ENGLISH COMPOSITION



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Harrisburg Area Community College

English Composition

Karen Woodring

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Planning for Success in College

1.1: College Attendance and Communication

1.2: Emailing Your Professor - Ten Tips

1.3: Participating in Online Discussions

1.4: Writing for College

1.5: What is Academic Writing

1.6: Your Role as a Learner

2: Really? Writing? Again?

2.1: Yes. Writing. Again.

2.2: College Writing is Different

2.3: Academic Style

3: What Does the Professor Want? Understanding the Assignment

3.1: Writing for Whom? Writing for What?

3.2: So What Do Professors Want?

3.3: The Prompt- What Does “Analyze” Mean Anyway?

3.4: Rubrics as Road Maps

4: Reading, Interpretation, and Text Wrestling

4.1: Techniques

4.2: Activities

4.3: Student samples

4.4: What’s Critical About Critical Thinking?

5: The Writing Process

5.1: Introduction

5.2: Understanding the Writing Process

5.3: Why It Matters- Writing Process

5.4: Prewriting

5.4.1: Prewriting

5.4.1.1: Prewriting Strategies

5.4.1.1.1: What Is Brainstorming?

5.4.1.1.2: What is Clustering?

5.4.1.1.3: What is Freewriting?

5.4.1.2: Strategies for Narrowing a Topic

5.4.1.3: Rhetorical Situation

5.4.1.4: Working Thesis Statement

5.4.1.5: What is an Annotated Bibliography?

5.4.1.6: Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

5.5: Drafting

5.5.1: Organizing and Writing your Draft

5.5.1.1: Moving From Outline to Draft

5.5.1.2: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme

5.5.1.3: Types of Essays and Suggested Structures

5.5.1.4: The First Draft is the Ugliest

5.5.1.5: Constructing and revising a thesis statement

5.5.1.6: Opening Paragraphs

5.5.1.7: In Today's World ...

5.5.1.8: Conclusions

5.6: Revising and Editing

5.6.1: Revising and Editing

5.6.1.1: General Revision Points to Consider

5.6.1.2: Points for Successful Revision

5.6.1.3: General Editing Points to Consider

5.6.1.4: Editing for clarity and conciseness

6: Types of Essays

6.1: Narration

6.1.1: Narration

6.1.2: Section Introduction- Telling a Story

6.1.3: Techniques

6.1.4: Tips on Writing the Narrative

6.1.5: Activities

6.1.6: Model Texts by Student Authors

6.1.7: Section Introduction- Reflecting on an Experience

6.1.8: Techniques

6.1.9: Sample Student Essay

6.2: The Causal Analysis Essay

6.2.1: Why Write a Causal Analysis or Cause/Effect Essay?

6.2.2: Cause and Effect

6.2.3: Organizing the Causal Analysis Essay

6.2.4: Tips for Writing the Causal Analysis

6.2.5: Sample Student Essays

6.3: Persuasion

6.3.1: Why Write an Argument Essay?

6.3.2: Elements of Rhetorical Appeals in persuasion

6.3.3: The Basics of Argument

6.3.4: The Fallacies of Argument
6.3.5: Persuasive Writing Tips
6.3.6: How to Write an Argument Essay
6.3.7: Incorporating Facts, Opinions, and Visuals to Persuade
6.3.8: Sample Professional Essays
6.3.9: Sample Student Essays
6.3.10: Model Texts by Student Authors

7: Avoiding Plagiarism

7.1: Avoiding Plagiarism
7.2: Incorporating Sources to Support your Thesis
7.3: Incorporating Sources
7.4: Principles
7.5: Integrating Source Material and Signal Phrases
7.6: Self Check on MLA citations and avoiding plagiarism

8: Handbook - Sentence Variety and Grammar

8.1: Fragments and Run-Ons
8.2: Coordination and Subordination
8.3: Subject-Verb Agreement
8.4: Verb Tense
8.5: Active vs. Passive Voice
8.6: Voice
8.7: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers
8.8: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers
8.9: Parallelism
8.10: Word Choice
8.10.1: Homonyms
8.10.2: Homonyms
8.10.3: Commonly Confused Words
8.10.4: Commonly Misspelled Words
8.10.5: Slang, Cliche, and Overly General Words
8.10.6: The Dilemma of Gendered Language in English

9: Handbook - Punctuation, Capitalization, and Mechanics

9.1: Italics and Quotation Marks
9.2: Semi-Colon
9.3: Colon
9.4: Apostrophe
9.5: Capitalization
9.6: Capitalization
9.7: Commas

9.8: Comma—Six Main Uses
9.9: Semicolons and Colons
9.10: Apostrophes
9.11: Quotation Marks
9.12: Hyphens and Dashes
9.13: Parentheses and Capitalization

Index

Glossary

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1: PLANNING FOR SUCCESS IN COLLEGE

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to achieve the following after reading this chapter:

- Understand the habits, behaviors, mindsets, perspectives and overall college success skills students need to practice to achieve academic goals.
- Use skills to communicate effectively, proactively, diplomatically, professionally, and in a timely manner with instructors and peers.
- Understand the top nine intellectual standards for quality thinking, speaking, and writing and apply them to college studies.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the differences between “growth” and “fixed” mindsets and of how to apply the growth mindset for greater college success.

1.1: College Attendance and Communication

1.2: Emailing Your Professor - Ten Tips

1.3: Participating in Online Discussions

1.4: Writing for College

1.5: What is Academic Writing

1.6: Your Role as a Learner

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1.1: College Attendance and Communication

It's About Time: Attendance and "Presence"

In elementary school, children are reminded to "stay on task" and focus on classroom activities. However, college students often need to remind themselves of this as well—to maintain focus and develop the set of skills needed to help them find success in college courses and achieve their goals.

College students are expected to demonstrate independence, responsibility, and relationship-building skills. While elementary-school students are dropped off and picked up from school by adults, college students are now the adults and are on their own. Adults make decisions about being early or on time to classes and meetings and often need to balance the shifting priorities of home life, work life, and school life.

For college students, whatever their age, the first year in college is a big transition and a learning experience in itself. Many students find themselves unable to catch up after missing even a single class. Class time is learning time. Online students often struggle more because they are not prepared to set time aside for the following, which schools and parents may have done in the past:

- reading the textbook (and applying that knowledge to assignments)
- reading course content and/or watching course videos
- participating in course discussions
- completing assignments (including planning/prewriting, writing, and revising and editing)
- attending office hours to meet with the professor
- meeting with the class tutor/using the writing center

In every class session, whether online (or remote) or in person, instructors cover course content, and students are invited (and expected) to think about the information, take notes, and participate in class discussions. Instructors, regardless of the level and subject they teach, want their students to learn things of value and that extend beyond the classroom and grade into the professional and the wider world. Most instructors put concerted and contemplative time and effort into what will become their teaching time, so they expect students to be in class to gain all they can.

However, sometimes students are absent when unforeseen events and challenges occur. So from the very first day of a student's college career, the student needs to be courageous and conscientious, to contact instructors and proactively notify them in advance of every absence, to express regret, and to show a commitment to moving forward. This is particularly critical if colleges use an automatic drop or withdrawal system that cancels students' registration if they are absent for two straight weeks.

Whether via email, phone call, text, or even in person, students should notify all their instructors about any potential missed day of class. Regardless of the notification method, students shouldn't ask what they missed. For example, in the email text below, line 3 is a faux pas.

1 Good afternoon, Professor McKenna.

2 I had a family emergency today and was unable to make it to campus.

3 Did I miss anything important? If so, is there a time I could meet with you?

4 I look forward to your response.

5 Josh McDonald

6 English 100, Section 006, Tuesday & Thursday, 3:00 p.m.–4:15 p.m.

7 Cell: 777-123-4567

Students can be certain that "something important" was definitely covered that day in class and that it's not the instructor's responsibility to teach it twice; however, reaching out with a politely worded email shows interest and responsibility on the

student's part.

Absences and Connecting to Help Each Other Recover Time Lost

It's the student's responsibility to connect with the class community and find out what she or he missed. Early in the semester, students should make acquaintance with at least one classmate, exchange contact information, and agree to share important information with each other if one is absent. It's important. Whenever students are absent for any amount of time in class, they have lost important instructional time and content.

Attending and being fully present involves making a commitment of time. Students and instructors also commit to each other—students to students, students to instructors, and instructors to students. Class is time for mutual respect, thoughtfulness, and kindness. Students should aim to build a sense of community and belonging. They should enter the classroom each day with a positive outlook. It's not always easy; sometimes it's nearly impossible. But when things are difficult, a community cares for its members. All colleges are communities filled with people and programs to help students get the assistance and guidance they need.

Absences, Deadlines, Tardies, Leaving Early

Within some academic programs or courses, even one absence may result in failing the course. In general, college students must be aware of the attendance policies (i.e., policies regarding absences, tardies, and "leaving early") indicated within each course syllabus and the college or university catalog. Double-check the syllabus for each course every semester of college. Students who know they will be absent should always contact instructors ahead of time (i.e., a month, a week, a day, or an hour before class), depending on the policies..

A missed class does not necessarily change a due date for an assignment. Students should read the course syllabus and know their instructor's policies for absences and late work. For example, if a student misses three classes without any reasonable explanations, notifications, or formal paperwork, what happens to the overall course grade? Students should know the answer after the first day of class.

Tardiness in a face to face or remote class may be equivalent to absence. Critically important activities often happen during the first few minutes of class, including the taking of attendance. Some instructors will count all tardies as absences and/or deduct points for each tardy. Leaving early carries the same issues as being tardy. Some students mistakenly assume that "attending" class means arriving to the class during the scheduled time, not being present and attentive for the entire class period. It is not acceptable to arrive or leave class at their convience.It is not okay. Even when students think their professors don't notice students leaving, instructors and do pay attention. Students not present in class could likely miss out on essential course content. However, leaving a class early may be acceptable in extenuating circumstances if a student requests permission and if the instructor approves.

Speaking of "presence," students must be physically, psychologically, and intellectually present in class each period to learn everything they possibly can.

Time Communicating and Attending to Email and Learning Management Systems

Before the semester begins, students would do well to familiarize themselves with their campus email system and respective learning management system (LMS). Instructors and students use their campus LMS in a variety of ways. It's important for students to ask questions about how instructors will use the LMS and how they wish to be contacted.

The Syllabus: Words to Live By

Syllabi created for college-level courses are likely to be much longer than students have previously encountered. A course syllabus is a multiple-page document that instructors provide to students during the first few days of class. If one stays enrolled in a course, both student and instructor are expected to follow the syllabus, which usually provides the following critically important information:

- Course number, title, schedule, and final exam date and time
- Instructor's name, contact information, and office hours
- Learning Outcomes/Objectives (LOs) or goals (sometimes called Student Learning Outcomes [SLOs] or Program Learning Outcomes [PLOs], which vary amongst college and universities): Students should highlight these and keep them in mind as a checklist of goals they should meet, concepts they should learn, and skills they should demonstrate over the semester and certainly by the end of the course.
- Required materials (e.g., books, email access, computer access)
- General course tasks
- Course assignments (e.g., homework) and assessments (e.g., quizzes, exams), including formatting of written work
- Daily and/or weekly class schedule
- General course policies (e.g., attendance and participation, academic integrity, grading and late work, and suggested study times per week)
- Campus-wide support services (e.g., a writing center, learning assistance center, counseling center, health clinic, Title IX support center, and LGBTQ+ support center)
- College and university policies, rules, and guidelines

Students should read each syllabus on the first day they receive it so they are clear about all that will be expected of them for the rest of the semester.

Managing Time

It often seems the older people get, the busier their lives become. These days, increasingly more students can't complete a degree without also having to work at least one job. Add family needs into the mix, and it becomes a situation in which time can seem difficult to manage, and responsibilities in life can feel overwhelming. "Overwhelming," in fact, is a word college students often use. College is interesting, fun, exciting, and full of new ideas, and exists as a path to fulfill students' dreams, but it requires time, attention, and energy.

To feel empowered and in control of one's life, students need to proactively manage their time and life—instead of just letting life happen to them. It helps to be clear about expectations, to plan ahead, to stay organized, to anticipate any complications, and to create a schedule that works. The first step to creating a schedule is knowing where one already spends time. To learn more about tracking your time and later creating a reasonable schedule to help you manage your time to meet your commitments to work, family, home, health/wellness, and friends/fun, check out Laura Vanderkam's information here (https://lauravanderkam.com/start-here/). Many students benefit from creating a weekly hourly plan, whether digital or paper. Organizational strategies help maintain control over time.

Making Appointments with Instructors and Keeping Them

Meeting with instructors helps students obtain or process content that is significant for getting the most out of a course, but they also demonstrate a student's interest in the content and commitment to doing well in the class. Students should prepare questions beforehand and be prepared to take notes on anything the instructor offers that seems especially poignant or helpful.

If an appointment is missed, an apology is surely due. But it's important to remember that everyone misses a meeting now and then, and all one can do is apologize and try not to miss a second one.

Growth Mindset

In 2007, Dr. Carol Dweck and her team of researchers studied students' attitudes about success and failure. They noticed that some students were able to deal with failure better and rebound relatively quickly while others were crushed by even the smallest of setbacks. Essentially, they determined that students who believe they can become smarter understand that making the effort can get them there. Students who believe that their intelligence is already fixed fear trying in case they prove that they aren't as smart as they think. They aren't interested in working harder. As such, Dweck coined the terms "growth mindset" and "fixed mindset" to describe how people feel about their ability to learn.

Scientists and researchers continue to study human behavior and brain activity, seeking an understanding about how and why humans succeed or fail at their endeavors, be they academic, professional, social, or even romantic. Researchers consider the way habits are formed and can be broken, the reasons for and the effects of growth versus fixed mindsets, and the role of self-

discipline in achievement.

In a 2015 interview, a year after her 2014 TED talk, Dweck revisits this concept. She states, "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. . . . The key is to get students to tune in to that growth mindset (Dweck, "Carol Dweck").

The takeaway from Dweck's research and conclusions is important for all college students to consider. Where do they see themselves on the scale? They can think about ways to nurture themselves through challenging times, and reach out to instructors and anyone else who can show them how the "brains," talent, and potential for growth already exists in every individual.

Letters of Recommendation or Reference (LOR): Ask!

