teachers** left the building when the fire alarm sounded.

In this example, the phrase *students and teachers* is a compound subject.

Prepositional Phrases

A phrase is a group of words that cannot function as a clause because it lacks either a subject, a predicate, or both. A prepositional phrase is a modifying unit that indicates a relationship of some kind (often a relationship of space or time) between the object of the preposition and another word.

Example 5.1.5:

The book was found underneath the couch.

In this example, *underneath the couch* is a prepositional phrase. The object of the preposition is couch, and the preposition *underneath* indicates the relationship between the subject of the sentence (book) and the couch.

Common prepositions include *in, on, of, under, near, by, with*, and *about*.

Participial Phrases

Just as prepositional phrases are built on prepositions, participial phrases are built on either the past or present participle of a verb. They are used as modifiers and usually describe nouns. The participles commonly used in English are the present participle (the –ing form of verbs) and the past participle (the –ed form of regular verbs). Thus, *walking* and *walked* are the present and past participles of the verb to *walk*. A participial phrase consists of the verb participle and any modifiers that go with it.

Example 5.1.6:

walking over rocky ground.

In this example, *walking* is the participle and *over rocky ground* (a prepositional phrase) completes the participial phrase.

Since many participial phrases contain the participle of an action verb, students sometimes confuse a participial phrase with the main verb of a sentence. Look closely, though, and you will see that the action word in a participial phrase is never a complete verb. It is usually only a past or present participle that lacks the helping verb it would need to form a predicate.

Example 5.1.7:

A young man staring at his cell phone bumped into me.

The subject of this sentence is *A young man*, and there may seem to be two predicates, *staring at his cell phone* and *bumped into me*. One of these, however, is only a participial phrase. How can you tell which one? If you remove the first of these two phrases, you get *A young man bumped into me*. This is clearly a complete sentence with a verb, *bumped*, in the past tense. However, if you remove the second phrase, you get *A young man staring at his cell phone*. Is this a complete sentence? Compare it with this:

Example 5.1.8:

A young man **was** staring at his cell phone.

Only when we add was do we have a complete sentence. Why? Because *staring* cannot function as a verb without the helping verb *was* or *is*. So in our original sentence *staring at his cell phone* is a participial phrase used to describe the young man, and the predicate is *bumped into me*.

Exercise 1

Read the following sentences. Underline the subjects, and circle the prepositional phrases:

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.

4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.
7. The people who work for that company were surprised about the merger.
8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.
9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.
10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.

Sentence Patterns

Most English sentences, no matter how long or complicated, make use of the following five basic sentence patterns:

Subject–Verb

Example 5.1.9:

The hammer fell.

The verb [fell] in this type of sentence is *intransitive*, meaning that it does not require a direct object, as the transitive verbs do in patterns 4 and 5. Also, not being a linking verb (see patterns 2 and 3), it does not require a complement. It is possible, then, for a sentence using this pattern to be comprised of only a subject and a verb, as in this example. However, modifiers can always be added, making the sentence longer. Consider this example:

Example 5.1.10:

The hammer fell with great force.

In this example with *great force* is a prepositional phrase added to describe (or modify) how the hammer fell. But because this prepositional phrase is extra material that is not essential to the sentence's structure (the sentence is grammatically complete without it), this longer version is still an example of the basic Subject-Verb sentence pattern.

Subject–Linking Verb–Noun

Example 5.1.11:

The professor is an economist.

This pattern is distinguished by its use of a linking verb. The most common linking verb in English is *to be*, which is conjugated as *is* in this example. In this pattern, the linking verb is used to re-name the subject by linking it to another noun, as in this example where the professor is said to be an economist. This re-naming noun is known as the complement of the linking verb.

Subject–Linking Verb–Adjective

Example 5.1.12:

The athlete is tall.

As in pattern 2, this pattern uses a linking verb (*is*) to connect the subject with a complement, but here the complement is an adjective (*tall*) that describes the subject.

Subject–Verb–Direct Object

Example 5.1.13:

The pitcher threw the ball.

The verb in this pattern is transitive: it requires that the action be performed on something or someone. In other words, something or someone receives the action of the verb (*threw*, in this example), and that thing or person is the direct object (the ball, in this example).

Subject–Verb–Indirect Object–Direct Object

Example 5.1.14:

The lobbyists gave the Congressmen money.

In this pattern, the transitive verb takes both a direct object and an indirect object. In this example, the direct object is *money* (because money is the thing that was given) and the indirect object is *Congressmen*. The indirect object identifies to whom (or which) or for whom (or which) the action is done. The indirect object is usually a noun or pronoun, and in this pattern it comes before the direct object. Usually a sentence using this pattern can be re-written in a form that places the indirect object in a prepositional phrase that comes after the direct object, thus: *The lobbyists gave money to the Congressmen*. Here the indirect object, the *Congressmen*, becomes the object of the preposition *to*.

Compound Sentences: Joining Clauses with Coordination

A compound sentence consists of two independent clauses joined by coordination. Coordination connects the two clauses in a way that emphasizes both clauses equally. Consider these two sentences:

Original sentences: I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week because I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction *so*:

Revised sentence: I spent my entire paycheck last week, so I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the sentence retains two independent clauses (*I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend*) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

Coordinating Conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions *are for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so*. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when it joins two independent clauses.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
Posters announcing the dance are everywhere.	and (joins two ideas)	Teachers have talked about it in class.	Posters announcing the dance are everywhere, and teachers have talked about it in class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	but, yet (both words indicate a contrast; *but* is more commonly used)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going. OR The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, yet I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

tip

To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym **FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction to connect independent clauses, a comma should precede the conjunction. (Exception: the comma is sometimes left out when the clauses are short and closely related. Example: John drove and I gave directions.)

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon. Like coordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs can join independent clauses and indicate a particular relationship between them, but conjunctive adverbs create a stronger break between the clauses than coordinating conjunction do. Read the following sentences:

Original sentences: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

Revised sentence: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget's desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

The table below lists common conjunctive adverbs and demonstrates their function.

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	also, furthermore, moreover, besides	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Comparison	similarly, likewise	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Contrast	instead, however, conversely	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	namely, certainly, indeed	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, thus	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	finally, next, subsequently, then	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Exercise 2

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb:

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. . Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

This page titled 5.1: Syntax (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.1: Syntax (Part 2)

Complex Sentences: Joining Clauses with Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by combining them into an independent clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the independent clause, also called the main clause, to complete its meaning). While coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

Original sentences: Tracy stopped to help the injured man. She would be late for work.

To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

Revised sentence: Even though Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (*she stopped to help the injured man*) that stands as a complete sentence, and a dependent clause (*even though Tracy would be late for work*) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact that she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

Revised sentence: Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

tip

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is required. Exception: subordinate clauses that begin with conjunctions that indicate concession (see table below) are sometimes preceded by a comma, even when they follow the main clause.

Subordinating Conjunctions and Adverb

Clauses A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Since the resulting subordinate clause modifies the verb in the main clause, the subordinate unit is called an adverb clause.

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	although, while, though, whereas, even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if, unless, until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner (used to make a comparison)	as if, as though	The students in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where, wherever	Where the trail split, our guide stopped, unsure of which route to take.
Reason	because, since, so that, in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after, before, while, once, when, as, as soon as	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Exercise 3

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction:

1. A snow storm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
2. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
3. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
4. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

Key Takeaways

- Coordination and subordination join two sentences with related ideas.
- Coordination joins sentences with related and equal ideas, whereas subordination joins sentences with related but unequal ideas.
- Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction and a comma or a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.
- Subordinate adverb clauses are made by the use of a subordinating conjunction.
- In a sentence with an adverb clause, a comma is generally used to separate the main clause from the dependent clause if the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

Relative Pronouns and Adjective Clauses

While an adverb clause modifies the verb in an independent clause, an adjective clause modifies a noun. The modified noun may function in the sentence in any number of ways. It may be a subject, complement, direct object, or the object of a preposition.

Consider the following:

Original Sentences: Jill and her friends camped near a silver mine. The mine had been abandoned for fifty years.

The second sentence modifies or tells about the silver mine, which is the object of a preposition (*near*) in the first sentence. We can turn the second sentence into a subordinate adjective clause and attach it to the first sentence.

Combined Sentences: Jill and her friends camped near a silver mine **that had been abandoned for fifty years.**

The adjective clause is highlighted in yellow. *That* replaces the original subject of the second sentence (*The mine*) to form a subordinate adjective clause, and the clause is then attached to the first sentence, which becomes the main clause. The relative pronoun in this example is *that*. Like subordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns are used to make a clause dependent (or subordinate). But unlike subordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns take the place of another word, just as other pronouns do. And unlike adverb clauses, which can be located either before or after a main clause, an adjective clause must be located immediately after the noun that it modifies. If this rule is not followed, the adjective clause becomes a misplaced modifier (see Misplaced Modifiers). The following words can all function as relative pronouns: *who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where*.

Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Adjective Clauses

An adjective clause is restrictive if it is essential for identifying (restricting) the noun that it modifies. A nonrestrictive clause may be important to the sentence, but it is not essential for identifying the noun. This distinction is important because nonrestrictive clauses must be set off from the main clause with commas. Consider these examples:

- My brother Frank, **who ran cross country in high school**, beat everybody in the foot race.
- A young man **who ran cross country in high school** beat everybody in the foot race.

Both these sentences contain the same adjective clause (*who ran cross country in high school*), but in the first example the clause modifies a subject identified with a proper noun (*Frank*) and the designation *my brother*. Consequently, the adjective clause is not essential to the identification of the subject. It is nonrestrictive and set off with two commas, one before the clause and one after it.

In the second example, the subject is simply “A young man.” Consequently, the adjective clause is necessary to the identification of who this particular young man is. The clause is restrictive and is not set off with commas (see comma use).

The table below illustrates relative pronouns and how they function to create adjective clauses.

Function of Relative Pronoun	Relative Pronoun	Example (with adjective clause highlighted)
Takes the place of a noun referring to people.	who	My roommate, **who is from Brazil**, is majoring in physics
Takes the place of a direct object referring to people.	whom	The band hired Slim Swayze, **whom the lead singer had known in Ogden**, to play the harmonica. Notes: *Whom* is generally used only in formal writing. *Who* is often used in its place in colloquial English. When *whom* is used in a restrictive clause, it may be deleted from the sentence. Example: The band leader hired a musician **whom he had known in Ogden** to play the harmonica.
Takes the place of a noun referring to things. Generally used in nonrestrictive clauses.	which	*The Old Man and the Sea*, **which I read last year**, tells the story of a fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico.
Takes the place of a noun referring to people or things. Used only in restrictive clauses.	that	The tourist blundered down a street **that seemed to lead nowhere**. Note: When that is used to replace a direct object, it may be deleted from the sentence. Example: The tacos **that I ate** were delicious.
Creates a clause that modifies a particular time.	when	Audrey and I recalled the time **when we played together on the volleyball team**.
Creates a clause that modifies a particular place	where	Joe spent spring break in North Carolina, **where his cousins live**.
Indicates a condition of ownership between the modified noun and the subject of the adjective clause.	whose	An elderly woman **whose car had been stolen** sat on a bench in the police station.

Exercise 4

Use coordination and/or subordination to combine each set of simple sentences into a single sentence.

1. 1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.
2. Shakespeare’s writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Gay marriage was first legal in the U.S in the six states of Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Other states followed their example.
4. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
5. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch’s two children attend the school.

Common Errors: Fragments and Run-ons

Fragments

A fragment occurs when a group of words that does not form a complete sentence is punctuated as though it is a complete sentence. Here are three common types of fragments and ways to correct them:

The fragment may lack a predicate because the verb is incomplete:

Fragment: The runners staggering in the 100-degree heat.

Complete sentence: The runners **were** staggering in the 100-degree heat.