Through the course of a student's college career, many situations will arise for which the student might need a letter of recommendation (or "letter of reference"), sometimes referred to as an "LOR." Whether it be for a scholarship, an internship, study abroad, a job, or a graduate program, letters of recommendation, reference, or support are key for students and should be written by someone whom the student appreciates and trusts.

Once a student determines which instructor might be an ideal letter writer, the student should craft a formal email that includes the following elements:

- A pleasant greeting (e.g., "Good afternoon, Professor McKenna.")
- A sentence of well-wishes. (e.g., "I hope your week is moving along nicely.")
- An explanation of the email's purpose (e.g., "I'm writing to you today because I am applying for graduate school, and I would like to see if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me.")
- An understanding of the instructor's busy schedule (e.g., "At this point in the semester, I am sure that you have many important responsibilities that require your time.")
- A sincere wish for their assistance (e.g., "However, if you could possibly find the time to support me with such a letter, I would be sincerely grateful.")
- A closing line (e.g., "I look forward to your response. Regardless, please know how much I have valued you as a teacher and mentor.")
- On separate lines: a pleasant closing, student's full name, course number and title, semester dates and times the student attended the professor's class (e.g., "With gratitude, Jaden Bennett, English 100, Composition I, Fall 2020, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:30 a.m.—8:45 a.m.")

If the instructor agrees, it's good practice to immediately send a follow up email with all important information including letter due dates and the recipient's name and address, along with any other essential information.

The letter-writer should be contacted at least one week before the letter must be received.

It's a good idea to deliver a handwritten card of thanks regardless of whether the overall results were as wished.

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1.2: Emailing Your Professor - Ten Tips

1. Put your class/section in the subject line, followed by the nature of the communication. (ENGL 151:04 Illness)
2. Use an appropriate standard greeting, such as “Dear Professor Shaw” or “Good Morning.” Never “Hey.”
3. Keep the message on point. “My question about today’s assignment is this:”
4. Write in standard English—no “textspeak” or slang.
5. Always sign your name at the end (full name if you are unknown to the recipient or first name if you are known).
6. Never ask your professor if you missed anything important; of course you have.
7. Don’t share too much personal detail if you miss class. An absence is an absence.
8. If you will be missing class, always ask what you need to do to keep current.
9. Never forward jokes, memes, or chain letters to your professor.
10. Make readers want to respond. Your email is a reflection of you, your work habits, and your professionalism.

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1.3: Participating in Online Discussions

Many college courses provide students with opportunities to exchange ideas with their peers and professors in online forums. If you are required to participate in online discussions, make sure your posts are civil, thoughtful, and well-edited.

The student exchange on the next page comes from an online sociology course. The students were asked to define sociological concepts. In addition, students were required to refer to the textbook to support their points.

You'll notice the students included references for their textbook. Usually references have a hanging indent. Because this was posted in a Moodle discussion board, however, hanging indents were not required. Otherwise, APA citations are correct.

Exercise/Discussion:

1. Where do these students use specific examples to support their ideas?
2. Is there evidence that these students have learned anything from this reading assignment?
3. How do these writers exhibit civility or promote further discussion?
4. In what ways do these students personalize the course material?
5. How is this discussion different from forums in which you've participated?

Sociology Concepts

By Jennifer L.—Wednesday, 15 February 2017, 1:26 PM

I chose to explain social construction, microsociology, and the sociological imagination for this assignment. These terms were all new to me. I find them interesting and think they are important to understanding sociology.

Social construction is "an idea or practice that a group of people agree exists. It is maintained over time by people taking its existence for granted" (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr, 2016, p. 7). Many people believe that the ideas we accept are natural truths. However, according to Giddens et al. (2016), sociology teaches us that "in many ways we are freer than we think" (p. 7). Sociology points out that many behaviors thought of as biological, are actually a result of social construction (Giddens et al., 2016).

According to Introduction to Sociolog , microsociology focuses on everyday behavior during small group or individual interactions, whereas macrosociology analyzes patterns in large-scale groups, organizations, or social systems (Giddens et al., 2016). A macrosociologist and a microsociologist would analyze different settings, e.g. a food court, differently.

The textbook, Introduction to Sociology , discusses the work of C. Wright Mills, who stated in The Sociological Imagination , that "each of us lives in a very small orbit," limited by the social situations of our daily encounters (as cited in Giddens et al., 2016, p. 5).

Reference

Giddens, A., Duneier, M., Appelbaum, R. P., & Carr, D. (2016). Introduction to sociology (10th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Re: Sociology Concepts

By Steven R. – Thursday, 16 February 2017, 4:15 PM

Your explanation helped me understand these concepts better, Jennifer. I also wrote about the sociological imagination. I had not thought about this whole idea before taking this class and find it interesting. Sociologists believe that we can understand problems like poverty, unemployment, and money troubles by looking at the social structure in our society. If we develop a sociological understanding, we stop looking at these types of troubles as simply personal, and instead start to understand them as larger, public issues, perhaps resulting from policies, and applying to many people in society (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr, 2016).

Reference

Giddens, A., Duneier, M., Appelbaum, R. P., & Carr, D. (2016). Introduction to sociology (10th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

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1.4: Writing for College

Article links:

“Writing in College” by Joseph M. Williams and Lawrence McEnerney

Chapter Preview

- Explain argument as a key concept in writing.
- Interpret the key requirements of a writing assignment.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=32

Writing in College

by Joseph M. Williams and Lawrence McEnerney

Part 1. Some crucial differences between high school and college writing

From high school to college

Some students make very smooth transitions from writing in high school to writing in college, and we heartily wish all of you an easy passage. But other students are puzzled and frustrated by their experiences in writing for college classes. Only months earlier your writing was winning praise; now your instructors are dissatisfied, saying that the writing isn’t quite “there” yet, saying that the writing is “lacking something.” You haven’t changed–your writing is still mechanically sound, your descriptions are accurate, you’re saying smart things. But they’re still not happy. Some of the criticism is easy to understand: it’s easy to predict that standards at college are going to be higher than in high school. But it is not just a matter of higher standards: Often, what your instructors are asking of you is not just something *better*, but something *different*. If that’s the case, then you won’t succeed merely by being more intelligent or more skillful at doing what you did in high school. Instead, you’ll need to direct your skills and your intelligence

to a new task.

We should note here that a college is a big place and that you'll be asked to use writing to fulfill different tasks. You'll find occasions where you'll succeed by summarizing a reading accurately and showing that you understand it. There may be times when you're invited to use writing to react to a reading, speculate about it. Far more often–like every other week–you will be asked to *analyze* the reading, to make a worthwhile *claim* about it that is not obvious (*state a thesis* means almost the same thing), to support your claim with good reasons, all in four or five pages that are organized to present an *argument* . (If you did that in high school, write your teachers a letter of gratitude.)

Argument: a key feature of college writing

Now by "***argument***" we do not mean a dispute over a loud stereo. In college, an argument is something less contentious and more systematic: It is a set of statements coherently arranged to offer three things that experienced readers expect in essays that they judge to be thoughtful:

- They expect to see a *claim* that would encourage them to say, "That's interesting. I'd like to know more."
- They expect to see *evidence, reasons* for your claim, evidence that would encourage them to agree with your claim, or at least to think it plausible.
- They expect to see that you've thought about *limits* and *objections* to your claim. Almost by definition, an interesting claim is one that can be reasonably challenged. Readers look for answers to questions like "But what about . . . ?" and "Have you considered . . . ?"

This kind of argument is less like disagreeable wrangling, more like an amiable and lively conversation with someone whom you respect and who respects you; someone who is interested in what you have to say, but will not agree with your claims just because you state them; someone who wants to hear your reasons for believing your claims and also wants to hear answers to their questions.

At this point, some students ask why they should be required to *convince* anyone of anything. "After all," they say, "we are all entitled to our opinions, so all we should have to do is express them clearly. Here's my opinion. Take it or leave it." This point of view both misunderstands the nature of argument and ignores its greatest value.

It is true that we are all entitled to our opinions and that we have no duty to defend them. But universities hold as their highest value not just the pursuit of new knowledge and better understanding, but the sharing of that knowledge. We write not only to state what we think, but also to show why others might agree with it and why it matters. We also know that whatever it is we think, it is never the entire truth. Our conclusions are partial, incomplete, and always subject to challenge. So we write in a way that allows others to test our reasoning: we present our best thinking as a series of claims, reasons, and responses to imagined challenges, so that readers can see not only what we think, but whether they ought to agree.

And that's all an argument is–not wrangling, but a serious and focused conversation among people who are intensely interested in getting to the bottom of things *cooperatively*.

Those values are also an integral part of your education in college. For four years, you are asked to read, do research, gather data, analyze it, think about it, and then communicate it to readers in a form in which enables them to asses it and use it. You are asked to do this not because we expect you all to become professional scholars, but because in just about any profession you pursue, you will do research, think about what you find, make decisions about complex matters, and then explain those decisions–usually in writing–to others who have a stake in your decisions being sound ones. In an Age of Information, what most professionals do is research, think, and make arguments. (And part of the value of doing your own thinking and writing is that it makes you much better at evaluating the thinking and writing of others.)

In the next few pages, we're going to walk you through a process of creating an argument in a Humanities or Social Science paper. Note that we're describing "a" process and not "the" process. We're not describing the way that everyone does go about writing an argument. We're certainly not describing the way everyone must go about writing an argument. Further, we can't cover everything, and some of your teachers will expect something other than what we describe here. There are even some differences between how you write papers in Humanities and in the Social Sciences. But within all these limits, we can lay some groundwork for writing college papers.

We begin with the assignment that gets you started; then we discuss some ways to plan your paper so that you don't waste too much time on false starts. We conclude with some strategies for drafting and revising, especially revising, because the most productive work on a paper begins after you have gotten your ideas out of the warm and cozy incubator of your own mind and

into the cold light of day.

Interpreting assignments: a guide to professors' expectations

Not all of your instructors will be equally clear about what they expect of your paper. Some will tell you in detail what to read, how to think about it, and how to organize your paper, but others will ask a general question just to see what you can do with it. Some instructors will expect you to stay close to the assignment, penalizing you if you depart from it; others will encourage you to strike out on your own. Some few instructors may want you to demonstrate only that you have read and understood a reading, but most will want you to use your understanding of the reading as a jumping-off point for an analysis and an argument.

So your first step in writing an assigned paper occurs well before you begin writing: You must know what your instructor expects. Start by assuming that, unless you see the words "Summarize or paraphrase what X says about . . . ," your instructor is unlikely to want just a summary. Beyond this point, however, you have to become a kind of anthropologist, reading the culture of your particular class to understand what is said, what is not, and what is intended.

Start by looking carefully at the words of the assignment. If it is phrased in any of these ways, one crucial part of your task has been done for you:

- "Agree or disagree: 'Freud misunderstood the feminine mind when he wrote . . . .'"
- "Was Lear justified in castigating Cordelia when she refused to . . . ?"
- "Discuss whether Socrates adequately answered the charge that he corrupted the youth of Athens."

For questions like these, you start (but it's only a start) by considering two opposing claims: Freud understood the feminine mind or did not, Lear was or was not justified, Socrates did or did not answer the charges against him. For reasons we will discuss below, you will *not* want the claim of your paper to be merely yes or no, he did or he didn't. But an assignment like this can make it easier to get started because you can immediately begin to find and assess data from your readings. You can look at passages from the reading and consider how they would support one of the claims. (Remember: this is only a start. You do not want to end up with a claim that says nothing more than "Freud did (or did not) understand the feminine mind." "Lear was (or was not) justified in castigating Cordelia " "Socrates did (or did not) adequately answer the charge.")

More likely, however, your assignments will be less specific. They won't suggest opposite claims. Instead, they'll give you a reasonably specific sense of subject matter and a reasonably specific sense of your task:

- "illustrate," "explain," "analyze," "evaluate," "compare and contrast,"
- "Discuss the role that the honor plays in *The Odyssey*. "
- "Show how Molière exploits comic patterns in a scene from *Tartuffe*."

None of these assignments implies a main point or claim that you can directly import into your paper. You can't just claim that "honor does play a role in *The Odyssey*" or that "Molière does exploit comic patterns in *Tartuffe*." After all, if the instructor has asked you to discuss *how* Molière used comic patterns, she presumably already believes that he *did* use them. You get no credit for asserting the existence of something we already know exists.

Instead, these assignments ask you to spend four or five pages explaining the results of an analysis. Words such as "show how" and "explain" and "illustrate" do *not* ask you to summarize a reading. They ask you to show how the reading is put together, how it works. If you asked someone to show you how your computer worked, you wouldn't be satisfied if they simply summarized: "This is the keyboard, this is the monitor, this is the printer." You already know the summary–now you want to know how the thing does what it does. These assignments are similar. They ask you to identify parts of things–parts of an argument, parts of a narrative, parts of a poem; then show how those parts fit together (or work against one another) to create some larger effect.

But in the course of so doing, you can't just grind out four or five pages of discussion, explanation, or analysis. It may seem strange, but even when you're asked to "show how" or "illustrate," you're still being asked to make an argument. You must shape and focus that discussion or analysis so that it supports a ***claim*** that you discovered and formulated and that all of your discussion and explanation develops and supports. We'll talk more about claims — also known as points — in later sections.

A third kind of assignment is simultaneously least restrictive and most intimidating. These assignments leave it up to you to decide not only what you will claim but what you will write about and even what kind of analysis you will do: "Analyze the role of a character in *The Odyssey*." That is the kind of assignment that causes many students anxiety because they must motivate their research almost entirely on their own. To meet this kind of assignment, the best advice we can give is to read with your mind open to things that puzzle you, that make you wish you understood something better.

Now that advice may seem almost counterproductive; you may even think that being puzzled or not understanding something testifies to your intellectual failure. Yet almost everything we do in a university starts with someone being puzzled about something, someone with a vague–or specific–dissatisfaction caused by not knowing something that seems important or by wanting to understand something better. The best place to begin thinking about any assignment is with what *you* don't understand but wish you did.

Another key feature of college writing: what's your point?

However different your assignments may seem, most will share one characteristic: in each, you will almost certainly be asked to make a point. Now when we talk about the "point" of your paper, you should understand what we do and do *not* mean. If asked what the point of their paper is, most students answer with something like, "Well, I wanted to write about the way Falstaff plays the role of Prince Hal's father." But that kind of sentence names only your *topic* and an *intention* to write *about* it.

When most of your instructors ask what the point of your paper is, they have in mind something different. By "point" or "claim" (the words are virtually synonymous with *thesis*), they will more often mean the most important s*entence* that you wrote in your essay, a sentence that appears on the page, in black in white; words that you can point to, underline, send on a postcard; a sentence that sums up the most important thing you want to say as a result of your reading, thinking, research, and writing. In that sense, you might state the point of your paper as "Well, I want to show/prove/claim/argue/demonstrate (any of those words will serve to introduce the point) that

"Though Falstaff seems to play the role of Hal's father, he is, in fact, acting more like a younger brother who . . . ."

If you include in your paper what appears after *I want to prove that*, then that's the point of your paper, its main claim that the rest of your paper supports.

But what's a *good* point?

A question just as important as what a point is, though, is what counts as a good one. We will answer that question here, even though it gets us ahead of ourselves in describing the process of writing a paper. Many beginning writers think that writing an essay means thinking up a point or thesis and then finding evidence to support it. But few of us work that way. Most of us begin our research with a question, with a puzzle, something that we don't understand but want to, and maybe a vague sense of what an answer might look like. We hope that out of our early research to resolve that puzzle there emerges a solution to the puzzle, an idea that seems promising, but one that only more research can test. But even if more research supports that developing idea, we aren't ready to say that *that* idea is our claim or point. Instead, we start writing to see whether we can build an argument to support it, suspecting, hoping that in the act of writing we will refine that idea, maybe even change it substantially.

That's why we say we are getting ahead of ourselves in this account of writing a paper, because as paradoxical as it may sound, you are unlikely to know *exactly* what point you will make until *after* you have written the paper in which you made it. So for us to talk about the *quality* of a point now is to get ahead of ourselves, because we haven't even touched on how you might think about drafting your paper, much less revising it. But because everything you do at the beginning aims at finding a good point, it is useful to have a clear idea about what it is you are trying to find, what makes for a good point.

A good point or claim typically has several key characteristics: it says something significant about what you have read, something that helps you and your readers understand it better; it says something that is not obvious, something that your reader didn't already know; it is at least mildly contestable, something that no one would agree with just by reading it; it asserts something that you can plausibly support in five pages, not something that would require a book.

Measured by those criteria, these are *not* good points or claims:

- "*1 Henry IV* by William Shakespeare is a play that raises questions about the nature of kingship and responsibility." Sounds impressive, but who would contest it? Everyone who has read the play already knows that it raises such questions.
- "*Native Son* is one of the most important stories about race relations ever written." Again, your readers probably already agree with this, and if so, why would they read an essay that supported it? Further, are you ready to provide an argument that this point is true? What evidence could you provide to make this argument? Are you prepared to compare the effect of *Native Son* with the effects of other books about race relations?
- "Socrates' argument in *The Apology* is very interesting." Right. So?
- "In this paper I discuss Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean-Corinthian debate in Book I." First, what significant thing does this point tell us about the book? Second, who would contest this (who would argue that you are not going to discuss Thucydides' account?).

None of these is a particularly significant or contestable point, and so none of them qualifies as a good one.

What does qualify as a good claim? These might:

- The three most prominent women in *Heart of Darkness* play key roles in a complex system of parallels: literally as gatekeepers of Africa, representatively as gatekeepers of darkness, and metaphorically as gatekeepers of brutality.
- While Freud argues that followers obey because each has a part of themselves invested in the leader, Blau claims that followers obey in order to avoid punishment. Both neglect the effects of external power.

You should recognize, however, that you will only rarely be able state good points like these *before* you write your first draft. Much more often, you *discover* good points at the end of the process of drafting. Writing is a way of thinking through a problem, of discovering what you want to say. So do not feel that you should begin to write only when you have a fully articulated point in mind. Instead, write to discover and to refine it.

One note on the language of point sentences. If you're like us, you will want your readers to think that your points are terrifically interesting and significant. What almost never accomplishes this is to say: "My point is terrifically interesting and significant." Many writers try to generate a sense of importance for what they write by simply adding some synonym of the word "important:" "An important question to consider . . ." "It is essential to examine . . . " "A crucial concern is whether. . ." This isn't going to work. What convinces readers that a point is important is not the word "important," but the words that tell us the substance of the point. If, during your first draft, you find yourself using words like "important," you should make a note to yourself to come back during your revisions to replace "important" with more substantive language. Then don't forget to do it. It's really important.

Important Concepts

argument

interesting claim

"point" or "claim"

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1.5: What is Academic Writing

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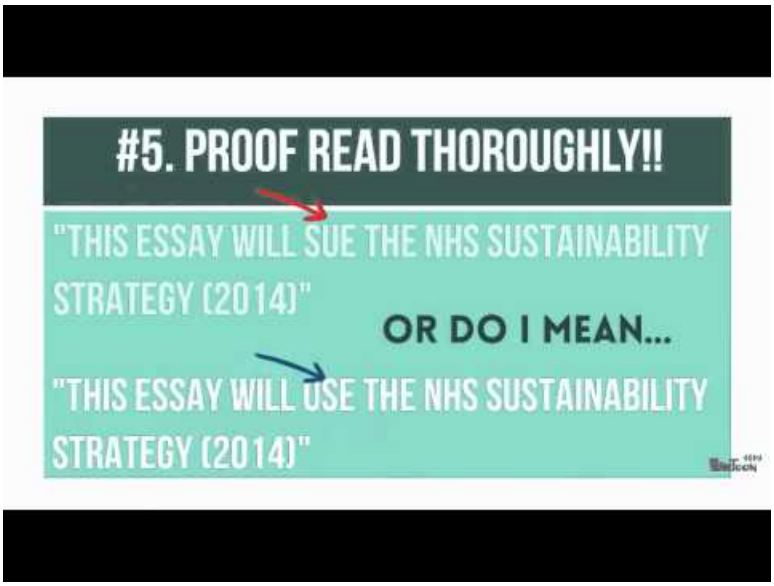
“What Is ‘Academic’ Writing?” by L. Lennie Irvin

“What is an Essay?” provided by Candela Open Courses

“Critical Thinking in College Writing: From the Personal to the Academic” by Gita DasBender

Chapter Preview

- Explore academic writing myths.
- Identify characteristics of academic writing.
- Describe what first-year writing courses are designed to teach.



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What Is “Academic” Writing?

by L. Lennie Irvin

Introduction: The Academic Writing Task

As a new college student, you may have a lot of anxiety and questions about the writing you’ll do in college.* That word “academic,” especially, may turn your stomach or turn your nose. However, with this first year composition class, you begin one of the only classes in your entire college career where you will focus on learning to write. Given the importance of writing as a communication skill, I urge you to consider this class as a gift and make the most of it. But writing is hard, and writing in college may resemble playing a familiar game by completely new rules (that often are unstated). This chapter is designed to introduce

you to what academic writing is like, and hopefully ease your transition as you face these daunting writing challenges.

So here's the secret. Your success with academic writing depends upon how well you understand what you are doing as you write and then how you approach the writing task. Early research done on college writers discovered that whether students produced a successful piece of writing depended largely upon their representation of the writing task. The writers' mental model for picturing their task made a huge difference. Most people as they start college have wildly strange ideas about what they are doing when they write an essay, or worse—they have no clear idea at all. I freely admit my own past as a clueless freshman writer, and it's out of this sympathy as well as twenty years of teaching college writing that I hope to provide you with something useful. So grab a cup of coffee or a diet coke, find a comfortable chair with good light, and let's explore together this activity of academic writing you'll be asked to do in college. We will start by clearing up some of those wild misconceptions people often arrive at college possessing. Then we will dig more deeply into the components of the academic writing situation and nature of the writing task.

Myths about Writing

Though I don't imagine an episode of *MythBusters* will be based on the misconceptions about writing we are about to look at, you'd still be surprised at some of the things people will believe about writing. You may find lurking within you viral elements of these myths—all of these lead to problems in writing.

Myth #1: The "Paint by Numbers" myth

Some writers believe they must perform certain steps in a particular order to write "correctly." Rather than being a lock-step linear process, writing is "***recursive***." That means we cycle through and repeat the various activities of the writing process many times as we write.

Myth #2: Writers only start writing when they have everything figured out

Writing is not like sending a fax! Writers figure out much of what they want to write as they write it. Rather than waiting, get some writing on the page—even with gaps or problems. You can come back to patch up rough spots.

Myth #3: Perfect first drafts

We put unrealistic expectations on early drafts, either by focusing too much on the impossible task of making them perfect (which can put a cap on the development of our ideas), or by making too little effort because we don't care or know about their inevitable problems. Nobody writes perfect first drafts; polished writing takes lots of revision.

Myth #4: Some got it; I don't—the genius fallacy

When you see your writing ability as something fixed or out of your control (as if it were in your genetic code), then you won't believe you can improve as a writer and are likely not to make any efforts in that direction. With effort and study, though, you can improve as a writer. I promise.

Myth #5: Good grammar is good writing

When people say "I can't write," what they often mean is they have problems with grammatical correctness. Writing, however, is about more than just grammatical correctness. Good writing is a matter of achieving your desired effect upon an intended audience. Plus, as we saw in myth #3, no one writes perfect first drafts.

Myth #6: The Five Paragraph Essay

Some people say to avoid it at all costs, while others believe no other way to write exists. With an introduction, three supporting para- graphs, and a conclusion, the five paragraph essay is a format you should know, but one which you will outgrow. You'll have to gauge the particular writing assignment to see whether and how this format is useful for you.

Myth #7: Never use "I"

Adopting this formal stance of objectivity implies a distrust (almost fear) of informality and often leads to artificial, puffed-

up prose. Although some writing situations will call on you to avoid using "I" (for example, a lab report), much college writing can be done in a middle, semi-formal style where it is ok to use "I."

The Academic Writing Situation

Now that we've dispelled some of the common myths that many writers have as they enter a college classroom, let's take a moment to think about the academic writing situation. The biggest problem I see in freshman writers is a poor sense of the writing situation in general. To illustrate this problem, let's look at the difference between speaking and writing.

When we speak, we inhabit the communication situation bodily in three dimensions, but in writing we are confined within the two-dimensional setting of the flat page (though writing for the web—or multimodal writing—is changing all that). Writing resembles having a blindfold over our eyes and our hands tied behind our backs: we can't see exactly whom we're talking to or where we are. Separated from our audience in place and time, we imaginatively have to create this context. Our words on the page are silent, so we must use punctuation and word choice to communicate our tone. We also can't see our audience to gauge how our communication is being received or if there will be some kind of response. It's the same space we share right now as you read this essay. Novice writers often write as if they were mumbling to themselves in the corner with no sense that their writing will be read by a reader or any sense of the context within which their communication will be received.

What's the moral here? Developing your "writer's sense" about communicating within the writing situation is the most important thing you should learn in freshman composition.

Looking More Closely at the "Academic Writing" Situation

Writing in college is a fairly specialized writing situation, and it has developed its own codes and conventions that you need to have a keen awareness of if you are going to write successfully in college. Let's break down the writing situation in college:

Who's your audience?	Primarily the professor and possibly your class- mates (though you may be asked to include a secondary outside audience).
What's the occasion or context?	An assignment given by the teacher within a learning context and designed to have you learn and demonstrate your learning.
What's your message?	It will be your learning or the interpretation gained from your study of the subject matter.
What's your purpose?	To show your learning and get a good grade (or to accomplish the goals of the writing assignment).
What documents/ genres are used?	The essay is the most frequent type of document used.

So far, this list looks like nothing new. You've been writing in school toward teachers for years. What's different in college? Lee Ann Carroll, a professor at Pepperdine University, performed a study of student writing in college and had this description of the kind of writing you will be doing in college:

What are usually called 'writing assignments' in college might more accurately be called 'literacy tasks' because they require much more than the ability to construct correct sentences or compose neatly organized paragraphs with topic sentences Projects calling for high levels of ***critical literacy*** in college typically require knowledge of research skills, ability to read complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame. (3–4)

Academic writing is always a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting. Writing the paper is never "just" the writing part. To be successful in this kind of writing, you must be completely aware of what the professor expects you to do and accomplish with that particular writing task. For a moment, let's explore more deeply the elements of this college writing "literacy task."

Knowledge of Research Skills

Perhaps up to now research has meant going straight to Google and Wikipedia, but college will require you to search for and

find more in-depth information. You'll need to know how to find information in the library, especially what is available from online databases which contain scholarly articles. Researching is also a process, so you'll need to learn how to focus and direct a research project and how to keep track of all your source information. Realize that researching represents a crucial component of most all college writing assignments, and you will need to devote lots of work to this researching.

The Ability to Read Complex Texts

Whereas your previous writing in school might have come generally from your experience, college writing typically asks you to write on unfamiliar topics. Whether you're reading your textbook, a short story, or scholarly articles from research, your ability to write well will be based upon the quality of your reading. In addition to the labor of close reading, you'll need to think critically as you read. That means separating fact from opinion, recognizing biases and assumptions, and making inferences. Inferences are how we as readers connect the dots: an inference is a belief (or statement) about something unknown made on the basis of something known. You smell smoke; you infer fire. They are conclusions or interpretations that we arrive at based upon the known factors we discover from our reading. When we, then, write to argue for these interpretations, our job becomes to get our readers to make the same inferences we have made.

The Understanding of Key Disciplinary Concepts

Each discipline whether it is English, Psychology, or History has its own key concepts and language for describing these important ways of understanding the world. Don't fool yourself that your professors' writing assignments are asking for your opinion on the topic from just your experience. They want to see you apply and use these concepts in your writing. Though different from a multiple-choice exam, writing similarly requires you to demonstrate your learning. So whatever writing assignment you receive, inspect it closely for what concepts it asks you to bring into your writing.

Strategies for Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Responding Critically to New Information

You need to develop the skill of a seasoned traveler who can be dropped in any city around the world and get by. Each writing assignment asks you to navigate through a new terrain of information, so you must develop ways for grasping new subject matter in order, then, to use it in your writing. We have already seen the importance of reading and research for these literacy tasks, but beyond laying the information out before you, you will need to learn ways of sorting and finding meaningful patterns in this information.