> Note
>
> The present participle *staggering* is not a complete verb without the helping verb were. See Progressive Verb Tenses.

The fragment may be a dependent (subordinate) clause that needs to be attached to an independent clause:

Fragment: Unless she could earn the money for tuition.

Complete sentence: Unless she could earn the money for tuition, she would have to drop out of school.

> Note
>
> The fragment here is an adverb clause and does not express a complete thought unless it is attached to an independent clause. See Complex Sentences.

Fragment: Which was the best thing to do.

Complete sentence: My sister decided to sell the house, which was the best thing to do.

> Note
>
> The fragment here is an adjective clause and does not express a complete thought unless it is attached to an independent clause. See Complex Sentences.

The fragment may be a subject with modifiers that needs a linking verb.

Fragment: Doubt and mistrust everywhere, fogging the minds of managers and workers alike.

Complete Sentence: Doubt and mistrust **were** everywhere, fogging the minds of managers and workers alike.

> Note
>
> Were supplies the needed linking verb in this sentence (see Sentence Patterns). Fogging may seem like a verb, but it is only part of a participial phrase and cannot be a complete verb without a helping verb. See Components of a Sentence.

Run-on Sentences

Sentences with two or more independent clauses that have been incorrectly combined are known as run-on sentences. A run-on

sentence may be either a fused sentence or a comma splice.

Fused sentence: A family of foxes lived under our shed young foxes played all over the yard.

Notice that there are two sentences here, one about a family of foxes, which ends with the word *shed*, and another about the young foxes. These two sentences are simply run together without any punctuation, coordination, or subordination, creating a fused sentence.

Comma splice: We looked outside, the kids were hopping on the trampoline.

Here the break between the two sentences is marked with only a comma. Since a comma is not a legitimate way to connect independent clauses, this creates a comma splice.

Correcting Run-ons with Punctuation

One way to correct run-on sentences is to correct the punctuation. For example, adding a period will correct the run-on by creating two separate sentences. Using a semicolon between the two complete sentences will also correct the error. A semicolon allows you to keep the two closely related ideas together in one sentence. When you punctuate with a semicolon, make sure that both parts of the sentence are independent clauses.

Run-on (fused sentence): The accident closed both lanes of traffic we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

Corrected sentence: The accident closed both lanes of traffic; we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may wish to add a conjunctive adverb to show the connection between the two thoughts. After the semicolon, add the conjunctive adverb and follow it with a comma (see Compound Sentences).

Run-on (comma splice): The project was put on hold, we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Corrected sentence: The project was put on hold; however, we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Coordinating conjunctions (remember FANBOYS) and subordination, discussed in the sections on Compound Sentences and Complex Sentences, can also be used to fix run-ons.

Exercise 5

Use what you have learned so far to identify common sentence errors. Label each sentence as a fragment (**F**), a run-on sentence (**R**), or a correct, complete sentence (**C**) in the space before each. Write corrected sentences on the lines below fragments and run-ons.

____ Being absent hurts a student's grade, he or she should be in class every day.

_____

____ Having been interested in science most of her life, she did well in Biology 101.

_____

____ Hurry with your breakfast, you will miss the bus.

_____

____ Several students had the right answer; however, most of them failed the exam.

_____

____ Several girls expressed concerns about course selections, therefore, changes were made.

_____

____ Jim practiced the violin daily, he wanted to excel in music.

_____

____ The child loved his mother, but he did not want to obey her.

_____

____ I had a severe case of the flu last year.

_____

____ And had spent the first three days of my illness in bed.

_____

____ Because I was sick of my bed and decided I'd lie on the sofa and watch television.

_____

____ Only getting up to take care of the necessities of life.

_____

____ Then I must have fallen asleep.

_____

____ When I was suddenly conscious again.

_____

____ The wind howled outside, the house was damp and chilly, and my fever soared.

_____

____ Then somewhere in the blackness ahead of me, I saw a spot of light.

_____

____ What has happened to the economy, many Americans want the answer to this question.

_____

____ He was late for his appointment, then he forgot to bring his briefcase with him.

_____

____ Voting is a privilege, this privilege should not be taken for granted.

_____

____ Be ready for any emergency, plan ahead.

_____

____ Because I was sure that I had died.

_____

____ A friend is always willing to help, friendship is invaluable.

_____

____ Although he was sick, James came to class.

_____

____ Running a temperature between 102 and 107.

_____

____ We were excited about the game, and we won.

_____

____ Be careful with your answer, your grade could be affected.

_____

Key Takeaways

- A sentence is complete when it contains both a subject and verb (predicate). A complete sentence makes sense on its own.
- Every sentence must have a subject, which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. A subject may be a noun (a person, place, or thing) or a pronoun.
- A compound subject contains more than one noun.
- A prepositional phrase describes, or modifies, another word in the sentence but cannot be the subject of a sentence.
- A verb is often an action word that indicates what the subject is doing. Verbs may be action verbs (transitive or intransitive), linking verbs, or helping verbs.
- Remembering the five basic sentence patterns is useful when correcting grammar errors.
- Fragments and run-on sentences are two common errors in sentence construction.
- Fragments can be corrected by adding a missing subject or verb or combining a dependent clause with an independent clause.
- Run-on sentences can be corrected by adding appropriate punctuation or using coordination or subordination.

This page titled 5.1: Syntax (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.1: Syntax (Part 3)

Common Errors: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced Modifiers

When a participial phrase, prepositional phrase, or other modifying unit is not placed next to the noun it describes, the resulting error is called a misplaced modifier. Consider these examples:

- **Incorrect**: Turning on the kitchen light, the woman surprised the thief in her nightgown.
  Correct: Turning on the kitchen light, the woman in her nightgown surprised the thief.
- **Incorrect**: They bought a kitten for my brother called Shadow.
  Correct: They bought a kitten called Shadow for my brother.
- **Incorrect**: The patient was referred to the physician with stomach pains.
  Correct: The patient with stomach pains was referred to the physician.

tip

Simple modifiers like only, almost, just, nearly, and barely often get used incorrectly because writers often put them in the wrong place.

Confusing: Tyler almost found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

Repaired: Tyler found almost fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

How do you almost find something? Either you find it or you do not. The repaired sentence is much clearer.

Exercise 6

Rewrite the following sentences to correct the misplaced modifiers:

1. The young lady was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called “Speed Racer.”
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his powerful foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn’t drink or smoke.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.
7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier (or simply a *dangler*) is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, then the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: Riding in the sports car, the world whizzed by.

Correct: As Jane was riding in the sports car, the world whizzed by.

In the incorrect sentence, *riding in the sports car* is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The writer must tell the reader.

Incorrect: Walking home at night, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: As Jonas was walking home at night, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was walking home at night.

In the incorrect sentence *walking home at night* is dangling. Who is walking home at night? Jonas. Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

Incorrect: To win the spelling bee, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

Correct: If we want to win the spelling bee, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

In the incorrect sentence, *to win the spelling bee* is dangling. *Who* wants to win the spelling bee? *We* do.

tip

Following these steps will help you correct a dangling modifier:

Look for a modifying phrase at the beginning of your sentence and underline the noun that immediately follows it. The example below opens with a participial phrase, highlighted in yellow:

Example: **Painting for three hours at night**, the kitchen was finally finished.

If the modifying phrase does not describe the underlined noun, then you have a dangler. In this example, the kitchen is the room that was painted, but who did the painting? A noun referring to that person should immediately follow the participial phrase:

Correction: Painting for three hours at night, **Maggie** finally finished the kitchen.

Since Maggie did the painting, her name follows the participial phrase.

Exercise 7

Rewrite the following the sentences to correct the dangling modifiers:

1. Bent over backward, the posture was very challenging.
2. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.
3. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
4. Playing a guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.
5. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
6. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
7. While driving to the veterinarian's office, the dog nervously whined.
8. The priceless painting drew large crowds when walking into the museum.
9. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.
10. Chewing furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.

Exercise 5.1.8

Rewrite the following paragraph correcting all the misplaced and dangling modifiers:

I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich shopping in the grocery store. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, the mayonnaise was thickly spread. Placing the cold cuts on the bread, the lettuce was placed on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife turning on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, my favorite song blared loudly in my ears. Humming and chewing, my sandwich went down smoothly. Smiling, my sandwich will be made again, but next time I will add cheese.

Key Takeaways

- Misplaced and dangling modifiers make sentences difficult to understand.
- Misplaced and dangling modifiers distract the reader.
- There are several effective ways to identify and correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

Faulty parallelism: Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Faulty parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

Faulty parallelism: Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins each sentence by using a noun (coordination, jeans), but ends with a phrase (to have good eyesight, wearing a suit). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

Correct parallelism: Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Correct parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

Correct parallelism: Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the work the reader has to do to decode the sentence.

tip

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

Creating Parallelism Using Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two phrases or clauses using a coordinating conjunction *(for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like to listen to music and talking to friends on the phone.

Correct parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like listening to music and talking to friends on the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (to listen, talking). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (and) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series.

Faulty parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.

Correct parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages.

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (reduce, cut) and a third item that uses a different verb form (lowering). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

Exercise 9

Revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions:

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar on weekends.
2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.
4. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer email queries.

Creating Parallelism Using Than or As

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words than or as, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is more difficult than a pool.

Correct parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is more difficult than swimming in a pool.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (than) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (swimming) with a noun (a pool). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

Faulty parallelism: A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

Correct parallelism: Going for a brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

Correct parallelism: A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as a run.

Exercise 10

Revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using *than* or *as*:

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
5. Jim's opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.

Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunctions

A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between

them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

either...or

not only...but also

neither...nor

whether...or

rather...than

both...and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor can we take evasive action.

Correct parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor take evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

Faulty parallelism: It was both a long movie and poorly written.

Correct parallelism: The movie was both long and poorly written.

tip

To see examples of parallelism in use, read some of the great historical speeches by rhetoricians such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Notice how they use parallel structures to emphasize important points and to create a smooth, easily understandable oration.

Exercise 11

Revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions:

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

Key Takeaways

- Parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and balance in writing by using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas.
- Faulty parallelism occurs when elements of a sentence are not balanced, causing the sentence to sound clunky and awkward.
- Parallelism may be created by connecting two clauses or making a list using coordinating conjunctions; by comparing two items using than or as; or by connecting two parts of a sentence using correlative conjunctions.

Appositives

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unlike adjective clauses and participial phrases, which may be restrictive or nonrestrictive, appositives are always nonrestrictive, and thus they are always set off by commas. A comma is placed both before and after the appositive.

Exercise 12

Rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using any of the techniques you have learned in this section:

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.
4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

This page titled 5.1: Syntax (Part 3) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.2: Verbs (Part 1)

Verb Forms

You must always use a verb in every sentence you write. Verbs are parts of speech that indicate actions or states of being. The most basic sentence structure is a subject followed by a verb. Correct use of verb tenses and forms is very important in English. Verbs carry much of the main meaning of the sentence, and verb suffixes and auxiliaries indicate the time. Verbs are the powerhouses of our language.

There are two main types of verb errors. Try to distinguish between the two types. Verb Form is an error where the tense has been incorrectly formed. Verb Tense is an error where an incorrect tense has been chosen for the meaning. Although the grammar of verbs is very complex in English, every student can easily learn the basic grammar and be able to use verbs correctly.