In College, Everything's an Argument: A Guide for Decoding College Writing Assignments

Let's restate this complex "literacy task" you'll be asked repeatedly to do in your writing assignments. Typically, you'll be required to write an "essay" based upon your analysis of some reading(s). In this essay you'll need to present an argument where you make a claim (i.e. present a "thesis") and support that claim with good reasons that have adequate and appropriate evidence to back them up. The dynamic of this argumentative task often confuses first-year writers, so let's examine it more closely.

Academic Writing Is an Argument

To start, let's focus on argument. What does it mean to present an "argument" in college writing? Rather than a shouting match between two disagreeing sides, argument instead means a carefully arranged and supported presentation of a viewpoint. Its purpose is not so much to win the argument as to earn your audience's consideration (and even approval) of your perspective. It resembles a conversation between two people who may not hold the same opinions, but they both desire a better understanding of the subject matter under discussion. My favorite analogy, however, to describe the nature of this argumentative stance in college writing is the courtroom. In this scenario, you are like a lawyer making a case at trial that the defendant is not guilty, and your readers are like the jury who will decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty. This jury (your readers) won't just take your word that he's innocent; instead, you must convince them by presenting evidence that proves he is not guilty. Stating your opinion is not enough—you have to back it up too. I like this courtroom analogy for capturing two importance things about academic argument: 1) the value of an organized presentation of your "case," and 2) the crucial element of strong evidence.

Academic Writing Is an Analysis

We now turn our attention to the actual writing assignment and that confusing word "analyze." Your first job when you get a writing assignment is to figure out what the professor expects. This assignment may be explicit in its expectations, but often built into the wording of the most defined writing assignments are implicit expectations that you might not recognize. First, we can say that unless your professor specifically asks you to summarize, you won't write a summary. Let me say that again: don't write a summary unless directly asked to. But what, then, does the professor want? We have already picked out a few of these expectations: You

can count on the instructor expecting you to read closely, research adequately, and write an argument where you will demonstrate your ability to apply and use important concepts you have been studying. But the writing task also implies that your essay will be the result of an analysis. At times, the writing assignment may even explicitly say to write an analysis, but often this element of the task remains unstated.

So what does it mean to analyze? One way to think of an analysis is that it asks you to seek How and Why questions much more than What questions. An analysis involves doing three things:

1. Engage in an open inquiry where the answer is not known at first (and where you leave yourself open to multiple suggestions)
2. Identify meaningful parts of the subject
3. Examine these separate parts and determine how they relate to each other

An ***analysis*** breaks a subject apart to study it closely, and from this inspection, ideas for writing emerge. When writing assignments call on you to analyze, they require you to identify the parts of the subject (parts of an ad, parts of a short story, parts of Hamlet's character), and then show how these parts fit or don't fit together to create some larger effect or meaning. Your interpretation of how these parts fit together constitutes your claim or thesis, and the task of your essay is then to present an argument defending your interpretation as a valid or plausible one to make. My biggest bit of advice about analysis is not to do it all in your head. Analysis works best when you put all the cards on the table, so to speak. Identify and isolate the parts of your analysis, and record important features and characteristics of each one. As patterns emerge, you sort and connect these parts in meaningful ways. For me, I have always had to do this recording and thinking on scratch pieces of paper. Just as critical reading forms a crucial element of the literacy task of a college writing assignment, so too does this analysis process. It's built in.

Three Common Types of College Writing Assignments

We have been decoding the expectations of the academic writing task so far, and I want to turn now to examine the types of assignments you might receive. From my experience, you are likely to get three kinds of writing assignments based upon the instructor's degree of direction for the assignment. We'll take a brief look at each kind of academic writing task.

The *Closed Writing Assignment*

- Is Creon a character to admire or condemn?
- Does your advertisement employ techniques of propaganda, and if so what kind?
- Was the South justified in seceding from the Union?
- In your opinion, do you believe Hamlet was truly mad?

These kinds of writing assignments present you with two counter claims and ask you to determine from your own analysis the more valid claim. They resemble yes-no questions. These topics define the claim for you, so the major task of the writing assignment then is working out the support for the claim. They resemble a math problem in which the teacher has given you the answer and now wants you to "show your work" in arriving at that answer.

Be careful with these writing assignments, however, because often these topics don't have a simple yes/no, either/or answer (despite the nature of the essay question). A close analysis of the subject matter often reveals nuances and ambiguities within the question that your eventual claim should reflect. Perhaps a claim such as, "In my opinion, Hamlet was mad" might work, but I urge you to avoid such a simplistic thesis. This thesis would be better: "I believe Hamlet's unhinged mind borders on insanity but doesn't quite reach it."

The *Semi-Open Writing Assignment*

- Discuss the role of law in Antigone.
- Explain the relationship between character and fate in Hamlet.
- Compare and contrast the use of setting in two short stories.
- Show how the Fugitive Slave Act influenced the Abolitionist Movement.

Although these topics chart out a subject matter for you to write upon, they don't offer up claims you can easily use in your paper. It would be a misstep to offer up claims such as, "Law plays a role in Antigone" or "In Hamlet we can see a relationship between character and fate." Such statements express the obvious and what the topic takes for granted. The question, for example, is not whether law plays a role in Antigone, but rather what sort of role law plays. What is the nature of this role? What influences does it have on the characters or actions or theme? This kind of writing assignment resembles a kind of archaeological dig. The teacher cordons off an area, hands you a shovel, and says dig here and see what you find. Be sure to avoid summary and mere explanation

in this kind of assignment. Despite using key words in the assignment such as “explain,” “illustrate,” analyze,” “discuss,” or “show how,” these topics still ask you to make an argument. Implicit in the topic is the expectation that you will analyze the reading and arrive at some insights into patterns and relationships about the subject. Your eventual paper, then, needs to present what you found from this analysis—the treasure you found from your digging. Determining your own claim represents the biggest challenge for this type of writing assignment.

The *Open Writing Assignment*

- Analyze the role of a character in Dante’s The Inferno.
- What does it mean to be an “American” in the 21st Century?
- Analyze the influence of slavery upon one cause of the Civil War.
- Compare and contrast two themes within *Pride and Prejudice*.

These kinds of writing assignments require you to decide both your writing topic and you claim (or thesis). Which character in the Inferno will I pick to analyze? What two themes in Pride and Prejudice will I choose to write about? Many students struggle with these types of assignments because they have to understand their subject matter well before they can intelligently choose a topic. For instance, you need a good familiarity with the characters in The Inferno before you can pick one. You have to have a solid understanding defining elements of American identity as well as 21st century culture before you can begin to connect them. This kind of writing assignment resembles riding a bike without the training wheels on. It says, “You decide what to write about.” The biggest decision, then, becomes selecting your topic and limiting it to a manageable size.

Picking and Limiting a Writing Topic

Let’s talk about both of these challenges: picking a topic and limiting it. Remember how I said these kinds of essay topics expect you to choose what to write about from a solid understanding of your subject? As you read and review your subject matter, look for things that interest you. Look for gaps, puzzling items, things that confuse you, or connections you see. Something in this pile of rocks should stand out as a jewel: as being “do-able” and interesting. (You’ll write best when you write from both your head and your heart.) Whatever topic you choose, state it as a clear and interesting question. You may or may not state this essay question explicitly in the introduction of your paper (I actually recommend that you do), but it will provide direction for your paper and a focus for your claim since that claim will be your answer to this essay question. For example, if with the Dante topic you decided to write on Virgil, your essay question might be: “What is the role of Virgil toward the character of Dante in The Inferno?” The thesis statement, then, might be this: “Virgil’s predominant role as Dante’s guide through hell is as the voice of reason.” Crafting a solid essay question is well worth your time because it charts the territory of your essay and helps you declare a focused thesis statement.

Many students struggle with defining the right size for their writing project. They chart out an essay question that it would take a book to deal with adequately. You’ll know you have that kind of topic if you have already written over the required page length but only touched one quarter of the topics you planned to discuss. In this case, carve out one of those topics and make your whole paper about it. For instance, with our Dante example, perhaps you planned to discuss four places where Virgil’s role as the voice of reason is evident. Instead of discussing all four, focus your essay on just one place. So your revised thesis statement might be: “Close inspection of Cantos I and II reveal that Virgil serves predominantly as the voice of reason for Dante on his journey through hell.” A writing teacher I had in college said it this way: A well tended garden is better than a large one full of weeds. That means to limit your topic to a size you can handle and support well.

Three Characteristics of Academic Writing

I want to wrap up this section by sharing in broad terms what the expectations are behind an academic writing assignment. Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki conducted research at George Mason University where they asked professors from their university what they thought academic writing was and its standards. They came up with three characteristics:

1. Clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study. (5)
2. The dominance of reason over emotions or sensual perception. (5)
3. An imagined reader who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response. (7)

Your professor wants to see these three things in your writing when they give you a writing assignment. They want to see in your writing the results of your efforts at the various literacy tasks we have been discussing: critical reading, research, and analysis. Beyond merely stating opinions, they also want to see an argument toward an intelligent

audience where you provide good reasons to support your interpretations.

The Format of the Academic Essay

Your instructors will also expect you to deliver a paper that contains particular textual features. The following list contains the characteristics of what I have for years called the "critical essay." Although I can't claim they will be useful for all essays in college, I hope that these features will help you shape and accomplish successful college essays. Be aware that these characteristics are flexible and not a formula, and any particular assignment might ask for something different.

Characteristics of the *Critical Essay*

"Critical" here is not used in the sense of "to criticize" as in find fault with. Instead, "critical" is used in the same way "critical thinking" is used. A synonym might be "interpretive" or "analytical."

1. It is an argument, persuasion essay that in its broadest sense MAKES A POINT and SUPPORTS IT. (We have already discussed this argumentative nature of academic writing at length.)
2. The point ("claim" or "thesis") of a critical essay is interpretive in nature. That means the point is debatable and open to interpretation, not a statement of the obvious. The thesis statement is a clear, declarative sentence that often works best when it comes at the end of the introduction.
3. Organization: Like any essay, the critical essay should have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. As you support your point in the body of the essay, you should "divide up the proof," which means structuring the body around clear primary supports (developed in single paragraphs for short papers or multiple paragraphs for longer papers).
4. Support: (a) The primary source for support in the critical es- say is from the text (or sources). The text is the authority, so using quotations is required. (b) The continuous movement of logic in a critical essay is "assert then support; assert then support." No assertion (general statement that needs proving) should be left without specific support (often from the text(s)).
5. A critical essay will always "document" its sources, distinguishing the use of outside information used inside your text and clarifying where that information came from (following the rules of MLA documentation style or whatever documentation style is required).
6. Whenever the author moves from one main point (primary support) to the next, the author needs to clearly signal to the reader that this movement is happening. This transition sentence works best when it links back to the thesis as it states the topic of that paragraph or section.
7. A critical essay is put into an academic essay format such as the MLA or APA document format.
8. Grammatical correctness: Your essay should have few if any grammatical problems. You'll want to edit your final draft carefully before turning it in.

Conclusion

As we leave this discussion, I want to return to what I said was the secret for your success in writing college essays: Your success with academic writing depends upon how well you understand what you are doing as you write and then how you approach the writing task. Hopefully, you now have a better idea about the nature of the academic writing task and the expectations behind it. Knowing what you need to do won't guarantee you an "A" on your paper—that will take a lot of thinking, hard work, and practice—but having the right orientation toward your college writing assignments is a first and important step in your eventual success.

What is an Essay?

provided by Candela Open Courses

If you were asked to describe an essay in one word, what would that one word be?



Okay, well, in one word, an ***essay*** is an idea.

No idea; no essay.

But more than that, the best essays have *original and insightful ideas.*

Okay, so the first thing we need to begin an essay is an *insightful idea* that we wish to share with the reader.

But original and insightful ideas do not just pop up every day. Where does one find original and insightful ideas?

Let's start here: an idea is an *insight* gained from either a) our personal experiences, or b) in scholarship, from synthesizing the ideas of others to create a new idea.

In this class (except for the last essay) we write ***personal essays***; therefore, we will focus mostly on a) *personal experience* as a source for our ideas.

Life teaches us lessons. We learn from our life experiences. This is how we grow as human beings. So before you start on your essays, reflect on your life experiences by employing one or more of the brainstorming strategies described in this course. Your brainstorming and prewriting assignments are important assignments because remember: *no idea; no essay*. Brainstorming can help you discover an *idea* for your essay. So, ask yourself: What lessons have I learned? What insights have I gained that I can write about and share with my reader? Your reader can learn from you.

Why do we write?

We write to improve our world; it's that simple. We write personal essays to address the most problematic and fundamental question of all: What does it mean to be a human being? By sharing the insights and lessons we have learned from our life experiences we can add to our community's collective wisdom.

We respect the writings of experts. And, guess what; you are an expert! You are the best expert of all on one subject—*your own life experiences*. So when we write personal essays, we research our own life experiences and describe those experiences with rich and compelling language to convince our reader that our idea is valid.

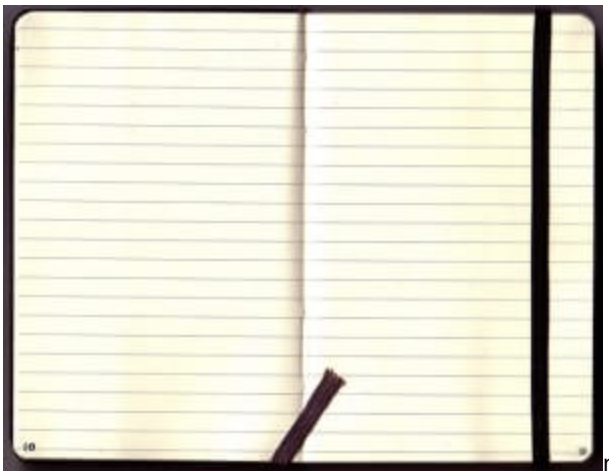
For example:

For your *Narrative essay*: do more than simply relate a series of events. Let the events make a point about the central *idea* you are trying to teach us.

For your ***Example essay***: do more than tell us about your experience. *Show* us your experience. *Describe* your examples in descriptive details so that your reader actually experiences for themselves the central *idea* you wish to teach them.

For the ***Comparison Contrast essay***: do more than simply tell us about the differences and similarities of two things. *Evaluate* those differences and similarities and draw an *idea* about them, so that you can offer your reader some basic insight into the comparison.