English verbs have five forms:

Base	Past	Past Participle	Progressive/Continuous	3rd Person Singular
Regular WALK	WALKED	WALKED	WALKING	WALKS
Irregular EAT	ATE	EATEN	EATING	EATS

Some Verb Form Rules to Know	Examples
Infinitive = to + base form	to run, to hide, to show
Modal = modal + base form	can run, could hide, should show
Do Support = do, does, did + base form	did run, doesn't hide, did show
Progressive = "to be" + base + ing	am running, was hiding, are doing
Perfect = have, has, had + past participle	have run, has hidden, had shown
Passive = "to be" + past participle	is built, was written, are being done

Active Forms of the 12 English Tenses of the regular verb "WALK"

	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
SIMPLE	WALKED	WALK/S	WILL WALK
PROGRESSIVE	WAS /WERE WALKING	AM/IS/ARE WALKING	WILL BE WALKING
PERFECT	HAD WALKED	HAS/HAVE WALKED	WILL HAVE WALKED
PERFECT-PROGRESSIVE	HAD BEEN WALKING	HAD BEEN WALKING	WILL HAVE BEEN WALKING

Simple Verb Tenses

Verb tenses tell the reader when the action takes place. The action could be in the past, present, or future. These are called Time Frames.

Past	← Present →	Future
Yesterday I jumped.	Today I jump.	Tomorrow I will jump.

Simple present verbs are used in the following situations:

When the action takes place now

Example 5.2.1:

I drink the water greedily.

When the action is something that happens regularly

Example 5.2.2:

I always cross my fingers for good luck.

When describing things that are generally true.

Example 5.2.3:

College tuition is very costly.

When it is he, she, or it doing the present tense action, remember to add -s, or -es to the end of the verb or to change the y to -ies.

Simple past verbs are used when the action has already taken place and is now finished:

- I washed my uniform last night.
- I asked for more pie.
- I coughed loudly last night.

When the action is something done in the past, remember to add -d or -ed to the end of regular verbs, regardless of the subject.

Simple future verbs are used when the action has not yet taken place:

- I will work late tomorrow.
- I will kiss my boyfriend when I see him.
- I will erase the board after class.

Going to can also be added to the main verb to make it future tense:

- I am *going to* go to work tomorrow

Exercise 13

Complete the following sentences by adding the verb in the correct simple tense:

1. Please do not (erase, erased, will erase) what I have written on the board.
2. They (dance, danced, will dance) for hours after the party was over.
3. Harrison (wash, washed, will wash) his laundry after several weeks had passed.
4. Yesterday Mom (ask, asked, will ask) me about my plans for college.

5. I (bake, baked, will bake) several dozen cookies for tomorrow's bake sale.

tip

Remember, if you have a compound subject like Marie and Jennifer, think of the subject as they to determine the correct verb form.

EX: Marie and Jennifer (they) have a house on Bainbridge Island.

Similarly, single names can be thought of as he, she, or it.

EX: LeBron (he) has scored thirty points so far.

Perfect Verb Tenses

Up to this point, we have studied the three simple verb tenses—simple present, simple past, and simple future. Now we will add three more tenses, which are called perfect tenses. They are present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. A past participle is often called the -ed form of a verb because it is formed by adding -d or -ed to the base form of regular verbs. Past participles can also end in -t or -en. Keep in mind, however, the past participle is also formed in various other ways for irregular verbs. The past participle can be used to form the present perfect tense.

Review the following basic formula for the present perfect tense:

Subject	+	has or have	+	past participle
I		have		helped

The present perfect tense has a connection with the past and the present.

Use the present perfect tense to describe a continuing situation and to describe an action that has just happened.

Example 5.2.4:

I have worked as a caretaker since June.

This sentence tells us that the subject has worked as a caretaker in the past and is still working as a caretaker in the present.

Example 5.2.5:

Dmitri has just received an award from the Dean of Students.

This sentence tells us that Dmitri has very recently received the award. The word just emphasizes that the action happened very recently.

Study the following basic formula for the past perfect tense:

Subject	+	had	+	past participle
I		had		listened

Example 5.2.6:

The bus had left by the time Theo arrived at the station.

Notice that both actions occurred entirely in the past, but one action occurred before the other. At some time in the past, Theo arrived (simple past tense) at the station, but at some time before that, the bus had left (past perfect).

Look at the following basic formula for the future perfect tense:

Subject	+	will have	+	past participle
I		will have		graduated

The future perfect tense describes an action that started in the past, continues through the present, and will occur in the future. Use the future perfect tense when you anticipate completing an event in the future, but you have not completed it yet.

Example 5.2.7:

You will have forgotten me after you move to London.

Notice that both actions occur in the future, but one action will occur before the other. At some time in the future, the subject (you) will move (future tense) to London, and at some time after that, the subject will have forgotten (future perfect tense) the speaker, me.

Exercise 14

Complete the following sentences by using the correct perfect verb tense for the verb in parentheses:

1. I plan to start a compost bin because I _____ (to want) one for a long time now.
2. My brother told me he _____ (to argue) with his friend about politics.
3. By the time we reach the mountain top the sun _____ (to set).
4. Denise _____ (to walk) several miles in the past three hours.
5. His mother _____ (to offer) to pay him to work in her office.

Progressive Verb Tenses

Progressive verb tenses describe a continuing or unfinished action, such as I am going, I was going, or I will be going.

The present/progressive tense describes an action or state of being that takes place in the present and that continues to take place. To make verbs in the present progressive tense, combine these two parts:

Present tense form of to be	+	present participle
am/is/are		helping

You should use the present progressive tense to describe a planned activity, to describe an activity that is recurring right now, and to describe an activity that is in progress, although not actually occurring at the time of speaking:

Example 5.2.8:

Preeti is starting school on Tuesday.

This sentence describes a planned activity.

Example 5.2.9:

Janetta is getting her teeth cleaned right now.

This sentence describes an activity that is occurring right now.

Example 5.2.10:

I am studying ballet at school.

This sentence describes an activity that is in progress but not actually occurring at the time of speaking.

The past progressive tense describes an action or state of being that took place in the past and that continues to take place in the past time. To make verbs in the past progressive tense, combine these two parts:

Past tense form of to be	+	present participle
was/were		helping

The future progressive tense describes an action or state of being that will take place in the future and that will continue to take place. The action will have started at that future moment, but it will not have finished at that moment. To make verbs in the future progressive tense, combine these parts.

Future tense form of to be	+	present participle
will be		helping

Use the future progressive tense to describe an activity that will be in progress in the future:

Example 5.2.11:

Samantha and I will be dancing in the school play next week.

Tomorrow Agnes will be reading two of her poems.

Exercise 15

Revise the following sentences, written in simple tenses, using the progressive tenses indicated in parentheses.

1. He prepared the food while I watched. (past progressive tense)
2. Jonathan will speak at the conference. (future progressive)
3. Josie traveled to Egypt last July. (past progressive tense)
4. My foot aches, so I know it will rain. (present progressive tense)
5. Micah will talk a lot when I see him. (future progressive) 6. I yawn a lot because I feel tired. (present progressive tense)

Perfect Progressive Verb Tenses

Similar to the present perfect tense, the present perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continues into the present. However, the present perfect progressive is used when you want to stress that the action is ongoing. To make verbs in the present perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Present tense form of to have	+	been	+	present participle
has or have		been		helping

Example 5.2.12:

She has been talking for the last hour.

This sentence indicates that she started talking in the past and is continuing to talk in the present.

Example 5.2.13:

I have been feeling tired lately

This sentence indicates that I started feeling tired in the past, and I continue to feel tired in the present. Instead of indicating time, as in the first sentence, the second sentence uses the adverb *lately*. You can also use the adverb *recently* when using the present perfect progressive tense.

Similar to the past perfect tense, the past perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continued until another time in the past. The past perfect progressive does not continue into the present but stops at a designated moment in the past. To make verbs in the past perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Past tense form of to have	+	been	+	present participle
had		been		helping

Example 5.2.14:

The employees had been talking until their boss arrived.

This sentence indicates that the employees were talking in the past and they stopped talking when their boss arrived, which also happened in the past.

Example 5.2.15:

I had been working all day.

This sentence implies that I was working in the past. The action does not continue into the future, and the sentence implies that the subject stopped working for unstated reasons.

The future perfect progressive tense is rarely used. It is used to indicate an action that will begin in the future and will continue until another time in the future. To make verbs in the future perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

Future tense form of to have	+	been	+	present participle
will have		been		helping

Example 5.2.16:

By the end of the meeting, I will have been hearing about mortgages and taxes for eight hours.

This sentence indicates that in the future I will hear about mortgages and taxes for eight hours, but it has not happened yet. It also indicates the action of hearing will continue until the end of the meeting, something that is also in the future.

Passive Verb Forms

The passive voice can be added to verbs, creating a difference in meaning and a difference in grammatical form from the active voice. In a clause with an active verb, the subject is "responsible" for the action described, as in this example:

Example 5.2.17:

Faculty members often forget to lock their office doors when they go to the workroom to print something.

Who did the forgetting? The answer is the faculty members – that is, the subject of the sentence. We know this because the verb is active. Look at the difference in the following example where the verb is passive:

Example 5.2.18:

Professor Mulden's purse was stolen from her office last week when she went to the computer room and forgot to lock her door.

Who did the stealing? Certainly, not Professor Mulden! She was not responsible for the action; she only suffered the effects. We know this because the main verb is in a passive form. To make verbs in the passive, combine the following parts:

Passive of the simple present:

Subject	+	am, is, are	+	past participle
A vote		is		taken

Passive of the simple past:

Subject	+	was, were	+	past participle
A vote		was		taken

Passive of the simple future:

Subject	+	will be	+	past participle
A vote		will be		taken

Passive of the present perfect:

Subject	+	has, have + been	+	past participle
A vote		has been		taken

Passive with modal:

Subject	+	must, could, can + be	+	past participle
A vote		must be		taken

Exercise 16

Identify the following underlined verbs in sentences as active (A) or passive (P).

1. The jury voted at the end of the trial.
2. Some jurors were told to leave at noon.
3. All the jurors were leaving the building when the reporters came in.
4. My sister Joan has been selected for jury two different times.
5. Were you given any information about that murder case?
6. Not every juror will be needed for the trial next week.

Gerunds and Infinitives

Gerunds

A gerund is a form of a verb that is used as a noun. All gerunds end in -ing. Since gerunds function as nouns, they occupy places in a sentence that a noun would, such as the subject, direct object, and object of a preposition. You can use a gerund in the following ways:

As a subject

Example 5.2.19:

Traveling is Cynthia's favorite pastime.

As a direct object

Example 5.2.20:

I enjoy jogging.

As an object of a proposition

Example 5.2.21:

The librarian scolded me for laughing.

Often verbs are followed by gerunds. Examine the following table for examples.

Table of Gerunds and Verbs

Gerund	Verb Followed by a Gerund
moving	Denise considered moving to Paris.

Gerund	Verb Followed by a Gerund
cleaning	I hate cleaning the bathroom.
winning	Nate imagines winning an Oscar one day.
worrying	Mom says she has stopped worrying.
taking	She admitted taking the pumpkin.

Infinitives

An infinitive is a form of a verb that includes the word to and acts as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

$$\text{to} + \text{verb} = \text{infinitive} \tag{5.2.1}$$

Examples of infinitives include to move, to sleep, to look, to throw, to read, and to sneeze.

Often verbs are followed by infinitives. Examine "Infinitives and Verbs" for examples.

Table of Infinitives and Verbs

Infinitive	Verb Followed by Infinitive
to help	Jessica offered to help her move.
to arrive	Mick expects to arrive early.
to win	Sunita wants to win the writing contest.
to close	He forgot to close the curtains.
to eat	She likes to eat late.

You may wonder which verbs can be followed by gerunds and which verbs can be followed by infinitives. With the following verbs, you can use either a gerund or an infinitive.

Table of Infinitives and Gerunds Verbs

Base Form of Verb	Sentences with Verbs Followed by Gerunds and Infinitives
begin	1. John began crying. 2. John began to cry.
hate	1. Marie hated talking on the phone. 2. Marie hated to talk on the phone.
forget	1. Wendell forgot paying the bills. 2. Wendell forgot to pay the bills.
like	1. I liked leaving messages. 2. I liked to leave messages.
continue	1. He continued listening to the news. 2. He continued to listen to the news.