Okay, one last comment. Often students say to me: "I am so young; I do not have any



meaningful insights in to life." Okay, well, you may not be able to solve the pressing issues of the day, but think of it this way. What if a younger brother or sister came to you and in an anxious voice said; "I've got to do X. I've never had to do X. You've had some experience with X. Can you give me some advice?" You may have some wisdom and insights from your own life experience with X to share with that person. Don't worry about solving the BIG issues in this class. You can serve the world as well by simply addressing, and bringing to life in words, the problems and life situations that you know best, no matter how mundane. Please notice that with rare exception the essays you will read in this class do *not* cite outside sources. They are all written from the author's actual life experiences. So think of your audience as someone who can learn from your life experiences and write to them and for them.



Critical Thinking in College Writing: From the Personal to the Academic

by Gita DasBender

There is something about the term "***critical thinking***" that makes you draw a blank every time you think about what it means.* It seems so fuzzy and abstract that you end up feeling uncomfortable, as though the term is thrust upon you, demanding an intellectual effort that you may not yet have. But you know it requires you to enter a realm of smart, complex ideas that others have written about and that you have to navigate, understand, and interact with just as intelligently. It's a lot to ask for. It makes you feel like a stranger in a strange land.

As a writing teacher I am accustomed to reading and responding to difficult texts. In fact, I like grappling with texts that have interesting ideas no matter how complicated they are because I understand their value. I have learned through my years of education that what ultimately engages me, keeps me enthralled, is not just grammatically pristine, fluent writing, but writing that forces me to think beyond the page. It is writing where the writer has challenged herself and then offered up that challenge to the reader, like a baton in a relay race. The idea is to run with the baton.

You will often come across critical thinking and analysis as requirements for assignments in writing and upper-level courses in a variety of disciplines. Instructors have varying explanations of what they actually require of you, but, in general, they expect you to respond thoughtfully to texts you have read. The first thing you should remember is not to be afraid of critical thinking. It does *not* mean that you have to criticize the text, disagree with its premise, or attack the writer simply because you feel you must. Criticism is the process of responding to and evaluating ideas, argument, and style so that readers understand how and why you value these items.

Critical thinking is also a process that is fundamental to all disciplines. While in this essay I refer mainly to critical thinking in composition, the general principles behind critical thinking are strikingly similar in other fields and disciplines. In history, for instance, it could mean examining and analyzing primary sources in order to understand the context in which they were written. In the hard sciences, it usually involves careful reasoning, making judgments and decisions, and problem-solving. While critical thinking may be subject-specific, that is to say, it can vary in method and technique depending on the discipline, most of its

general principles such as rational thinking, making independent evaluations and judgments, and a healthy skepticism of what is being read, are common to all disciplines. No matter the area of study, the application of critical thinking skills leads to clear and flexible thinking and a better understanding of the subject at hand.

To be a critical thinker you not only have to have an informed opinion about the text but also a thoughtful response to it. There is no doubt that critical thinking is serious thinking, so here are some steps you can take to become a serious thinker and writer.

Attentive Reading: A Foundation for Critical Thinking

A critical thinker is always a good reader because to engage critically with a text you have to read attentively and with an open mind, absorbing new ideas and forming your own as you go along. Let us imagine you are reading an essay by Annie Dillard, a famous essayist, called "Living like Weasels." Students are drawn to it because the idea of the essay appeals to something personally fundamental to all of us: how to live our lives. It is also a provocative essay that pulls the reader into the argument and forces a reaction, a good criterion for critical thinking. So let's say that in reading the essay you encounter a quote that gives you pause. In describing her encounter with a weasel in Hollins Pond, Dillard says, "I would like to learn, or remember, how to live . . . I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular

. . . but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive" (220). You may not be familiar with language like this. It seems complicated, and you have to stop ever so often (perhaps after every phrase) to see if you understood what Dillard means. You may ask yourself these questions:

- What does "mindlessness" mean in this context?
- How can one "learn something of mindlessness?"
- What does Dillard mean by "purity of living in the physical senses?"
- How can one live "without bias or motive?"

These questions show that you are an attentive reader. Instead of simply glossing over this important passage, you have actually stopped to think about what the writer means and what she expects you to get from it. Here is how I read the quote and try to answer the questions above: Dillard proposes a simple and uncomplicated way of life as she looks to the animal world for inspiration. It is ironic that she admires the quality of "mindlessness" since it is our consciousness, our very capacity to think and reason, which makes us human, which makes us beings of a higher order. Yet, Dillard seems to imply that we need to live instinctually, to be guided by our senses rather than our intellect. Such a "thoughtless" approach to daily living, according to Dillard, would mean that our actions would not be tainted by our biases or motives, our prejudices. We would go back to a primal way of living, like the weasel she observes. It may take you some time to arrive at this understanding on your own, but it is important to stop, reflect, and ask questions of the text whenever you feel stumped by it. Often such questions will be helpful during class discussions and peer review sessions.

When reading any essay, keep track of all the important points the writer makes by jotting down a list of ideas or quotations in a notebook. This list not only allows you to remember ideas that are central to the writer's argument, ideas that struck you in some way or the other, but it also you helps you to get a good sense of the whole reading assignment point by point. In reading Annie Dillard's essay, we come across several points that contribute toward her proposal for better living and that help us get a better understanding of her main argument. Here is a list of some of her ideas that struck me as important:

1. "The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons" (220).
2. "And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (221).
3. "We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse" (221).
4. "A weasel doesn't 'attack' anything; a weasel lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity" (221).
5. "I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you" (221).

These quotations give you a cumulative sense of what Dillard is trying to get at in her essay, that is, they lay out the elements with which she builds her argument. She first explains how the weasel lives, what she learns from observing the weasel, and then prescribes a lifestyle she admires—the central concern of her essay.

Noticing Key Terms and Summarizing Important Quotes

Within the list of quotations above are key terms and phrases that are critical to your understanding of the ideal life as Dillard describes it. For instance, “mindlessness,” “instinct,” “perfect freedom of a single necessity,” “stalk your calling,” “choice,” and “fierce and pointed will” are weighty terms and phrases, heavy with meaning, that you need to spend time understanding. You also need to understand the relationship between them and the quotations in which they appear. This is how you might work on each quotation to get a sense of its meaning and then come up with a statement that takes the key terms into account and expresses a general understanding of the text:

Quote 1: Animals (like the weasel) live in “necessity,” which means that their only goal in life is to survive. They don’t think about how they should live or what choices they should make like humans do. According to Dillard, we like to have options and resist the idea of “necessity.” We fight death—an inevitable force that we have no control over—and yet ultimately surrender to it as it is the necessary end of our lives.

Quote 2*:* Dillard thinks the weasel’s way of life is the best way to live. It implies a pure and simple approach to life where we do not worry about the passage of time or the approach of death. Like the weasel, we should live life in the moment, intensely experiencing everything but not dwelling on the past. We should accept our condition, what we are “given,” with a “fierce and pointed will.” Perhaps this means that we should pursue our one goal, our one passion in life, with the same single-minded determination and tenacity that we see in the weasel.

Quote 3: As humans, we can choose any lifestyle we want. The trick, however, is to go after our one goal, one passion like a stalker would after a prey.

Quote 4*:* While we may think that the weasel (or any animal) chooses to attack other animals, it is really only surrendering to the one thing it knows: its need to live. Dillard tells us there is “the perfect freedom” in this desire to survive because to her, the lack of options (the animal has no other option than to fight to survive) is the most liberating of all.

Quote 5*:* Dillard urges us to latch on to our deepest passion in life (the “one necessity”) with the tenacity of a weasel and not let go. Perhaps she’s telling us how important it is to have an unwavering focus or goal in life.

Writing a Personal Response: Looking Inward

Dillard’s ideas will have certainly provoked a response in your mind, so if you have some clear thoughts about how you feel about the essay this is the time to write them down. As you look at the quotes you have selected and your explanation of their meaning, begin to create your personal response to the essay. You may begin by using some of these strategies:

1. Tell a story. Has Dillard’s essay reminded you of an experience you have had? Write a story in which you illustrate a point that Dillard makes or hint at an idea that is connected to her essay.

2. Focus on an idea from Dillard’s essay that is personally important to you. Write down your thoughts about this idea in a first-person narrative and explain your perspective on the issue.

3. If you are uncomfortable writing a personal narrative or using “I” (you should not be), reflect on some of her ideas that seem important and meaningful in general. Why were you struck by these ideas?

4. Write a short letter to Dillard in which you speak to her about the essay. You may compliment her on some of her ideas by explaining why you like them, ask her a question related to her essay and explain why that question came to you, and genuinely start up a conversation with her.

This stage in critical thinking is important for establishing your ***relationship with a text***. What do I mean by this “relationship,” you may ask? Simply put, it has to do with how you feel about the text. Are you amazed by how true the ideas seem to be, how wise Dillard sounds? Or are you annoyed by Dillard’s let-me-tell-you-how-to-live approach and disturbed by the impractical ideas she so easily prescribes? Do you find Dillard’s voice and style thrilling and engaging or merely confusing? No matter which of the personal response options you select, your initial reaction to the text will help shape your views about it.

Making an Academic Connection: Looking Outward

First-year writing courses are designed to teach a range of writing— from the personal to the academic—so that you can learn to express advanced ideas, arguments, concepts, or theories in any discipline. While the example I have been discussing pertains mainly to college writing, the method of analysis and approach to critical thinking I have demonstrated here will serve you well in a variety of disciplines. Since critical thinking and analysis are key elements of the reading and writing you will do in college, it is important to understand how they form a part of academic writing. No matter how intimidating the term "academic writing" may seem (it is, after all, associated with advanced writing and becoming an expert in a field of study), embrace it not as a temporary college requirement but as a habit of mind.

To some, academic writing often implies ***impersonal writing***, writing that is detached, distant, and lacking in personal meaning or relevance. However, this is often not true of the academic writing you will do in a composition class. Here your presence as a writer—your thoughts, experiences, ideas, and therefore who you are—is of much significance to the writing you produce. In fact, it would not be far-fetched to say that in a writing class academic writing often begins with personal writing. Let me explain. If critical thinking begins with a personal view of the text, academic writing helps you broaden that view by going beyond the personal to a more universal point of view. In other words, academic writing often has its roots in one's private opinion or perspective about another writer's ideas but ultimately goes beyond this opinion to the expression of larger, more abstract ideas. Your personal vision—your core beliefs and general approach to life— will help you arrive at these "larger ideas" or universal propositions that any reader can understand and be enlightened by, if not agree with. In short, academic writing is largely about taking a critical, analytical stance toward a subject in order to arrive at some compelling conclusions.

Let us now think about how you might apply your critical thinking skills to move from a personal reaction to a more formal academic response to Annie Dillard's essay. The second stage of critical thinking involves textual analysis and requires you to do the following:

• Summarize the writer's ideas the best you can in a brief paragraph. This provides the basis for extended analysis since it contains the central ideas of the piece, the building blocks, so to speak.

• Evaluate the most important ideas of the essay by considering their merits or flaws, their worthiness or lack of worthiness. Do not merely agree or disagree with the ideas but explore and explain why you believe they are socially, politically, philosophically, or historically important and relevant, or why you need to question, challenge, or reject them.

• Identify gaps or discrepancies in the writer's argument. Does she contradict herself? If so, explain how this contradiction forces you to think more deeply about her ideas. Or if you are confused, explain what is confusing and why.

• Examine the strategies the writer uses to express her ideas. Look particularly at her style, voice, use of figurative language, and the way she structures her essay and organizes her ideas. Do these strategies strengthen or weaken her argument? How?

• Include a second text—an essay, a poem, lyrics of a song— whose ideas enhance your reading and analysis of the primary text. This text may help provide evidence by supporting a point you're making, and further your argument.

• Extend the writer's ideas, develop your own perspective, and propose new ways of thinking about the subject at hand.

Crafting the Essay

Once you have taken notes and developed a thorough understanding of the text, you are on your way to writing a good essay. If you were asked to write an exploratory essay, a personal response to Dillard's essay would probably suffice. However, an academic writing assignment requires you to be more critical. As counter-intuitive as it may sound, beginning your essay with a personal anecdote often helps to establish your relationship to the text and draw the reader into your writing. It also helps to ease you into the more complex task of textual analysis. Once you begin to analyze Dillard's ideas, go back to the list of important ideas and quotations you created as you read the essay. After a brief summary, engage with the quotations that are most important, that get to the heart of Dillard's ideas, and explore their meaning. Textual engagement, a seemingly slippery concept, simply means that you respond directly to some of Dillard's ideas, examine the value of Dillard's assertions, and explain why they are worthwhile or why they should be rejected. This should help you to transition into analysis and evaluation. Also, this part of your essay will most clearly reflect your critical thinking

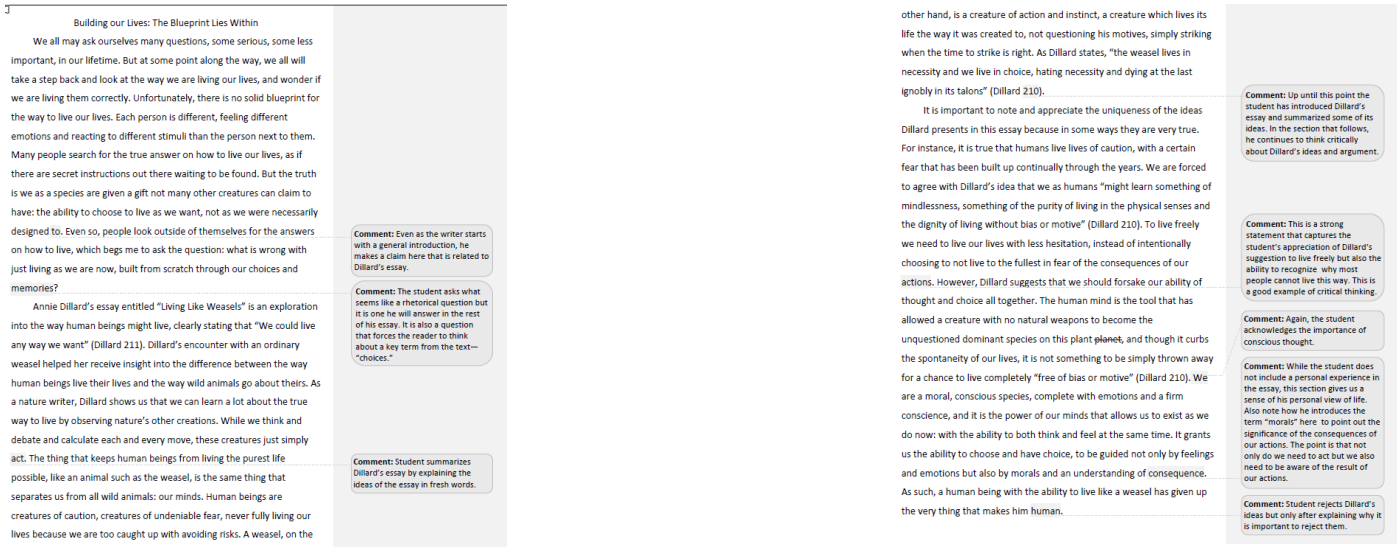
abilities as you are expected not only to represent Dillard's ideas but also to weigh their significance. Your observations about the various points she makes, analysis of conflicting viewpoints or contradictions, and your understanding of her general thesis should now be synthesized into a rich new idea about how we should live our lives. Conclude by explaining this fresh point of view in clear, compel- ling language and by rearticulating your main argument.