Base Form of Verb	Sentences with Verbs Followed by Gerunds and Infinitives
start	1. I will start recycling immediately. 2. I will start to recycle immediately.
try	1. Mikhail will try climbing the tree. 2. Mikhail will try to climb the tree.
prefer	1. I prefer baking. 2. I prefer to bake.
love	1. Josh loves diving. 2. Josh loves to dive.

Exercise 17

Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct infinitive or gerund:

1. I meant _____ (to kiss, kissing) my kids before they left for school.
2. The children hoped (to go, going) to a restaurant for dinner.
3. Do you intend _____ (to eat, eating) the entire pie?
4. Crystal postponed _____ (to get dressed, getting dressed) for the party.
5. When we finish _____ (to play, playing) this game, we will go home.

Key Takeaways

- Verb tenses tell the reader when the action takes place.
- Actions could be in the past, present, or future.
- There are six main verb tenses in English: simple present, simple past, simple future, present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect.
- Verbs in English can have active forms and passive forms.
- Verbs can be followed by either gerunds or infinitives.

This page titled 5.2: Verbs (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.2: Verbs (Part 2)

Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries are helping verbs that are used only with a main verb to help express mood.

The following is the basic formula for using a modal auxiliary:

Subject	+	modal auxiliary	+	main verb
James		may		call

There are ten main modal auxiliaries in English.

Table of Modal Auxiliaries

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
can	Expresses an ability or possibility	1. I can lift this forty-pound box. (ability) 2. We can embrace green sources of energy. (possibility)
could	Expresses an ability in the past; a present possibility; a past or future permission	1. I could beat you at chess when we were kids. (past ability) 2. We could bake a pie! (present possibility) 3. Could we pick some flowers from the garden? (future permission)
may	Expresses uncertain future action; permission; ask a yes-no question	1. I may attend the concert. (uncertain future action) 2. You may begin the exam. (permission) 3. May I attend the concert? (yesno questions)
might	Expresses uncertain future action	1. I might attend the concert (uncertain future action—same as may)
shall	Expresses intended future action	1. I shall go to the opera. (intended future action)
should	Expresses obligation; ask if an obligation exists	1. I should mail my RSVP. (obligation, same as ought to) 2. Should I call my mother? (asking if an obligation exists)

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
will	Expresses intended future action; ask a favor; ask for information	1. I will get an A in this class. (intended future action) 2. Will you buy me some chocolate? (favor) 3. Will you be finished soon? (information)
would	States a preference; request a choice politely; explain an action; introduce habitual past actions	1. I would like the steak, please. (preference) 2. Would you like to have breakfast in bed? (request a choice politely) 3. I would go with you if I didn't have to babysit tonight. (explain an action) 4. He would write to me every week when we were dating. (habitual past action)
must	Expresses obligation	We must be on time for class.
ought to	Expresses obligation	I ought to mail my RSVP. (obligation, same as may)

tip

Use the following format to form a yes-no question with a modal auxiliary:

Modal auxiliary	+	subject	+	main verb
Should		I		drive?

Be aware of these four common errors when using modal auxiliaries:

1. Using an infinitive instead of a base verb after a modal
   A. Incorrect: I can to move this heavy table.
   B. Correct: I can move this heavy table.
2. Using a gerund instead of a base verb after a modal
   a. Incorrect: I could moving to the United States.
   b. Correct: I could move to the United States.
3. Using two modals in a row
   a. Incorrect: I should must renew my passport.
   b. Correct: I must renew my passport.
   c. Correct: I should renew my passport.
4. Leaving out a modal
   a. Incorrect: I renew my passport.
   b. Correct: I must renew my passport.

Exercise 18

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the common modal auxiliary errors.

I may to go to France on vacation next summer. I shall might visit the Palace of Versailles. I will to drive around the countryside. I could imagining myself living there; however, I will not moved to France because my family should miss me very much.

Modals with Present Perfect Verbs

In the previous section, we defined the present perfect verb tense as describing a continuing situation or something that has just happened. Remember, when a sentence contains a modal auxiliary before the verb, the helping verb is always *have*.

Be aware of the following common errors when using modal auxiliaries in conditional statements:

Using had instead of have

Incorrect: Jamie would had attended the party, but he was sick.

Correct: Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

Leaving out have

Incorrect: Jamie would attended the party, but he was sick.

Correct: Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

Key Takeaways

- The basic formula for using a modal auxiliary is: subject + modal auxiliary + main verb in the base form.
- There are ten main modal auxiliaries in English: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, and ought to.
- The four common types of errors when using modals include the following: using an infinitive instead of a base verb after a modal, using a gerund instead of a base verb after a modal, using two modals in a row, and leaving out a modal.
- In the present perfect tense, when a sentence has a modal auxiliary before the verb, the helping verb is always have.
- The two common errors when using modals in the present perfect tense include using had instead of have and leaving out have.

Phrasal Verbs

Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings. These expressions are sometimes called prepositional verbs or phrasal verbs. It is important to remember that these expressions cannot be separated.

Verb + Preposition	Meaning	Example
agree with	to agree with something or someone	My husband always agrees with me.
apologize for	to express regret for something, to say sorry about something	I apologize for being late.
believe in	to have a firm conviction in something; to believe in the existence of something	I believe in educating the world's women.
care about	to think that someone or something is important	I care about the health of our oceans.
hear about	to be told about something or someone	I heard about the teachers' strike.
look after	to watch or to protect someone or something	Will you look after my dog while I am on vacation?
talk about	to discuss something	We will talk about the importance of recycling.
speak to, with t	to talk to/with someone	I will speak to his teacher tomorrow.
wait for	to await the arrival of someone or something	I will wait for my package to arrive.

tip

It is a good idea to memorize these combinations of verbs plus prepositions. Write them down in a notebook along with the definition and practice using them when you speak.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

Basic Agreement

Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender.

1. Number. All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
2. Person. All parts must match in first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he, she, it, they) forms.
3. Case. All parts must match in subjective (I, you, he, she, it, they, we), objective (me, her, him, them, us), or possessive (my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours) forms.
4. Gender. All parts must match in male or female forms.

Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs.

Because subjects and verbs are either singular or plural, the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in -s. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in –s.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I live.	We live.
Second Person	You live.	You live.
Third Person	He/She/It lives.	They live.

tip

Add an -es to the third person singular form of regular verbs that end in -sh,-x, -ch, and -s. (I wish/He wishes, I fix/She fixes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.) In the singular form, the pronoun you refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun you refers to a group of people, such as a team. Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an -s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are be, have, and do. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

Be

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am.	We are.
Second Person	You are.	You are.
Third Person	He/She/It is.	They are.

Have

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I have.	We have.
Second Person	You have.	You have.
Third Person	He/She/It have.	They have.

Do

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I do.	We do.
Second Person	You do.	You do.
Third Person	He/She/It does.	They do.

Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject;
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb;
- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as anyone or everyone;
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as team or organization;
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

Compound Subjects

A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions *and, or,* or *nor*. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

- Compound subjects combined with and take a plural verb form.
- Compound subjects combined with or and nor are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

tip

If you can substitute the word “they” for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

Intervening Phrases or Clauses

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

Indefinite Pronouns

When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form. However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun.

Indefinite Pronouns that Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns that can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything each, everybody, everyone, everything	all (Examples: All of the water **has** evaporated. All of the apples **are** ripe.
nobody, no one, none, nothing somebody, someone, something	some (Examples: Some of the money **was** stolen. Some of the books **were** stolen.

Collective Nouns

Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb.

Example $5.2.22$:

The class **respects** the teacher

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

Example $5.2.23$:

Somewhere deep in the woods **reigns** the **king** of the elves

In this example the verb (*reigns*) comes before the singular subject (*king*).

Here or There

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb. If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with here or there, it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

Example 5.2.24:

There **were** many **athletes** training in the gym.

In this example the verb is were and the subject is athletes. (Note: training is not the verb of this sentence. training in the gym is a participial phrase. See Components of a Sentence.)

Questions

Many questions are formed with helping verbs whose form must agree in number with the subject:

Example 5.2.25:

Are you **going** to the party tonight? Answer: Yes, I **am going** to the party.

The verb tense used in the question is present progressive (*are going*), and the subject (*you*) is placed after the helping verb are but before the present participle *going*.

Example 5.2.26:

Does your **car** run? Answer: Yes, my car runs.

In this example, notice that the s ending for the singular subject (car) appears at the end of the helping verb *does* in the question. In the answer to the question, the s ending is attached to the verb *run*, and the helping verb is not used.

tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked.

Exercise 19

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there are no errors in subject-verb agreement, write OK. Copy the corrected sentence or the word OK on your own sheet of notebook paper.

1. My dog and cats chases each other all the time.
   _____
2. The books that are in my library is the best I have ever read.
   _____
3. Everyone are going to the concert except me.
   _____
4. My family are moving to California.
   _____
5. Here is the lake I told you about.
   _____
6. There is the newspapers I was supposed to deliver.
   _____
7. Which room is bigger?
   _____
8. When are the movie going to start?
   _____

9. My sister and brother cleans up after themselves.
   _____
10. Some of the clothes is packed away in the attic.
   _____

Exercise 20

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I feels that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I has three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication is excellent. These skills, and others that I have learned on the job, helps me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always say that I am very helpful. Everyone appreciate when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and coworkers feels that I am an asset to the team. I is efficient and organized. Is there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here are my résumé. You can reach me by email or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.

Thanks,

Felicia Fellini

Key Takeaways

- Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender.
- A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb.
- Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are to be, to have, and to do.
- A compound subject is formed when two or more nouns are joined by the words and, or, or nor.
- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form.
- Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with here and there, the subject follows the verb.

This page titled 5.2: Verbs (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.3: Nouns and Article Use

Nouns are words that name things, places, people, and ideas. Right now, you may be surrounded by desks, computers, and notebooks. These are called count nouns because you can count the exact number of desks, computers, and notebooks—three desks, one computer, and six notebooks, for example.

On the other hand, you may be carrying a small amount of money in your wallet and sitting on a piece of furniture. These are called non-count nouns. Although you can count the pieces of furniture or the amount of money, you cannot add a number in front of money or furniture, and you cannot simply add -s to the end of a non-count noun. Instead, you must use other words and phrases to indicate the quantity of money and furniture.

Incorrect: five moneys, two furnitures

Correct: some money, two pieces of furniture

Count and Non-count Nouns

A count noun refers to people, places, and things that are separate units. You make count nouns plural by adding –s or -es.

Example 5.3.1:

chair -- Make sure to push the chairs against the wall before you leave.

A non-count noun identifies a whole object that cannot be separated from other identical objects and counted individually. Non-count nouns may refer to concrete objects or abstract objects. A concrete noun identifies an object you can see, taste, touch, or count. An abstract noun identifies an object that you cannot see, touch, or count. There are some exceptions, but most abstract nouns cannot be made plural, so they are non-count nouns. Examples of abstract nouns include anger, education, melancholy, softness, violence, and conduct.

Type of Non-count Nouns	Examples	Sample Sentence
Food	sugar, salt, pepper, lettuce, rice	Add more sugar to my coffee, please.
Solids	concrete, chocolate, silver, soap	The ice cream was covered in creamy chocolate.
Abstract Nouns	peace, warmth, hospitality, information	I need more information about the insurance policy.

Exercise 21

Identify whether the italicized noun in the sentence is a count or non-count noun by writing C or NC above the noun.

1. The amount of traffic on the way home was terrible.
2. Forgiveness is an important part of growing up.
3. I made caramel sauce for the organic apples I bought.
4. I prefer film cameras instead of digital ones.
5. My favorite subject is history.

Definite and Indefinite Articles

The word *the* is a definite article. It refers to one or more specific things. For example, the woman refers to not any woman but a particular woman. The definite article *the* is used before singular and plural count nouns.

The words *a* and *an* are indefinite articles. They refer to one nonspecific thing. For example, *a woman* refers to any woman, not a specific, particular woman. The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used before a singular count noun.

- Definite Articles (The) and Indefinite Articles (A/An) with Count Nouns
  - I saw the concert. (singular, refers to a specific concert)
    - I saw the concerts. (plural, refers to more than one specific concert)
    - I saw the U2 concert last night. (singular, refers to a specific concert)
    - I saw a concert. (singular, refers to any nonspecific concert)

Two Article Rules

The following rules will help to determine when and what kind of article needs to be used.

Rule 1: A singular count noun needs an article or a determiner. Choose *a* or *an* if the noun is indefinite. Choose *the* if the noun is definite

Rule 2: A plural or non-count noun does not need an article unless it is definite.

Exercise 22

Write the correct article in the blank for each of the following sentences. Write OK if the sentence is correct.

1. (A/An/The) camel can live for days without water. _____
2. I enjoyed (a/an/the) pastries at the Bar Mitzvah. _____
3. (A/An/The) politician spoke of many important issues. _____
4. I really enjoyed (a/an/the) actor's performance in the play. _____
5. (A/An/The) goal I have is to run a marathon this year. _____

Exercise 23

Correct the misused or missing articles and rewrite the paragraph.

Stars are large balls of spinning hot gas like our sun. The stars look tiny because they are far away. Many of them are much larger than sun. Did you know that a Milky Way galaxy has between two hundred billion and four hundred billion stars in it? Scientists estimate that there may be as many as five hundred billion galaxies in an entire universe! Just like a human being, the star has a life cycle from birth to death, but its lifespan is billions of years long. The star is born in a cloud of cosmic gas and dust called a nebula. Our sun was born in the nebula nearly five billion years ago. Photographs of the star-forming nebulas are astonishing.

Key Takeaways

- You can make count nouns plural by adding –s or –es.
- Count nouns are individual people, places, or things that can be counted, such as politicians, deserts, or candles.
- Non-count nouns refer to whole things that cannot be made plural, such as salt, peace, or happiness.
- The is a definite article and is used to refer to a specific person, place, or thing, such as the Queen of England.
- A and an are indefinite articles, and they refer to nonspecific people, places, or things, such as an apple or a bicycle.

This page titled 5.3: Nouns and Article Use is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.4: Pronouns

Subject, Object, and Possessive Pronouns

Subject pronouns are often the subject of a sentence—who or what the sentence is about.

Example 5.4.1:

Sentence: She loves the desserts in France.

She is the subject.

Example 5.4.2:

Sentence: By lunch time, they were hungry.

They is the subject.

Object pronouns are often the object of the verb— who or what was acted upon.

Example 5.4.3:

Sentence: Melanie's thoughtfulness touched him.

Him is the object of the verb touched.

Example 5.4.4:

Sentence: We lifted it.

It is the object of the verb lifted.

The masculine subject pronoun is *he*, and the masculine object pronoun is *him*. The feminine subject pronoun is *she*, and the feminine object pronoun is *her*.

A pronoun that shows possession or ownership is called a possessive pronoun.

Example 5.4.5:

Sentence: The teacher took her apple and left.

The pronoun *her* shows the teacher owns the apple.

Example 5.4.6:

Sentence: The hikers spotted their guide on the trail.

The pronoun their shows the hikers follow the guide who was assigned to the hikers.

Table of Pronouns

Subject Pronouns	I, you, he, she, it, we, they
Object Pronouns	me, you, him, her, it, us, them
Possessive Pronouns	my (mine), your(s), his, hers, its, our(s), their(s)

Exercise 24

Complete the following sentences by circling the correct pronoun.

1. Unfortunately, the house was too expensive for (we, us, they).
2. I completed (mine, my, your) research paper, and she completed (his, hers, theirs).
3. My dog Buster is old, but (he, it, them) is very playful.
4. That ring belongs to my father, so it is (hers, his, theirs).
5. I cannot find my textbook, so I think (they, it, he) is lost.

Common Pronoun Errors

English language learners often make the same errors when using pronouns. The following examples illustrate common errors.

Incorrect: Me and Daniela went to the restaurant for lunch.

This sentence is incorrect because an object pronoun (me) is used instead of a subject pronoun.

Correct: Daniela and I went to the restaurant for lunch.

This sentence is now correct because a subject pronoun (I) is used.

Incorrect: Mark put her grocery bag on the counter.

This sentence is incorrect because the pronoun her refers to a female, and Mark is a male.

Correct: Mark put his grocery bag on the counter.

This sentence is now correct because the male pronoun his refers to the male person, Mark.

Incorrect: The woman she went to work earlier than usual.

This sentence is incorrect because the subject the woman is repeated by the pronoun she.

Correct: The woman went to work earlier than usual. (Or) She went to work earlier than usual.

These sentences are now correct because the unnecessary repeated subject has been removed.

Exercise 25

Correct the following sentences that have pronoun errors. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. Us are going to the county fair this weekend.
2. Steven did not want to see a movie because she had a headache.
3. The teacher congratulated Maria and me.
4. The eighth grade students they were all behaving mysteriously well.

5. Derrick and he received the best grade on the grammar test.

Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun is a type of pronoun that helps connect details to the subject of the sentence and may often combine two shorter sentences. The relative pronouns are *who, whom, whose, which, that, where*. On how they are used, see Relative Pronouns and Adjective Clauses.

First-, Second-, and Third-person Pronouns

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am.	We are.
Second Person	You are.	You are.
Third Person	He/She/It is.	They are.

Exercise 26

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct relative pronoun.

1. He showed me a photo (who, that) upset me.
2. Soccer is a fast moving game (who, that) has many fans worldwide.
3. Juan is a man (which, who) has high standards for everything.
4. Jamaica is a beautiful country (that, who) I would like to visit next year.
5. My mother only eats bananas (who, that) are green.

Exercise 27

Combine the two sentences into one sentence using a relative pronoun.

1. Jeff is a dependable person. He will never let you down.
2. I rode a roller coaster. It was scary.
3. At the beach, I always dig my feet into the sand. It protects them from the hot sun.
4. Jackie is trying not to use so many plastic products. They are not good for the environment.
5. My Aunt Sherry is teaching me how to drive. She has never been in accident or gotten a ticket.

Key Takeaways

- A pronoun is used in place of a noun. There are several types of pronouns, including subject and object pronouns, possessive pronouns, and relative pronouns.
- Subject pronouns are the “who” and “what” the sentence is about. Object pronouns are the “who” and “what” that receives the action. A possessive pronoun is a pronoun showing ownership.
- Common pronoun errors include mixing up subject, object, and gender pronouns, and repeating the subject of a sentence with a pronoun. Relative pronouns help combine two separate sentences.

Pronouns and Antecedents

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be quite tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like “Bob said that Bob was tired or Christina told the class that Christina received an A.” Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the antecedent of the pronoun.

Example 5.4.7:

1. *Lani* complained that *she* was exhausted.

She refers to Lani. *Lani* is the antecedent of she.

2. *Jeremy* left the party early, so I did not see *him* until Monday at work.

Him refers to Jeremy. *Jeremy* is the antecedent of him.

3. Crina and Rosalie have been best friends ever since they were freshman in high school.

They refers to Crina and Rosalie. *Crina and Rosalie* is the antecedent of they.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular.

Agreement in Person

	Singular Pronouns			Plural Pronouns		
First Person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second Person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third Person	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

Indefinite Pronouns and Agreement

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing and are usually singular. Note that a pronoun that refers to an indefinite singular pronoun should also be singular. Note: The pronoun “they” is often used for gender neutrality.

Common Indefinite Pronouns				
all	each one	few	nothing	several
any	each other	many	one	some
anybody	either	neither	one another	somebody
anything	everybody	nobody	oneself	someone
both	everyone	none	other	something
each	everything	no one	others	anyone

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular.

Common Collective Nouns		
audience	faculty	public
band	family	school
class	government	society
committee	group	team
company	Jury	tribe

Exercise 28

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct pronoun. Then circle the noun the pronoun replaces.

1. In the current economy, nobody wants to waste _____ money on frivolous things.
2. If anybody chooses to go to medical school, _____ must be prepared to work long hours.
3. The plumbing crew did _____ best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.
4. If someone is rude to you, try giving _____ a smile in return.
5. My family has _____ faults, but I still love them no matter what.
6. The school of education plans to train _____ students to be literacy tutors.
7. The commencement speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward _____.
8. My mother's singing group has _____ rehearsals on Thursday evenings.
9. No one should suffer _____ pains alone.
10. I thought the flock of birds lost _____ way in the storm.

Who vs. Whom

Who or *whoever* is always the subject of a verb. Use *who* or *whoever* when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

Example 5.4.8:

Who won the marathon last Tuesday?

I wonder who came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, whom and whomever serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does not perform an action. Use whom or whomever when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Example 5.4.9:

Whom did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)

From whom did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)

tip

If you are having trouble deciding when to use who and whom, try this trick. Take the following sentence: Who/Whom do I consider my best friend? Reorder the sentence in your head, using either he or him in place of who or whom. I consider him my best friend. I consider he my best friend. Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So the trick is, if you can use him, you should use whom.

Exercise 29

Complete the following sentences by adding who or whom.

1. _____ hit the home run?
2. I remember _____ won the Academy Award for Best Actor last year.
3. To _____ is the letter addressed?
4. I have no idea _____ left the iron on, but I am going to find out.
5. _____ are you going to recommend for the internship?
6. With _____ are you going to Hawaii?
7. No one knew _____ the famous actor was.
8. _____ in the office knows how to fix the copy machine?
9. From _____ did you get the concert tickets?
10. No one knew _____ ate the cake mom was saving.

Key Takeaways

- Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person.
- Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.
- Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.
- Who serves as a subject of a verb.
- Whom serves as an object of a sentence (direct object) or the object of a preposition.

This page titled 5.4: Pronouns is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.5: Punctuation (Part 1)

Commas

The comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause in a sentence or a separation of things in a list. Commas can be used in a variety of ways. Look at some of the following sentences to see how you might use a comma when writing a sentence.

1. **Introductory word**: Personally, I think the practice is helpful.
2. **Lists**: The barn, the tool shed, and the back porch were destroyed by the wind.
3. **Coordinating adjectives**: He was tired, hungry, and late.
4. **Conjunctions in compound sentences**: The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep.
5. **Interrupting words**: I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves.
6. **Dates, addresses, greetings, and letters**: The letter was postmarked December 8, 1945.
7. **Nonrestrictive adjective clauses**: Jimmy Carter, who was the first president from Georgia, visited Atlanta last week.

Commas after an Introductory Word or Phrase

You may notice a comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence, usually after a word or phrase. This comma lets the reader know where the introductory word or phrase ends and the main sentence begins.

Example 5.5.1:

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, without spoiling the surprise is an introductory phrase, while we need to tell her to save the date is the main sentence. Notice how they are separated by a comma. When only an introductory word appears in the sentence, a comma also follows the introductory word.

Example 5.5.2:

Ironically, she already had plans for that day

Exercise 30

Look for the introductory word or phrase. Then add a comma to correct the sentence.

1. Suddenly the dog ran into the house.
2. In the blink of an eye the kids were ready to go to the movies.
3. Confused he tried opening the box from the other end.
4. Without a doubt green is my favorite color.
5. Hesitating she looked back at the directions before proceeding.
6. Fortunately the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.
7. Believe it or not the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.

Commas in a List of Items

When you want to list several nouns in a sentence, you separate each word with a comma. This allows the reader to pause after each item and identify which words are included in the grouping. When you list items in a sentence, put a comma after each noun, then add the word and before the last item.

Example 5.5.3:

We'll need to get flour, tomatoes, and cheese at the store.

The pizza will be topped with olives, peppers, and pineapple chunks.