Modeling Good Writing

When I teach a writing class, I often show students samples of really good writing that I've collected over the years. I do this for two reasons: first, to show students how another freshman writer understood and responded to an assignment that they are currently working on; and second, to encourage them to succeed as well. I explain that although they may be intimidated by strong, sophisticated writing and feel pressured to perform similarly, it is always helpful to see what it takes to get an A. It also helps to follow a writer's imagination, to learn how the mind works when confronted with a task involving critical thinking. The following sample is a response to the Annie Dillard essay. Figure 1 includes the entire student essay and my comments are inserted into the text to guide your reading.

Though this student has not included a personal narrative in his essay, his own world-view is clear throughout. His personal point of view, while not expressed in first person statements, is evident from the very beginning. So we could say that a personal response to the text need not always be expressed in experiential or narrative form but may be present as reflection, as it is here. The point is that the writer has traveled through the rough terrain of critical thinking by starting out with his own ruminations on the subject, then by critically analyzing and responding to Dillard's text, and finally by developing a strong point of view of his own about our responsibility as human beings. As readers, we are engaged by clear, compelling writing and riveted by critical thinking that produces a movement of ideas that give the essay depth and meaning. The challenge Dillard set forth in her essay has been met and the baton passed along to us.

Figure 1:



Building our Lives: The Blueprint Lies Within

We all may ask ourselves many questions, some serious, some less important, in our lifetime. But at some point along the way, we all will take a step back and look at the way we are living our lives, and wonder if we are living them correctly. Unfortunately, there is no solid blueprint for the way to live our lives. Each person is different, feeling different emotions and reacting to different stimuli than the person next to them. Many people search for the true answer on how to live our lives, as if there are secret instructions out there waiting to be found. But the truth is we as a species are given a gift not many other creatures can claim to have: the ability to choose to live as we want, not as we were necessarily designed to. Even so, people look outside of themselves for the answers on how to live, which begs me to ask the question: what is wrong with just living as we are now, built from scratch through our choices and memories?

Comment: Even as the writer starts with a general introduction, he makes a claim here that is related to Dillard's essay.

Comment: The student asks what seems like a rhetorical question but it is one he will answer in the rest of his essay. It is also a question that forces the reader to think about a key term from the text—"choices."

Annie Dillard's essay entitled "Living Like Weasels" is an exploration into the way human beings might live, clearly stating that "We could live any way we want" (Dillard 211). Dillard's encounter with an ordinary weasel helped her receive insight into the difference between the way human beings live their lives and the way wild animals go about theirs. As a nature writer, Dillard shows us that we can learn a lot about the true way to live by observing nature's other creations. While we think and debate and calculate each and every move, these creatures just simply act. The thing that keeps human beings from living the purest life possible, like an animal such as the weasel, is the same thing that separates us from all wild animals: our minds. Human beings are creatures of caution, creatures of undeniable fear, never fully living our lives because we are too caught up with avoiding risks. A weasel, on the other hand, is a creature of action and instinct, a creature which lives its life the way it was created to, not questioning his motives, simply striking when the time to strike is right. As Dillard states, "the weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons" (Dillard 210).

Comment: Student summarizes Dillard's essay by explaining the ideas of the essay in fresh words.

It is important to note and appreciate the uniqueness of the ideas Dillard presents in this essay because in some ways they are very true. For instance, it is true that humans live lives of caution, with a certain fear that has been built up continually through the years. We are forced to agree with Dillard's idea that we as humans "might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive" (Dillard 210). To live freely we need to live our lives with less hesitation, instead of intentionally choosing to not live to the fullest in fear of the consequences of our actions. However, Dillard suggests that we should forsake our ability of thought and choice all together. The human mind is the tool that has allowed a creature with no natural weapons to become the unquestioned dominant species on this plant ~~planet~~, and though it curbs the spontaneity of our lives, it is not something to be simply thrown away for a chance to live completely "free of bias or motive" (Dillard 210). We are a moral, conscious species, complete with emotions and a firm conscience, and it is the power of our minds that allows us to exist as we do now: with the ability to both think and feel at the same time. It grants us the ability to choose and have choice, to be guided not only by feelings and emotions but also by morals and an understanding of consequence. As such, a human being with the ability to live like a weasel has given up the very thing that makes him human.

Comment: Up until this point the student has introduced Dillard's essay and summarized some of its ideas. In the section that follows, he continues to think critically about Dillard's ideas and argument.

Comment: This is a strong statement that captures the student's appreciation of Dillard's suggestion to live freely but also the ability to recognize why most people cannot live this way. This is a good example of critical thinking.

Comment: Again, the student acknowledges the importance of conscious thought.

Comment: While the student does not include a personal experience in the essay, this section gives us a sense of his personal view of life. Also note how he introduces the term "morals" here to point out the significance of the consequences of our actions. The point is that not only do we need to act but we also need to be aware of the result of our actions.

Comment: Student rejects Dillard's ideas but only after explaining why it is important to reject them.

Here, the first true flaw of Dillard's essay comes to light. While it is possible to understand and even respect Dillard's observations, it should be noted that without thought and choice she would have never been able to construct these notions in the first place. Dillard protests, "I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine" (Dillard 210). One cannot cast oneself into the mind of another creature without the intricacy of human thought, and one would not be able to choose to live as said creature does without the power of human choice. In essence, Dillard would not have had the ability to judge the life of another creature if she were to live like a weasel. Weasels do not make judgments; they simply act and react on the basis of instinct. The "mindlessness" that Dillard speaks of would prevent her from having the option to choose her own reactions. Whereas the conscious- thinking Dillard has the ability to see this creature and take the time to stop and examine its life, the "mindless" Dillard would only have the limited options to attack or run away. This is the major fault in the logic of Dillard's essay, as it would be impossible for her to choose to examine and compare the lives of humans and weasels without the capacity for choice.

Comment: Student dismantles Dillard's entire premise by telling us how the very act of writing the essay negates her argument. He has not only interpreted the essay but figured out how its premise is logically flawed.

Comment: Once again the student demonstrates why the logic of Dillard's argument falls short when applied to her own writing.

Dillard also examines a weasel's short memory in a positive light and seems to believe that a happier life could be achieved if only we were simple-minded enough to live our lives with absolutely no regret. She claims, "I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (Dillard 210). In theory, this does sound like a positive value. To be able to live freely without a hint of remembrance as to the results of our choices would be an interesting life, one may even say a care-free life. But at the same time, would we not be denying our responsibility as humans to learn from the mistakes of the past as to not replicate them in the future? Human beings' ability to remember is almost as important as our ability to choose, because remembering things from the past is the only way we can truly learn from them. History is taught throughout our educational system for a very good reason: so that the generations of the future do not make the mistakes of the past. A human being who chooses to live like a weasel gives up something that once made him very human: the ability to learn from his mistakes to further better himself.

Comment: This question represents excellent critical thinking. The student acknowledges that theoretically "remembering nothing' may have some merits but then ponders on the larger socio-political problem it presents.

Comment: The student brings two ideas together very smoothly here.

Ultimately, without the ability to choose or recall the past, mankind would be able to more readily take risks without regard for consequences. Dillard views the weasel's reaction to necessity as an unwavering willingness to take such carefree risks and chances. She states that "it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you" (Dillard 211). Would it then be productive for us to make a wrong choice and be forced to live in it forever, when we as a people have the power to change, to remedy wrongs we've made in our lives? What Dillard appears to be recommending is that humans not take many risks, but who is to say that the ability to avoid or escape risks is necessarily a flaw with mankind?

Comment: The writer sums up his argument while once again reminding us of the problem with Dillard's ideas.

Comment: This is another thoughtful question that makes the reader think along with the writer.

If we had been like the weasel, never wanting, never needing, always "choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (Dillard 210), our world would be a completely different place. The United States of America might not exist at this very moment if we had just taken what was given to us, and unwaveringly accepted a life as a colony of Great Britain. But as Cole clearly puts it, "A risk that you assume by actually doing something seems far more risky than a risk you take by not doing something, even though the risk of doing nothing may be greater" (Cole 145). As a unified body of people, we were able to go against that which was expected of us, evaluate the risk in doing so, and move forward with our revolution. The American people used the power of choice, and risk assessment, to make a permanent change in their lives; they used the remembrance of Britain's unjust deeds to fuel their passion for victory. We as a people chose. We remembered. We distinguished between right and wrong. These are things that a weasel can never do, because a weasel does not have a say in its own life, it only has its instincts and nothing more.

Comment: The student makes a historical reference here that serves as strong evidence for his own argument.

Humans are so unique in the fact that they can dictate the course of their own lives, but many people still choose to search around for the true way to live. What they do not realize is that they have to look no further than themselves. Our power, our weapon, is our ability to have thought and choice, to remember, and to make our own decisions based on our concepts of right and wrong, good and bad. These are the only tools we will ever need to construct the perfect life for ourselves from the ground up. And though it may seem like a nice notion to live a life free of regret, it is our responsibility as creatures and the appointed caretakers of this planet to utilize what was given to us and live our lives as we were meant to, not the life of any other wild animal.

Comment: This final paragraph sums up the writer's perspective in a thoughtful and mature way. It moves away from Dillard's argument and establishes the notion of human responsibility, an idea highly worth thinking about.

Important Concepts

recursive

writing in college

critical literacy

closed writing assignment

semi-open writing assignment

open writing assignment

essay

example essay

comparison contrast essay

critical thinking

relationship with a text

first-year writing courses are designed to teach a range of writing— from the personal to the academic—so that you can learn to express advanced ideas, arguments, concepts, or theories in any discipline

impersonal writing

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1.6: Your Role as a Learner

Article links:

“Ten Ways To Think About Writing: Metaphoric Musings for College Writing Students” by E. Shelley Reid

“Effective Communication and Persuasion” by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear

“Writing Anxiety” provided by UNC College of Arts & Sciences

Chapter Preview

- Explain the three principles of writing.
- Identify the audience for your writing.
- Identify strategies to deal with writing anxiety.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=41

Ten Ways To Think About Writing: Metaphoric Musings for College Writing Students

E. Shelley Reid

I’m a writer and a writing professor, the daughter and granddaughter of writers and writing professors, and I still sit down at my key- board every week and think, writing is hard. I also think, though, that writing is made harder than it has to be when we try to follow too many rules for writing. Which rules have you heard? Here are some I was taught.

1. A Thousand Rules and Three Principles

Always have a thesis. *I* before *E* except after *C*. No one-sentence paragraphs. Use concrete nouns. A semi-colon joins two complete sentences. A conclusion restates the thesis and the topic sentences. Don't use "I," check your spelling, make three main points, and don't repeat yourself. Don't use contractions. Cite at least three sources, capitalize proper nouns, and don't use "you." Don't start a sentence with "And" or "But," don't end a sentence with a preposition, give two examples in every paragraph, and use transition words. Don't use transition words too much.

When we write to the rules, writing seems more like a chore than a living process that connects people and moves the world forward. I find it particularly hard to cope with all those "Don'ts." It's no wonder we get writer's block, hands poised above the keyboard, worried about all the ways we could go wrong, suddenly wondering if we have new messages or whether there's another soda in the fridge.

We can start to unblock the live, negotiated process of writing for real people by cutting the thousand rules down to three broader principles:

1. Write about what you know about, are curious about, are passionate about (or what you can *find a way* to be curious about or interested in).
2. Show, don't just tell.
3. Adapt to the audience and purpose you're writing for.

When we write this way, we write ***rhetorically****:* that is, we pay attention to the needs of the *author* and the needs of the *reader* rather than the needs of the *teacher*—or the rules in the textbook.

Everything that matters from the preceding list of rules can be connected to one of those three rhetorical principles, and the principles address lots of aspects of writing that aren't on the list but that are central to why humans struggle to express themselves through written language. Write about what you know about *so that you can* show not just tell *in order to* adapt to your audience's needs and accomplish your goals. (Unless you do a good job showing what you mean, your audience will not understand your message. You will not meet their expectations or accomplish your goals.) Make clear points early *so that* your audience can spot your expertise or passion right from the start. Write multi-sentence paragraphs in which you show key ideas in enough detail that your audience doesn't have to guess what you mean. Use a semi-colon correctly *in order to* show how your carefully thought out ideas relate to one another—and to win your reader's confidence.

Writing will still be hard because these are some of the hardest principles in college; they may be some of the hardest principles in the galaxy. But if you write from those three principles, and use some of the strategies listed below, your writing will finally have a fighting chance of being real, not just rules. And that's when writing gets interesting and rewarding enough that we do it even though it's hard.

2. Show & Telepaths What does that "show, don't just tell" idea really mean?

Let's try some time travel to get a better idea. Can you remember being in kindergarten on show-and-tell day? Imagine that a student gets up in front of you and your fellow five-year-olds, empty-handed, and says, "I have a baseball signed by Hank Aaron that's in perfect condition, but I can't bring it to school." You're only five years old, but you know that she's got two problems, right? Not only can you not *see* the ball to know exactly what "perfect condition" looks like, to eyeball the signature and smell the leather and count the stitches, but you have no reason to *believe* this kid even if she describes it perfectly. If you tell without showing, your reader might not only be confused but might entirely disbelieve you. So you're two strikes down.