Commas and Coordinating Adjectives

You can use commas to list both adjectives and nouns. A string of adjectives that describe a noun are called coordinating adjectives. These adjectives come before the noun they modify and are separated by commas. One important thing to note, however, is that unlike listing nouns, the word and does not always need to be before the last adjective.

Example 5.5.4:

It was a bright, windy, clear day.

Our kite glowed red, yellow, and blue in the morning sunlight.

Exercise 31

Use what you have learned so far about comma use to add commas to the following sentences.

1. Monday Tuesday and Wednesday are all booked with meetings.
2. It was a quiet uneventful unproductive day.
3. We'll need to prepare statements for the Franks Todds and Smiths before their portfolio reviews next week.
4. Michael Nita and Desmond finished their report last Tuesday.
5. With cold wet aching fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.
6. He wrote his name on the board in clear precise delicate letters.

Commas before Conjunctions in Compound Sentences

Commas are used to separate two independent clauses. The comma comes after the first independent clause and is followed by a conjunction, such as for, and, or but.

Example 5.5.5:

He missed class today, and he thinks he will be out tomorrow, too.

He says his fever is gone, but he is still very tired.

Commas before and after Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about. In a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with a word or phrase called interrupting words. Interrupting words can come at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, a comma appears after the word or phrase.

Example 5.5.6:

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.

Luckily, some people questioned that theory.

When interrupting words come in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense.

Example 5.5.7:

An Italian astronomer, Galileo, proved that Earth orbited the sun.

We have known, for hundreds of years now, that the Earth and other planets exist in a solar system.

Exercise 32

Insert commas to separate the interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.

1. I asked my neighbors the retired couple from Florida to bring in my mail.
2. Without a doubt his work has improved over the last few weeks.
3. Our professor Mr. Alamut drilled the lessons into our heads.
4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately which means I will be late for lunch.
5. We came in time for the last part of dinner but most importantly we came in time for dessert.
6. All of a sudden our network crashed and we lost our files.
7. Alex hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.

Commas in Dates, Addresses, and the Greetings and Closings of Letters

You also use commas when you write the date, such as in cover letters and emails. Commas are used when you write the date, when you include an address, and when you greet someone.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and the year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

Example 5.5.8:

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2001.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2009.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2010, so we should get our tickets soon.

You also use commas when you include addresses and locations. When you include an address in a sentence, be sure to place a comma after the street and after the city. Do not place a comma between the state and the zip code. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

Example 5.5.9:

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, Hope, Missouri 70832.

After moving to Boston, Massachusetts, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Greetings are also separated by commas. When you write an email or a letter, you add a comma after the greeting word or the person's name. You also need to include a comma after the closing, which is the word or phrase you put before your signature.

Example 5.5.10:

Hello,

I would like more information about your job posting.

Thank you,

Anita Al-Sayf

Dear Mrs. Al-Sayf,

Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.

Sincerely,

Jack Fromont

Exercise 33

Use what you have learned about comma usage to edit the following paragraphs.

1. My brother Nathaniel is a collector of many rare unusual things. He has collected lunch boxes limited edition books and hatpins at various points of his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually he sells one collection before starting another.
2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 20. In that time we need to gather all our documents together. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules. Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines. I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting please print out any emails faxes or documents you have referred to when writing your sample.
3. It was a cool crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp so they walked at a brisk pace. The leader of the group Garth kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle Raoul and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment while Carrie took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.
4. Please have your report complete and filed by April 15 2010. In your submission letter please include your contact information the position you are applying for and two people we can contact as references. We will not be available for consultation after April 10 but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you HR Department.

Key Takeaways

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to read a sentence. Punctuation marks convey meaning.
- Commas indicate a pause or a list in a sentence.
- A comma should be used after an introductory word to separate this word from the main sentence.

- A comma comes after each noun in a list. The word and is added before the last noun, which is not followed by a comma.
- A comma comes after every coordinating adjective except for the last adjective.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a conjunction follows the comma.
- Commas are used to separate interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.
- When you write the date, you add a comma between the day and the year. You also add a comma after the year if the sentence continues after the date.
- When they are used in a sentence, addresses have commas after the street address, and the city. If a sentence continues after the address, a comma comes after the zip code.
- When you write a letter, you use commas in your greeting at the beginning and in your closing at the end of your letter.

Semicolons

The semicolon (;) can be used in a variety of ways. The semicolon indicates a break in the flow of a sentence, but functions differently than a period or a comma. When you encounter a semicolon while reading aloud, this represents a good place to pause and take a breath.

Semicolons to Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing. Using a comma would create an awkward run-on sentence.

Correct: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview; appearances are important.

Choppy: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview. Appearances are important.

Incorrect: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview, appearances are important.

In this case, writing the independent clauses as two sentences separated by a period is correct. However, using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

Semicolons to Join Items in a List

You can also use a semicolon to join items in a list when the items in the list already require commas. Semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

Correct: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

Incorrect: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

By using semicolons in this sentence, the reader can easily distinguish between the three sets of colors.

tip

Use semicolons to join two main clauses. Do not use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions such as and, or, and but.

Exercise 34

Correct the following sentences by adding semicolons. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. I did not notice that you were in the office I was behind the front desk all day.

2. Do you want turkey, spinach, and cheese roast beef, lettuce, and cheese or ham, tomato, and cheese?
3. Please close the blinds there is a glare on the screen.
4. Unbelievably, no one was hurt in the accident.
5. I cannot decide if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple green, black, and brown or green, brown, and dark red.
6. Let's go for a walk the air is so refreshing.

Key Takeaways

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already require a comma.

This page titled 5.5: Punctuation (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.5: Punctuation (Part 2)

Colons

The colon (:) is another punctuation mark used to indicate a full stop. Use a colon to introduce lists, quotes, examples, and explanations. You can also use a colon after the greeting in business letters and memos.

Example 5.5.11:

Dear Hiring Manager:

To: Human Resources

From: Deanna Dean

Colons to Introduce a List

Use a colon to introduce a list of items. Introduce the list with an independent clause.

Example 5.5.12:

The team will tour three states: New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

I have to take four classes this semester: Composition, Statistics, Ethics, and Italian.

Colons to Introduce a Quote

You can use a colon to introduce a quote if the introduction to the quote is a complete, independent clause:

Correct: Mark Twain had some great advice about honesty: “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

Incorrect: Mark Twain said: “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

Correct: Mark Twain said, “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

If a quote is longer than four typed lines, skip a line after the colon and indent the left margin of the quote five spaces. Because quotations longer than four typed lines use line spacing and indentation to indicate a quote, quotation marks are not necessary.

Example 5.5.13:

My father always loved Mark Twain’s words:

There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.

tip

Long quotations, which are four typed lines or more, are called block quotations. Block quotations frequently appear in longer essays and research papers.

Colons to Introduce Examples or Explanations

Use a colon to introduce an example or to further explain an idea presented in the first part of a sentence. The first part of the sentence must always be an independent clause; that is, it must stand alone as a complete thought with a subject and verb. Do not use a colon after phrases like such as or for example.

Incorrect: Our company offers many publishing services, such as: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Incorrect: Our company does: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Correct: Our company offers many publishing services: writing, editing, and reviewing.

tip

Capitalize the first letter following a colon for a proper noun, the beginning of a quote, or the first letter of another independent clause. Do NOT capitalize if the information following the colon is not a complete sentence.

Proper noun: We visited three countries: Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Beginning of a quote: My mother loved this line from Hamlet: “To thine own self be true.”

Two independent clauses: There are drawbacks to modern technology: My brother’s cell phone died and he lost a lot of phone numbers.

Incorrect: The recipe is simple: Tomato, basil, and avocado.

Exercise 35

Correct the following sentences by adding semicolons or colons where needed. If the sentence does not need a semicolon or colon, write OK.

1. Don’t give up you never know what tomorrow brings.
   _____
2. Our records show that the patient was admitted on March 9, 2010 January 13, 2010 and November 16, 2009.
   _____
3. Allow me to introduce myself I am the greatest ice-carver in the world.
   _____
4. Where I come from there are three ways to get to the grocery store by car, by bus, and by foot.
   _____
5. Listen closely you will want to remember this speech.
   _____
6. I have lived in Sedona, Arizona Baltimore, Maryland and Knoxville, Tennessee.
   _____
7. The boss’s message was clear lateness would not be tolerated.
   _____
8. Next semester, we will read some well-known authors, such as Vonnegut, Miller, and Orwell.
   _____
9. My little sister said what we were all thinking “We should have stayed home.”
   _____

10. Trust me I have done this before.
    _____

Key Takeaways

- Use a colon to introduce a list, quote, or example.
- Use a colon after a greeting in business letters and memos.

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks (“ ”) set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words or to indicate a title of a short published work. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

Direct Quotations

A direct quotation is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in your writing, enclose the words in quotation marks. An indirect quotation is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation, which is also called reported speech, does not use the person’s exact words. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Direct quotation: Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

Indirect quotation: Carly said that she would never go back there.

Punctuating Direct Quotations

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words. Often, you will want to identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and capitalized words.

Beginning: Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Middle: “Let’s stop at the farmers market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.

End: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

Speaker not identified: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Always capitalize the first letter of a quote when it is the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized.

Use commas between identifying words and quotes. Quotation marks must be placed after commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

Question is part of quoted text: The new employee asked, “When is lunch?”

Question is not part of quoted text: Did you hear her say you were “the next Picasso”?

Exclamation is part of quoted text: My supervisor beamed, “Thanks for all of your hard work!”

Exclamation is not part of quoted text: He said I “single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars”!

Quotations within Quotations

Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) to show a quotation within in a quotation.

Example 5.5.14:

Theresa said, “I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, ‘No dogs allowed.’”

“When you say, ‘I can’t help it,’ what exactly does that mean?”

“The instructions say, ‘Tighten the screws one at a time.’”

Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as essays, songs, poems, short stories, and chapters in books. Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and novels, are italicized or underlined, but never both at the same time.

Example 5.5.15:

“Annabelle Lee” is one of my favorite romantic poems.

The New York Times has been in publication since 1851.

Exercise 36

Correct these sentences by adding quotation marks where necessary. If the sentence does not need any quotation marks, write OK.

1. Yasmin said, I don’t feel like cooking. Let’s go out to eat.
   _____
2. Where should we go? said Russell.
   _____
3. Yasmin said it didn’t matter to her.
   _____
4. I know, said Russell, let’s go to the Two Roads Juice Bar.
   _____
5. Perfect! said Yasmin.
   _____
6. Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem? asked Russell.
   _____
7. I didn’t! exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?
   _____
8. The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.
   _____
9. Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?
   _____
10. That’s the one said Russell.
    _____

Key Takeaways

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quote within a quote.
- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Apostrophes

An apostrophe (’) is a punctuation mark that is used with a noun to show possession or to indicate where a letter has been left out to form a contraction.

Possession

An apostrophe and the letter s indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add ’s.

Example 5.5.16:

Jen’s dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.

The dog’s leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.

Jess’s sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in s still take the apostrophe s (’s) ending to show possession.

To show possession with a plural noun that ends in s, just add an apostrophe (’). If the plural noun does not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s (’s).

Plural noun that ends in s: The drummers’ sticks all moved in the same rhythm, like a machine.

Plural noun that does not end in s: The people’s votes clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.

Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words. In a contraction, an apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

Example 5.5.17:

I do not like ice cream.

I don’t like ice cream.

Notice how the words do and not have been combined to form the contraction don’t. The apostrophe shows where the o in not has been left out.

Example 5.5.18:

We will see you later.

We’ll see you later.

Be careful not to confuse it’s with its. It’s is a contraction of the words it and is. Its is a possessive pronoun.

Example 5.5.19:

It’s cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)

The cat was chasing its tail. (Shows that the tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words it is in a sentence. If sentence still makes sense, use the contraction it's.