Another way to explain show vs. tell is with a story. There is a very, very short science fiction story in a collection of very short science fiction stories entitled "Science Fiction for Telepaths." This is the entire story, just six words: "Aw, you know what I mean" (Blake 235). "Wah-ha-ha!" go the telepaths, "what a great story! I really liked the part about the Martian with three heads trying to use the gamma blaster to get the chartreuse kitchen sink to fly out the window and land on the six-armed Venusian thief! Good one!" Since the telepaths can read the storyteller's mind, they don't need any other written details: they know the whole story instantly.

This story is a little like when you say to your best friend from just about forever, *you know what I mean,* and sometimes she even does, because she can *almost* read your mind. Sometimes, though, even your best buddy from way back gives you *that look*. You know *that look:* the one that says he thinks you've finally cracked. He can't read your mind, and you've lost him.

If you can confuse your best friend in the whole world, even when he's standing right there in front of you, think how easy it could be to confuse some stranger who's reading your writing days or months or years from now. If we could read each other's minds,

writing wouldn't be hard at all, because we would always know what everyone meant, and we'd never doubt each other. If you figure out how to read minds this semester, I hope you'll tell us how it works! In the meantime, though, you have to *show* what you mean.

3. The Little Green Ball and Some People: Doing Details Right

Now we know: I can read my own mind, and you can read your own mind, and this self-mind-reading is even easier to do than breathing in and out on a lovely April morning. When I write something like "I have a little green ball" on the whiteboard, I read my mind as I read the board, so I understand it—and I'm positive, therefore, that you understand it. Meanwhile, you read my sentence and your own mind together and the meaning is so perfectly clear to you that it's nearly impossible to imagine that you're not understanding exactly what I intended.

I have a little green ball. Even a five-year-old could read this sentence and know what I mean, right?

Try something. Bring both hands up in front of your face, and use each one to show one possible size of this "little" ball. (You can try this with friends: have everyone close their eyes and show the size of a "little" ball with their hands, then open their eyes, and look around.) Hmm. Already there's some possible disagreement, even though it seemed so clear what "little" meant.

Maybe "green" is easier: you know what "green" is, right? Of course. But now, can you think of two different versions of "green"? three versions? five? In the twenty-five minds in a classroom, say, we might have at least twenty kinds of little, and maybe a hundred kinds of green, and we haven't even discussed what kind of "ball" we might be talking about. Those of you who are math whizzes can see the permutations that come from all those variables. If I sent you to Mega Toyland with the basic instructions, "Buy me a little green ball," the chances are slim that you would come home with the ball I had in mind.

If I don't care about the exact ball—I just need something ball-like and not too huge and somewhat greenish—then it doesn't matter. I can leave it up to you to decide. (Occasionally, it's effective to avoid details: if I were writing a pop song about my broken heart, I'd be deliberately vague so that you'd think the song was about your heart, and then you'd decide to download or even buy my song.) But the more I care that you know exactly what I'm thinking, the more the details matter to me, then the more information I need to give you.

What information would you need to write down so that someone would buy the exact little green ball

that you're thinking of while he or she is shopping at Mega Toyland?

If you're going to show me, or each other, what you're thinking, using only language, it will take several sentences, perhaps a whole paragraph—filled with facts and statistics, comparisons, sensory description, expert testimony, examples, personal experiences—to be sure that what's in your mind is what's in my mind. After my students and I finish examining my ball and choosing rich language to show it, the whiteboard often reads something like this: "I have a little green ball about an inch in diameter, small enough to hide in

your hand. It's light neon green like highlighter ink and made of smooth shiny rubber with a slightly rough line running around its equator as if two halves were joined together. When I drop it on the tile floor, it bounces back nearly as high as my hand; when I throw it down the hallway, it careens unpredictably off the walls and floor." Now the ball in your mind matches the ball in my hand much more closely.

Showing is harder than just telling, and takes longer, and is dependent on your remembering that nobody reads your mind like you do. Can you think of other "little green ball" words or phrases that you might need to show more clearly? How do you describe a good movie or a bad meal? How would you describe your mother, your hometown, your car? Try it on a blank page or in an open document: write one "you know what I mean" sentence, then write every detail and example you can think of to make sure that a reader does know what you mean. Then you can choose the most vivid three or four, the ones that best show your readers what you want them to understand.

There's another kind of description that requires mind reading. If I write on the board that "some people need to learn to mind their own business sometimes," would you agree with me? (By now, you should be gaining some skepticism about being able to read my mind.) In my head, I'm filling in "some people" and "their business" and "some- times" with very specific, one-time-only examples. It's like I have a YouTube clip playing in my head, or a whole season's worth of a reality TV show, and you don't have access to it yet. (I might as well be say- ing "I have cookies!" but not offering to share any of them with you.)

If I give you a snapshot from that film, if I use language to provide a one-time-only example, I show you: "My ninety-year-old grand- mother needs to stop calling up my younger cousin Celia like she did last night and telling her to persuade me to move back home to Laramie so my mom won't get lonely and take up extreme snowboarding just to go meet some nice people." Does that help you see how the one- time-only example you were thinking of, when you read my boring sentence along with your own mind, is different from what I wanted you to think? As writers, we need to watch out for the some-people example and the plural example: "Sometimes things bother me" or "Frederick Douglass had lots of tricks for learning things he needed to know." If an idea is important, give an exact one-time snapshot with as much detail as possible.

In a writing class, you also have to learn to be greedy as a reader, to ask for the good stuff from someone else's head if they don't give it to you, to demand that they share their cookies: you have to be brave and say, "I can't see what you mean." This is one of the roles teachers take up as we read your writing. (One time during my first year teaching, one of my students snorted in exasperation upon receiving his essay back from me. "So, like, what do you do," he asked, "just go through the essay and write 'Why? How so? Why? How so? Why? How so?' randomly all over the margins and then slap that 'B–' on there?" I grinned and said, "Yep, that's about it.")

It's also your job as a peer reader to read skeptically and let your fellow writer know when he or she is assuming the presence of a mind reader—because none of us knows for sure if we're doing that when we write, not until we encounter a reader's "Hunh?" or "Wha-a-a-?" You can learn a lot about writing from books and essays like this one, but in order to learn how not to depend on reading your own mind, you need feedback from a real, live reader to help you gauge how your audience will respond.

4. Lost Money and Thank-you Notes: What's in an Audience?

Writing teachers are always going on and on about *audience,* as if you didn't already know all about this concept. You can do a simple thought experiment to prove to them, and to yourself, that you already fully understand that when the audience changes, your message has to change, sometimes drastically.

Imagine that you've done something embarrassingly stupid or impulsive that means you no longer have any money to spend this semester. (I won't ask you what it is, or which credit card or 888 phone number or website it involves, or who was egging you on.) You really need the money, but you can't get it back now. If I just said, "Write a message to try to get some money from someone," you might struggle a bit, and then come up with some vague points about your situation. But if I say, "Ask your best friend for the money," you should suddenly have a very clear idea of what you can say. Take a minute and consider: what do you tell this friend? Some of my students have suggested, "Remember how you owe me from that time I helped you last February?" or "I'll pay you back, with interest" or "I'll do your laundry for a month." Most of my students say they'll tell their friends the truth about what happened: would you? What else might you say to your own friend, particularly if he were giving you that skeptical look? Suppose then that your friend is nearly as broke as you are, and you have to ask one of your parents or another family adult. Now what do you say to help loosen the parental purse strings? Do you tell the truth about what happens? (Does it matter which parent it is?) Do you say, "Hey, you *owe* me"? Some of my students have suggested choosing messages that foreground their impending starvation, their intense drive for a quality education, or their ability to learn a good lesson.

Would your parent want you to offer to pay back the money? What else might you say? Notice how easy it is for you to switch gears: nothing has changed but the audience, and yet you've quickly created a whole new message, changing both the content and the language you were using.

One more try: when your parent says there's just no extra cash to give you, you may end up at the local bank trying to take out a loan. What will you tell the bank? Should the loan officer hear how you lost your money, or how you promise you'll be more responsible in the future? Should you try looking hungry and wan? Probably not: by discussing collateral (your five-year-old Toyota) and repayment terms (supported by your fry-jockey job at McSkippy's), you're adjusting your message once again. Sometimes writing teachers talk about a "primary" and "secondary" audience, as if *that* were really a complicated topic, but you know all about this idea, too. Take just a minute and think about writing a thank you note. If it's a thank-you note to your grandmother, then your ***primary audience*** is your grandmother, so you write to her. But if your grandmother is like mine, she may show your note to someone else, and all those people become ***secondary*** **audiences**. Who might see, or hear about, your note to your grandmother? Neighbors, other relatives, her yoga group or church friends? If you know your note will be stuck up on the fridge, then you can't use it as a place to add snarky remarks about your younger brother: you write for a primary audience, but you also need to think for a minute to be sure your message is adjusted for the needs of your secondary audiences. (If you haven't written a thank-you note recently, try to remember the last time someone forwarded your email or text message to someone else, without asking you first.)

In a writing classroom, everyone knows that, in reality, your primary audience is the teacher—just as during rehearsal or team practice the primary audience is the director or coach who decides whether you'll be first clarinet or take your place in the starting

line-up. Your classmates (or teammates) may be part of a secondary audience who also need considering. It can be tempting to take the middle-of-the- road route and forget about any other audiences. But in all these cases, you won't be practicing forever. It helps to imagine another primary audience—sometimes called a "target audience"—outside the class- room, in order to gain experience tailoring your performance to a "real" audience. It also helps to imagine a *very specific* primary audi- ence (a person or small group or publication), so that instead of staring at the screen thinking vague "some people" thoughts, you can quickly come up with just the right words and information to match that audience's needs, and it helps to consider some exact secondary audiences so that you can include ideas that will appeal to those readers as well. (Who do you suppose are the specific primary and secondary audiences for this essay? How does the writing adapt to those audiences?)

5. Pink Houses & Choruses: Keeping Your Reader With You

Once you've identified a target audience, and put down all the detail you can think of to help show your ideas to those readers, you need to focus on not losing them somewhere along the way. Earlier in your writing career as you worked on writing cohesive essays, you may have watched writing teachers go totally ballistic over thesis statements and topic sentences<—even though some teachers insisted that they weren't requiring any kind of set formula. How can this be? What's up with all this up-front information?

The concept is actually pretty simple, if we step out of the writing arena for a minute. Say you're driving down the interstate at sixty-five miles an hour with three friends from out of town, and you suddenly say to them, "Hey, there's that amazing Pink House!" What happens? Probably there's a lot of whiplash-inducing head swiveling, and some- one's elbow ends up in someone else's ribs, and maybe one of your friends gets a glimpse, but probably nobody really gets a chance to see it (and somebody might not believe you if she didn't see it for herself!). What if you had said instead, "Hey, coming up on the right here in about two miles, there's an amazing huge neon Pink House: watch for it"? They'd be ready, they'd know where to look and what to look for, and they'd see what you wanted them to see.

Writers need to advise their readers in a similar way. That advice doesn't always need to be in a *thesis statement* or a *topic sentence,* but it does need to happen regularly so that readers don't miss something crucial. "But," you say, "I'm not supposed to repeat things in my essay; it gets boring!" That's true, up to a point, but there are exceptions. Have you ever noticed how the very same company will run the exact same advertisement for light beer five or six times during one football game? It's not as if the message they are trying to get across is that complex: *Drink this beer and you will be noticed by this beautiful woman, or get to own this awesome sports car, or meet these wonderful friends who will never ever let you down.* The ad costs the company hundreds of thou- sands of dollars each time, but there it is again. Beer: sports car. Beer: sports car. Contemporary Americans have a very high tolerance for repeated messages; we even come to depend on them, like football fans relishing the instant replay. Beer: sports car.

If you'd rather think like an artist than an advertising executive, consider popular music. Pick a pop song, any song—"Jingle Bells," for instance, or whatever song everybody's listening to this month—and the next time you listen, count the number of times the chorus, or even the title phrase, comes up. Do we get bored by the repetition? Not usually. In fact, the chorus is crucial for audience awareness because it's often the first (or even the only) part of the song the listener learns and can sing along with. Repeating the chorus helps bring the audience along with you from verse to verse: the audience thinks, "Aha, I know this!"

Now, what you're trying to say in your essay is much more complex than *beer: sports car* or *I will always love you.* If you only say it once or twice—there, in the last paragraph, where you finally figured out the most important point, or maybe once at the start and once at the end—we might miss it, or only get a piece of it. Here you've spent hundreds of minutes working on this idea, and we zoom past it at sixty-five m.p.h. and miss it entirely! You have to bring it back to our attention throughout the essay. Of course, you don't want to repeat just anything. You certainly don't want to repeat the same examples or vague "some people" theories, stuffing baloney into the middle of the paper to fill it out. But the core idea—beer: sports car—needs to appear early and often, using the same key words, even, as an anchor for all the complex ideas and examples you're connecting to it, as a place for the audience to recognize the main idea and find a way to "sing along."

So as you're revising, add your chorus back into some key middle parts of your essay—the beginnings and endings of paragraphs, like commercial breaks, can be places that readers expect repetition—until you start to really feel uncomfortable about your repetition . . . and then add it one more time, and it might be enough, but it shouldn't be too much. (Since you read the essay dozens of times *and* you read your own mind, you'll get antsy about repetition long before your readers will in their one trip through your essay.) If you get a good balance, your reader—the same person who keeps laughing at the beer ad or mumbling the chorus to the pop song without knowing the rest of the lyrics—won't even notice that you're repeating. When I work with my students, I say: "I promise to tell you—no harm, no penalty—if you're ever *too clear* about your main point." I find that very few people make it that far, but they like having the encouragement to try. You and your peer readers can make the same agreement.

6. Fruit Jell-O: Balancing Arguments & Examples

"Great," you say, "so I'm supposed to have all these examples and to have all these Pink House reminders, but it's hard to keep it all straight."That's a very smart observation—because one of the main challenges writers face, when we can't read someone's mind or get them to read ours, is learning how to balance the writing that states our theories and arguments with the writing that provides our evidence and examples. It turns out that it's easier to do just one of these things at a time when writing, but having theories and arguments without evidence and examples is a recipe for confusion and misunderstanding.

I find that it helps sometimes to think about fruit Jell-O™, the kind my mom used to take to family get-togethers: lime Jell-O with mandarin orange slices in it, or berry Jell-O with cherries in it. Fruit Jell-O is a pretty good *balance* of foods to take to an informal family gathering: it meets the needs of the audience.