Exercise 37

Correct the following sentences by adding apostrophes. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. "What a beautiful child! She has her mothers eyes."
2. My brothers wife is one of my best friends.
3. I couldnt believe it when I found out that I got the job!
4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldnt be able to take the days off.
5. Each of the students responses were unique.
6. Wont you please join me for dinner tonight?

Key Takeaways

- Use apostrophes to show possession. Add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s.
- Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show where a letter or letters have been left out.

Dashes

A dash (—) is a punctuation mark used to set off information in a sentence for emphasis. You can enclose text between two dashes, or use just one dash. To create a dash in Microsoft Word, type two hyphens together. Do not put a space between dashes and text.

Example 5.5.20:

Arrive to the interview early—but not too early.

Any of the suits—except for the purple one—should be fine to wear.

Exercise 38

Clarify the following sentences by adding dashes. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer short or long?
2. I don't know I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what I got the job!
4. I will be happy to work over the weekend if I can have Monday off.
5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a candidate intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.

Key Takeaways

- Dashes indicate a pause in text.
- Dashes set off information in a sentence to show emphasis.

Hyphens

A hyphen (-) looks similar to a dash but is shorter and used in different ways.

Hyphens between Two Adjectives That Work as One

Use a hyphen to combine words that work together to form a single description.

Example 5.5.21:

The fifty-five-year-old athlete was just as qualified for the marathon as his younger opponents.

My doctor recommended against taking the medication, since it can be habit-forming.

My study group focused on preparing for the midyear review.

Hyphens When a Word Breaks at the End of a Line

Use a hyphen to divide a word across two lines of text. You may notice that most word-processing programs will do this for you. If you have to manually insert a hyphen, place the hyphen between two syllables. If you are unsure of where to place the hyphen, consult a dictionary or move the entire word to the next line.

Example 5.5.22:

My supervisor was concerned that the team meet-
ing would conflict with the client meeting.

Key Takeaways

- Hyphens join words that work as one adjective.
- Hyphens break words across two lines of text.

This page titled 5.5: Punctuation (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.6: Capitalization

Rules for Capitalization

- Capitalize the first word of a sentence.
- Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, American, African American, Hispanic, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.
- Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in general or common way.
- Capitalize days of the week, months of the year, and holidays.
- Capitalize titles of positions when they are accompanied by proper names.
  - **Examples**: President Obama, Governor Scott Brown, Judge Wheeler.
- Capitalize the names of specific movements or events.
  - **Examples**: the Civil Rights Movement, World War II, D-Day
- Capitalize the letters that make up abbreviations for organizations or agencies.
  - **Examples**: FEMA, EPA, NFL. CNN.
- Computer-related words such as “Internet” and “World Wide Web” are usually capitalized; however, “email” and “online” are never capitalized.
- Proper nouns—the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized.

Table of Common vs. Proper Nouns

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	The Art Institute of Chicago
theater	Apollo Theater
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	*Pride and Prejudice*
college	Smith College
war	the Spanish-American War
historical event	The Renaissance

Key Takeaways

- Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization is a fundamental aspect of good writing.
- Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization is an important writing skill.

This page titled 5.6: Capitalization is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 1)

The English language contains an enormous and ever-growing number of words. Enhancing your vocabulary by learning new words can seem overwhelming, but if you know the common prefixes and suffixes of English, you will understand many more words. Mastering common prefixes and suffixes is like learning a code. Once you crack the code, you can not only spell words more correctly but also recognize and perhaps even define unfamiliar words.

Prefixes and Suffixes

A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word to create a new meaning.

Table of Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Example
dis	not, opposite of	dis + satisfied = dissatisfied
mis	wrongly	mis + spell = misspell
un	un	un + acceptable = unacceptable
re	again	re + election = reelection
inter	between	inter + related = interrelated
pre	before	pre + pay = prepay
non	not	non + sense = nonsense
super	above	super + script = superscript
sub	under	sub + merge = submerge
anti	against, opposing	anti + bacterial = antibacterial

Exercise 39

Add the correct prefix to the word to complete each sentence.

1. I wanted to ease my stomach _____comfort, so I drank some ginger root tea.
2. Lenny looked funny in his _____matched shirt and pants.
3. Penelope felt _____glamorous at the party because she was the only one not wearing a dress.
4. My mother said those _____aging creams do not work, so I should not waste my money on them.
5. The child's _____standard performance on the test alarmed his parents.
6. When my sister first saw the meteor, she thought it was a _____natural phenomenon.
7. Even though she got an excellent job offer, Cherie did not want to _____locate to a different country.
8. With a small class size, the students get to _____act with the teacher more frequently.
9. I slipped on the ice because I did not heed the _____cautions about watching my step.
10. A _____combatant is another word for civilian.

A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word to create a new meaning. Study the suffix rules in the following boxes.

Rules for Prefixes

The main rule to remember when adding a prefix to a word is not to add letters or leave out any letters.

Rule 1

When adding the suffixes -ness and -ly to a word, the spelling of the word does not change.

Example 5.7.1:

dark + ness = darkness

scholar + ly = scholarly

Exceptions to Rule 1

When the word ends in y, change the y to i before adding -ness and -ly.

Example 5.7.2:

ready + ly = readily

happy + ness = happiness

Rule 2

When the suffix begins with a vowel, drop the silent e in the root word.

Example 5.7.3:

care + ing = caring

use + able = usable

Exceptions to Rule 2

When the word ends in ce or ge, keep the silent e if the suffix begins with a or o.

Example 5.7.4:

replace + able = replaceable

courage + ous = courageous

Rule 3

When the suffix begins with a consonant, keep the silent e in the original word.

Example 5.7.5:

care + ful = careful

care + less = careless

true + ly = truly

argue + ment = argument

Rule 4

When the word ends in a consonant plus y, change the y to i before any suffix not beginning with i.

Example 5.7.6:

sunny + er = sunnier

hurry + ing = hurrying

Rule 5

When the suffix begins with a vowel, double the final consonant only if (1) the word has only one syllable or is accented on the last syllable and (2) the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.

Example 5.7.7:

tan + ing = tanning (one syllable word)

regret + ing = regretting (The accent is on the last syllable; the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.)

cancel + ed = canceled (The accent is not on the last syllable.)

prefer + ed = preferred

Exercise 40

Write the correct forms of the words with their suffixes.

1. refer + ed
2. refer + ence
3. mope + ing
4. approve + al
5. green + ness
6. benefit + ed
7. resubmit + ing
8. use + age
9. greedy + ly
10. excite + ment

Key Takeaways

- A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- Learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes will help expand your vocabulary, which will help improve your writing.

Commonly Confused Words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words. For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words new and knew:

Example 5.7.8:

I liked her new sweater.

I knew she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike when spoken, but they carry entirely different usages and meanings. New is an adjective that describes the sweater, and knew is the past tense of the verb to know.

Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

New and knew are just two of the words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word.

List of Commonly Confused Words

- a, an, and
  - a (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.
    a key, a mouse, a screen
  - an (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.
    an airplane, an ocean, an igloo
  - and (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.
    peanut butter and jelly, pen and pencil, jump and shout
- accept, except
  - accept (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.
    They accepted our proposal for the conference.
  - except (conjunction). Means only or but.
    We could fly there except the tickets cost too much.
  - affect, effect
  - affect (verb). Means to create a change.
    Hurricane winds affect the amount of rainfall.
  - effect (noun). Means an outcome or result.
    The heavy rains will have an effect on the crop growth.
- are, our
  - are (verb). A conjugated form of the verb to be.
    My cousins are all tall and blonde.
  - our (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun we.
    We will bring our cameras to take pictures.
- by, buy
  - by (preposition). Means next to.
    My glasses are by the bed.
  - buy (verb). Means to purchase.
    I will buy new glasses after the doctor's appointment.
- its, it's
  - its (pronoun). A form of it that shows possession.
    The butterfly flapped its wings.
  - it's (contraction). Joins the words it and is.
    It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

- know, no
  - know (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.
    I know the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
  - no. Used to make a negative.
    I have no time to visit the zoo this weekend.
- loose, lose
  - loose (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.
    Without a belt, her pants are loose on her waist.
  - lose (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.
    She will lose even more weight after finishing the marathon training.
- of, have
  - of (preposition). Means from or about.
    I studied maps of the city to know where to rent a new apartment.
  - have (verb). Means to possess something.
    I have many friends to help me move.
  - have (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.
    I should have helped her with that heavy box.
- quite, quiet, quit
  - quite (adverb). Means really or truly.
    My work will require quite a lot of concentration.
  - quiet (adjective). Means not loud.
    I need a quiet room to complete the assignments.
  - quit (verb). Means to stop or to end.
    I will quit when I am hungry for dinner.
- right, write
  - right (adjective). Means proper or correct.
    When bowling, she practices the right form.
  - right (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.
    The ball curved to the right and hit the last pin.
  - write (verb). Means to communicate on paper.
    After the team members bowl, I will write down their scores.
- set, sit
  - set (verb). Means to put an item down.
    She set the mug on the saucer.
  - set (noun). Means a group of similar objects.
    All the mugs and saucers belonged in a set.
  - sit (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place.
    I'll sit on the sofa while she brews the tea.
- suppose, supposed
  - suppose (verb). Means to think or to consider.
    I suppose I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe.
  - suppose (verb). Means to suggest.
    Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.
  - supposed (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.
    She was supposed to create the menu.
- than, then
  - than (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing
    Registered nurses require less schooling than doctors.
  - then (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.
    Doctors first complete medical school and then obtain a residency.
- their, they're, there
  - their (pronoun). A form of they that shows possession.
    The dog walker feeds their dogs everyday at two o'clock.
  - they're (contraction). Joins the words they and are.
    They're the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
  - there (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
    The dogs' bowls are over there, next to the pantry.
  - there (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something

There are more treats if the dogs behave.

- to, two, too
  - to (preposition). Indicates movement.
    Let's go to the circus.
  - to. A word that completes an infinitive verb.
    to play, to ride, to watch.
  - two. The number after one. It describes how many.
    Two clowns squirted the elephants with water.
  - Too (adverb). Means also or very.
    The tents were too loud, and we left.
- use, used
  - use (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.
    We use a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
  - used. The past tense form of the verb to use
    He used the lawnmower last night before it rained.
  - used to. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present
    He used to hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.
- who's, whose
  - who's (contraction). Joins the words who and either is or has.
    Who's the new student? Who's met him?
  - whose (pronoun). A form of who that shows possession.
    Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?
- your, you're
  - your (pronoun). A form of you that shows possession.
    Your book bag is unzipped.
  - you're (contraction). Joins the words you and are.
    You're the girl with the unzipped book bag.

The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

When writing, you need to choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also makes a good impression on your readers. It also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

Use a dictionary. Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.

Keep a list of words you commonly confuse. Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.

Study the list of commonly confused words. You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.

Key Takeaways

- In order to write accurately, it is important for writers to be aware of commonly confused words.
- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different.

- Consulting the dictionary is one way to make sure you are using the correct word in your writing. You may also keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write, and you may study the list of commonly confused words in this chapter.
- Choosing the proper words leaves a positive impression on your readers.

This page titled 5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 1) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 2)

Avoiding Slang and Clichés

Avoiding Slang

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as emails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

Exercise 41

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

1. Clichéd: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my blood boil.
2. Plain: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
3. Original: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Avoiding Overly General Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring yours words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

Example 5.7.9:

General: My new puppy is cute.

Specific: My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.

General: My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.

Specific: My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

Spelling Rules

Common Spelling Rules

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules carry exceptions. A spell checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. You may want to try memorizing each rule and its exception like you would memorize a rhyme or lyrics to a song.

Write i before e except after c, or when pronounced ay like “neighbor” or “weigh.”

Example 5.7.10:

achieve, niece, alien

receive, deceive

When words end in a consonant plus y, drop the y and add an i before adding another ending.

Example 5.7.11:

happy + er = happier

cry + ed = cried

When words end in a vowel plus y, keep the y and add the ending.

Example 5.7.12:

delay + ed = delayed

Memorize the following exceptions to this rule: day, lay, say, pay = daily, laid, said, paid

When adding an ending that begins with a vowel, such as -able, -ence, -ing, or -ity, drop the last e in a word.

Example 5.7.13:

write + ing = writing

pure + ity = purity

When adding an ending that begins with a consonant, such as -less, -ment, or -ly, keep the last e in a word.

Example 5.7.14:

hope + less = hopeless

advertise + ment = advertisement

For many words ending in a consonant and an o, add -s when using the plural form.

Example 5.7.15:

photo + s = photos

soprano + s = sopranos

Add -es to words that end in s, ch, sh, and x.

Example 5.7.16:

church + es = churches

fax + es = faxes

Tips to Improve Spelling Skills

1. Read the words in your assignment carefully, and avoid skimming over the page. Focusing on your written assignment word by word will help you pay close attention to each word's spelling. Skimming quickly, you may overlook misspelled words.
2. Use mnemonic devices to remember the correct spelling of words. Mnemonic devices, or memory techniques and learning aids, include inventive sayings or practices that help you remember. For example, the saying "It is important to be a beautiful person inside and out" may help you remember that beautiful begins with "be a." The practice of pronouncing the word Wednesday Wed-nes-day may help you remember how to spell the word correctly.
3. Use a dictionary. Many professional writers rely on the dictionary—either in print or online. If you find it difficult to use a regular dictionary, ask your instructor to help you find a "poor speller's dictionary."
4. Use your computer's spell checker. The spell checker will not solve all your spelling problems, but it is a useful tool. See the introduction to this section for cautions about spell checkers.
5. Keep a list of frequently misspelled words. You will often misspell the same words again and again, but do not let this discourage you. All writers struggle with the spellings of certain words; they become aware of their spelling weaknesses and work to improve. Be aware of which words you commonly misspell, and you can add them to a list to learn to spell them correctly.
6. Look over corrected papers for misspelled words. Add these words to your list and practice writing each word four to five times each. Writing teachers will especially notice which words you frequently misspell, and it will help you excel in your classes if they see your spelling improve.
7. Test yourself with flashcards. Sometimes the old-fashioned methods are best, and for spelling, this tried and true technique has worked for many students. You can work with a peer or alone.
8. Review the common spelling rules explained in this chapter. Take the necessary time to master the material; you may return to the rules in this chapter again and again, as needed.

tip

Remember to focus on spelling during the editing and revising step of the writing process. Start with the big ideas such as organizing your piece of writing and developing effective paragraphs, and then work your way down toward the smaller—but equally important— details like spelling and punctuation.

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

Commonly Misused Homonyms

- principle, principal
  - principle (noun). A fundamental concept that is accepted as true.

The principle of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.
    - principal (noun). The original amount of debt on which interest is calculated.
      The payment plan allows me to pay back only the principal amount, not any compounded interest.
    - principal (noun). A person who is the main authority of a school.
      The principal held a conference for both parents and teachers.
- where, wear, ware
    - where (adverb). The place in which something happens.
      Where is the restaurant?
    - wear (verb). To carry or have on the body.
      I will wear my hiking shoes when go on a climb tomorrow morning.
    - ware (noun). Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, wares).
      When I return from shopping, I will show you my wares.
- lead, led
    - lead (noun). A type of metal used in pipes and batteries.
      The lead pipes in my homes are old and need to be replaced.
    - led (verb). The past tense of the verb lead.
      After the garden, she led the patrons through the museum.
- which, witch
    - which (pronoun). Replaces one out of a group.
      Which apartment is yours?
    - witch (noun). A person who practices sorcery or who has supernatural powers.
      She thinks she is a witch, but she does not seem to have any powers.
- peace, piece
    - peace (noun). A state of tranquility or quiet.
      For once, there was peace between the argumentative brothers.
    - piece (noun). A part of a whole.
      I would like a large piece of cake, thank you.
- passed, past
    - passed (verb). To go away or move.
      He passed the slower cars on the road using the left lane.
    - past (noun). Having existed or taken place in a period before the present.
      The argument happened in the past, so there is no use in dwelling on it.
- lessen, lesson
    - lessen (verb). To reduce in number, size, or degree.
      My dentist gave me medicine to lessen the pain of my aching tooth.
    - lesson (noun). A reading or exercise to be studied by a student.
      Today's lesson was about mortgage interest rates.
- patience, patients
    - patience (noun). The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly).
      The novice teacher's patience with the unruly class was astounding.
    - patients (plural noun). Individuals under medical care.
      The patients were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.
- sees, seas, seize
    - sees (verb). To perceive with the eye.
      He sees a whale through his binoculars.
    - seas (plural noun). The plural of sea, a great body of salt water.
      The tidal fluctuation of the oceans and seas are influenced by the moon.
    - seize (verb). To possess or take by force.
      The king plans to seize all the peasants' land.
- threw, through
    - threw (verb). The past tense of throw.
      She threw the football with perfect form.
    - through (preposition). A word that indicates movement.
      She walked through the door and out of his life.

Commonly Misspelled Words

The table below lists commonly misspelled words. You probably use these words every day in either speaking or writing. Each word has a segment in bold type, which indicates the problem area of the word that is often spelled incorrectly. If you can, use this list as a guide before, during, and after you write.

Use the following two tricks to help you master these troublesome words:

1. Copy each word a few times and underline the problem area.
2. Copy the words onto flash cards and have a friend test you.

Table of Commonly Misspelled Words

across	disappoint	integration	particular	separate
address	disapprove	intelligent	perform	similar
answer	doesn't	interest	perhaps	since
argument	eighth	interfere	personnel	speech
athlete	embarrass	jewelry	possess	strength
beginning	environment	judgment	possible	success
behavior	exaggerate	knowledge	prefer	surprise
calendar	familiar	maintain	prejudice	taught
career	finally	mathematics	privilege	temperature
conscience	government	meant	probably	thorough
crowded	grammar	necessary	psychology	thought
definite	height	nervous	pursue	tired
describe	Illegal	occasion	reference	until
desperate	immediately	opinion	rhythm	weight
different	Important	optimist	ridiculous	written

Key Takeaways

- Accurate, error-free spelling enhances your credibility with the reader.
- Mastering the rules of spelling may help you become a better speller.
- Knowing the commonly misused homonyms may prevent spelling errors.
- Studying the list of commonly misspelled words in this chapter, or studying a list of your own, is one way to improve your spelling skills.

This page titled 5.7: Diction and Spelling (Part 2) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kathryn Crowther et al. (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

INDEX

P

plagiarism
4.8: Documenting Your Source Material

S

subordination
5.1: Syntax (Part 2)

This page titled Index is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

GLOSSARY

Abstract – A brief summary of a longer text, usually used in academic papers to present the main idea and findings.

Active Voice – A sentence structure where the subject performs the action (e.g., "The writer composed the essay").

Adjective – A word that describes or modifies a noun (e.g., *clear*, *important*, *academic*).

Adverb – A word that modifies a verb, adjective, or another adverb (e.g., *quickly*, *very*, *carefully*).

Argument – A reasoned claim or set of claims supported by evidence intended to persuade an audience.

Audience – The specific group of readers or viewers a writer addresses.

Brainstorming – A method of generating ideas in a free-flowing manner before organizing them into a structure.

Cause and Effect – A rhetorical mode that explains relationships between actions/events and their consequences.

Citation – Formal reference to a source of information, used to give credit and avoid plagiarism.

Clause – A group of words containing a subject and verb; can be independent (a complete sentence) or dependent (incomplete).

Classification – A writing technique that groups subjects into categories based on shared characteristics.

Cliché – An overused phrase or idea that has lost its original impact or meaning.

Clarity – The quality of being easily understood; a key goal in academic and professional writing.

Coherence – Logical flow and unity among ideas in a paragraph or essay.

Conclusion – The final paragraph or section of an essay, which summarizes the main ideas and reinforces the thesis.

Connotation – The emotional or cultural meaning associated with a word, beyond its dictionary definition.

Content – The ideas, arguments, and evidence presented in a piece of writing.

Context – The circumstances or background that influence the meaning of a text.

Conventions – Accepted rules in writing regarding grammar, punctuation, formatting, and style.

Counterargument – An opposing viewpoint presented to strengthen a writer's argument by addressing and refuting it.

Credibility – The reliability or trustworthiness of a source or writer.

Diction – The choice and use of words in writing, which affects tone, clarity, and audience engagement.

Description – A rhetorical mode using sensory details to create vivid imagery or convey a mood.

Drafting – The stage of the writing process when a writer produces a complete version of a text.

Editing – Refining a draft to correct surface-level issues such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Essay – A short piece of writing on a particular subject, usually expressing the writer's argument or perspective.

Evidence – Support for an argument, claim, or thesis, drawn from facts, examples, statistics, or expert opinions.

Expository Writing – Writing that explains, informs, or clarifies, using facts rather than opinions.

Fragment – An incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, verb, or complete thought.

Freewriting – A prewriting strategy where a writer writes continuously for a set period without concern for grammar or structure.

Grammar – The system of rules governing the structure of sentences, including syntax, punctuation, and word use.

Hook – An engaging opening sentence or question designed to capture the reader's attention.

Introduction – The opening section of an essay, which presents the topic, background, and thesis.

Logical Fallacy – An error in reasoning that weakens an argument (e.g., slippery slope, ad hominem).

Narration – A rhetorical mode that tells a story or relates a sequence of events.

Note-taking – The practice of recording key ideas from readings or lectures for later reference in writing.

Outlining – Creating a structured plan that organizes main ideas and supporting details before drafting.

Paragraph – A unit of writing made up of related sentences focused on a single idea.

Paraphrasing – Rewriting source information in your own words while preserving the original meaning.

Passive Voice – A sentence structure where the subject receives the action (e.g., "The essay was written by the student").

Peer Review – A process in which classmates or colleagues provide feedback on each other's drafts to improve content and clarity.

Plagiarism – The act of using someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution.

Point of View – The perspective from which a text is written (e.g., first person, third person).

Prewriting – The stage of the writing process involving idea generation and planning.

Process Essay – A mode of writing that explains how something works or how to do something, step-by-step.

Pronoun – A word that takes the place of a noun (e.g., *he*, *she*, *they*, *it*).

Purpose – The reason for writing a text, such as to inform, persuade, entertain, or explain.

Quotation – The exact words taken from a source and enclosed in quotation marks.

Revising – The process of improving a draft by rethinking ideas, organization, and clarity.

Rhetoric – The art of effective or persuasive communication, especially in writing and speaking.

Rhetorical Mode – A pattern or structure for organizing writing, such as narration, description, or argumentation.

Run-on Sentence – Two or more independent clauses joined without proper punctuation or conjunction.

Sentence Variety – The use of different sentence structures to enhance writing style and readability.

Source – Any book, article, website, or document used to gather information for research writing.

Structure – The arrangement of ideas and paragraphs in a coherent, logical manner.

Summary – A brief restatement of the main points of a text in the reader's own words.

Syntax – The arrangement of words and phrases to form grammatically correct sentences.

Thesis Statement – A single, concise sentence that clearly expresses the central argument or focus of an essay.

Tone – The writer's attitude toward the subject or audience, conveyed through word choice and style.

Topic Sentence – The sentence in a paragraph that expresses the main idea of that paragraph.

Transition – A word, phrase, or sentence that connects ideas and helps maintain flow in writing.

Verb – A word that expresses an action or a state of being.

Voice (Writer's Voice) – The distinctive tone and style that comes through in a writer's work, often influenced by diction and sentence structure.

Works Cited / References – A list of sources cited in a paper, formatted according to a style guide like MLA or APA.

This page titled Glossary is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.