You wouldn't want to take plain gelatin to show off to your family, after all. Think of the last time you ate plain old Jell-O, with no additional food (or beverage) added to it. Weren't you in a hospital, or a school cafeteria, or some other unhappy place? Hospitals serve plain gelatin because it *looks* and *behaves* like food, but it has so few ingredients that it won't irritate your mouth or upset your digestion. That same blandness means that not a lot of family members will choose it over the tortilla chips or the macaroons.

Writing just your opinions, theories, and arguments is a lot like serving plain Jell-O: it seems like you're doing something productive, but there's not much substance to it. Politicians often write plain Jell-O speeches with no details or examples, because that kind of talk motivates people but won't irritate voters with tiny details about time or money. Talent-show contestants sometimes choose to sing plain Jell-O songs for the same reason.

On the other hand, if you took a bowl of cherries with you, your family might perk up a bit, but cherries are kind of hard to serve. They roll out of the bowl and off of those flimsy paper plates and end up sliding into the cheese dip or being squished into the new carpet by your two-year-old cousin. People finger all the cherries but take just a few (using tongs on cherries just seems too formal!), and it's hard to know how to handle the pits, or to eat gooey already-pitted cherries with your hands.

Writing just your examples, reasons, and details is a lot like bringing cherries to the party: it's interesting and lively, but readers don't know what to make of it all. Some of your reasons or stories will roll out of readers' heads if they aren't firmly attached to an argument; some readers will meander through all your details and just randomly remember one or two of them rather than building a whole picture.

Good writers blend argument and evidence as they write, so that readers get both elements together all the way through. Good revisers go back and adjust the recipe, seeking a workable combination. Some- times as you're revising it can feel odd to be just adding cherries: it can seem like you're packing in too many extra details when there's already a perfectly good piece of fruit there. Other times it seems weird to be just adding Jell-O, because all those "chorus" sentences sound the same and have the same flavor, and you don't want to repeat yourself unnecessarily. It's hard to get the balance right, and you'll want to have your readers help you see where to adjust the ingredients. But if you remember that the fruit/evidence is the tastiest part (so you want the most vibrant examples), and the point of Jell-O/argumentation is to provide consistency to hold everything together (you want statements that sound alike), you may start to gain additional confidence in balancing your writing.

7. Wash-and-wear Paragraphs

If you're going to have Jell-O and cherries, a chorus and one-time-only examples, in every paragraph, that's going to take some managing— and you'll want to manage *rhetorically* rather than going by some rules you once heard about exactly how long a paragraph should be. What paragraph-length rules have you been taught? Should a paragraph be five to eight sentences? always more than two sentences? never longer than a page? Some of my students have learned rules that specify that all paragraphs have twelve sentences and each sentence has a specific job. That sounds complicated—and you know that a rule like that can't be universally true. What if you're writing for a newspaper? for a psychology journal? for a website? Paragraph length doesn't follow clear rules, but once again depends upon a rhetorical negotiation be- tween the writer's needs and the reader's needs.

Switch gears for a minute and try out another metaphor: what do you know about how big a load of laundry should be? Right: it de- pends. What's wrong with a very small or a very large load? Paragraphs face the same kinds of boundaries: too small, and they can waste a reader's energy, always starting and stopping; too large, and they over- load a reader and nothing gets clean. But there are no definite rules in laundry or in paragraphs. Is there ever reason to do one tiny laundry load, even if it might waste money or energy? Sure: maybe you've got an important event to attend Friday night and you just need to wash your best black shirt quickly, or maybe you have a small washing machine. Is there ever reason to do one slightly load? Absolutely: perhaps you're low on quarters or there's only one machine open in the dormitory laundry room, and you need to get all those t-shirts clean. The same is true for paragraphs: sometimes, you have just one important thing to say, or your readers have a short attention span, so

you want a short paragraph—even a one-sentence paragraph. On the other hand, sometimes you have a complex explanation that you want your reader to work through all at once, so you stretch your paragraph a little longer than usual, and hope your reader stays with you.

You want to write paragraphs that your target audience can handle without straining their brains or leaving suds all over the floor. I bet you're pretty good at sorting laundry into the basic loads: darks, colors, whites, like the three body paragraphs of a five-paragraph essay. But what if you're writing an eight-page paper using three basic points? What if you have an enormous pile of whites?

You sometimes have to split up even the loads that look alike. Would you split an all-whites pile into all the long-drying socks vs. all the quick-drying shirts? the dirty stuff vs. the really gross, stinky stuff? the underwear you need tomorrow vs. the towels you could wash later? You can find lots of ways to split a too-long paragraph based on how you want your reader to think about the issue: pros and cons, first steps and next steps, familiar information and more surprising information.

Writers need to remember that paragraphs help readers focus and manage their analytical energies. It's good to have some variance in size and shape but not to overtax your readers with too much variation; it's useful to write each paragraph with a clear beginning and ending to direct readers' attention; and it's helpful if paragraphs come with a blend of information and analysis to help readers "see what you mean" about your subpoints and see how they relate to the overall point of your essay. It's not true that paragraphs are "one size fits all," and it's not true that "anything goes": you need to adjust your paragraphs to connect your ideas to your readers' brains.

8. Hey Hey Hey and the Textbook Conspiracy: Annotating Your Reading

I know, you thought this was an essay about writing. But part of being a writer, and being a helpful companion to other writers, is being a careful reader, a reader who writes. Besides, I want to be sure you get what you pay for: that kind of critical thinking helps all of us be better writers. Did you know that you pay for most textbooks in two ways, and most students never do the simplest thing to recoup their investment?

How do you pay? First, except for texts like the one you're reading right now, you've paid some exorbitant price for your books, even if you bought them used. Why would you do that, instead of checking them out of the library or sneaking a look from a friend? Right: you can read them whenever and wherever you get around to it. (No, I don't want to know where you read your class book!) But you may be overlooking one more benefit, which I'll get to in a minute.

Second, you pay for the book—even a free one like this one—with your time. You pore over page after page, the minutes ticking by, in- stead of building houses for orphans in Botswana or coming up with a cure for insomnia or even giving that double-crossing elf what he deserves in *World of Warcraft*. Did you ever finish all that poring (with a "p," not a "b," really) and realize you had tuned out and didn't re- member a thing? Now you've paid dearly, and you may have to pay yet another time when you re-read it.

The simplest thing you can do to get your money's worth and your time's worth from your books and other reading material is this: you can *write* on them.

Whatever you pay for the book (minus whatever you might sell it back for), the only two benefits you get are convenient reading access, and the chance to *write in the book*. If you don't write in your book, or type notes into the document, you're being cheated, as if you'd paid for a Combo Meal but ate only the fries. (Do you think maybe you won't be able to re-sell your book if you write in it? Check with your friends: I bet someone's bought a used book that's been scribbled all over. So clearly someone will buy your book back even if you write in it. Don't let the textbook industry scare you out of getting what you pay for.)

Some of you may think you *are* writing on your text, but I wonder if that's true. Smearing it with hot pink highlighter pen doesn't count as *writing*. Why not? That takes another story and another metaphor. There's a classic Far Side cartoon from back in the twentieth century that reveals what dogs are really saying when they bark all day long. According to cartoonist Gary Larson, when we finally translate their secret language, we find that they say, "Hey! Hey! Hey!" (144). You can just see a dog thinking that way, everything new and surprising, but not much complexity of analysis. Hey!

When you read something and gloss it with your highlighter pen, that's what you're saying: Hey! Hey! Hey! You can come back six weeks later to write an essay or study for an exam, and you have an entire book filled with Hey! It's a good start, but as a smart writing student, you're ready to go further to get your money's worth.

Without having to expend much more energy, you can begin to add a wholly intelligent commentary, putting your own advanced brain down on the page, using an actual writing utensil such as a pen or pencil (or a comment function for an electronic

document). For starters, let's just vary Hey:

Ha. Heh. Hee. Hooboy! Hmm. Hmph. Huh?

Whoa!

Each of those responses records some higher-brain *judgment:* if you go back later, you'll know whether you were saying "Hey, this is cool!" or "Hey, this is fishy." You can also use other abbreviations you know: LOL, OMG, WTH(eck), or J. You can underline short phrases with a solid or a squiggly underline, depending on your reaction. And of course, you can always go back to "Why? How so? *Show* me!" If you get really bold, you can ask questions ("will this take too much time?"), write quick summaries ("annotate so there's no hey") or note connections ("sounds like the mind-reading thing"). It doesn't take very long, and it keeps your brain involved as you read. What other short *annotations* could you write or type on this page right now?

Every time you write on the page and talk back to the text, you get your money's worth, because you make the text truly your own, and you get your time's worth, because you're staying awake and you're more likely to remember and learn what you read. If you don't remember, you still have an intelligent record of what you should've remembered, not just a pile of Hey! Bonus: being a writer when you're a reader helps you become a better reader *and* a better writer.

9. Short-Time Writing: Use Your Higher Brain

So far, we've been thinking about writing when you have plenty of time to consider your audience, play with your paragraphs, and re- calibrate your Jell-O/cherry balance. But you won't always have that much time: sometimes you'll get a late start or have an early deadline. In college, you might encounter essay questions on an exam. Learning how to be a good timed-exam writer can help you in lots of short-time writing situations.

What's hard about writing an essay exam? The stress, the pressure, the clock ticking, the things you don't know. It's like trying to think with a jet airplane taking off overhead, or a pride of hungry lions rac- ing your way. But wait: the coolest thing about the essay exam is that, in contrast to a multiple choice exam that shows what you *don't* know, the essay exam allows you to focus on what you *do* know. The problem is that only your higher brain can show off that knowledge, and for most people in a stressful situation like an essay exam, the higher brain starts to lose out to the lower brain, the *fight-or-flight* brain, the brain that sees breathing in and breathing out as one of its most complicated tasks, and so the writing goes awry.

Essay exams—or those last-minute, started-at-1:22-a.m. essays that you may be tempted or forced to write this semester (but not for your writing teacher, of course!)—generally go wrong by failing to meet one of the three principles described at the beginning of this essay. Sometimes students fail to study well so that they can write from knowledge. (Unfortunately, I don't know if I can help you with your midnight cram sessions.) More often, though, some very smart, well- prepared students fail to adapt to their audience's needs, or fail to pro- vide specific support. All that late-night study-session agony goes for nothing if your lower brain takes over while you're writing. Your lower brain can barely remember "I before E," and it knows nothing about complicated rhetorical strategies like ours: you have to make sure your higher brain sets the pace and marks the trail.

So the teacher hands out the questions, and the first thing you do is . . . panic? No. Start writing? Heavens, no. *Never* start an essay exam—or a truly last-minute essay—by starting to write the essay, even if (like me) you generally prefer to "just start writing" rather than doing a lot of restrictive planning. Free writing is an excellent writing exercise, but only when you know you have plenty of time to revise. Instead, ignore all those keyboards clacking, all those pens scribbling: they are the signs of lower brains at work, racing off screeching wildly about lions without remembering the way writing happens. You're smarter than that. You're going to use your higher brain right at the start, before it gets distracted. Speed, right now, is your enemy, a trick of the lower brain.

The first thing you want to do is . . . *read the gosh darn question*.

Really, really read it. Annotate the assignment sheet or exam prompt, or write the key question out on a separate piece of paper, so you know you're actually reading it, and not just pretending to. (If you're in a workplace setting, write down a list of the top things you know your audience—or your boss—wants to see.) In every essay exam I've ever given, s*ome*body has not answered

the question. When I say this in a class, everyone frowns or laughs at me just the way you are now, thinking, "What kind of idiot wouldn't read the question? Certainly not me!" But someone always *thinks* she's read the whole question, and understood it, when she hasn't. Don't be that writer. Circle the verbs: *analyze, argue, describe, contrast*. Underline the key terms: *two causes, most important theme, main steps, post–Civil War*. Read it again, and read it a third time: this is your only official clue about what your audience—the teacher—wants. On a piece of scratch paper, write out an answer to the question, *in so many words:* if it asks, "What are two competing explanations for language acquisition?" write down, "Two competing explanations for language acquisition are ___ and ___ ." In an examination setting, this may even become your opening line, since readers of essay exams rarely reward frilly introductions or cute metaphors.

But don't start to write the whole answer yet, even though your lower brain is begging you, even though the sweat is breaking out on your brow and your muscles are tensing up with adrenaline because you know the lions and probably some rampaging T-Rexes are just around the corner. In real time, it has only taken you two minutes to read and annotate the question. Some students are still pulling out their pens, while across campus at least one student is just waking up in a panic because his alarm didn't go off. Meanwhile, far from being hopelessly behind, you're ahead of everyone who's writing already, be- cause you're still working with your higher brain.

You have one more task, though. You know that *showing* takes longer, and is more complicated, than *telling*. Given the choice, your lower brain will tell, tell, and tell again, blathering on about Jell-O generalities that don't let readers see all the best thinking going on in your mind. Before your higher brain starts to abandon you, make it give you the cherries: write yourself a list of very specific examples that you can use in this essay, as many as you can think of. Do not just "think them over." That's a lower brain shortcut, a flight move, and it's a trick, because your lower brain will forget them as soon as the lions get a bit closer. Write them down. If you don't know all the possible transmission vectors for tuberculosis that were discussed, write down excellent examples of the ones you *do* know. If you can, number them in an order that makes sense, so that you leave a good breadcrumb trail for your lower brain to follow. Don't call it an "outline" if you don't want to; that can feel intimidating. Just call it a "trail guide."

Now you can start writing: take a deep, calming breath and begin with your *in so many words* sentence, then follow the trail your higher brain has planned. About every two or three sentences, you should start out with "For example, . . ." or "Another example of this is . . . ," to be sure that you're not forgetting your higher brain's advice or sliding into a vague "some people" sentence. About every three or four sentences, you should start out with "Therefore, . . ." or "In other words, . . ." and come back to a version of that very first, question- answering sentence you wrote on your paper. Bring the chorus back in; stay in tune and on the trail. Don't try for too much variation or beau- ty. Knowing that your higher brain has already solved the problem, all you have to do is set it down on paper, to *show what you know.* Writing is hard, especially under time pressure, but when you use higher brain strategies and don't get trapped in the rules or caught up in random flight, when you take control and anticipate your reader's needs, you can make writing work for you in very powerful ways even without a lot of time.

10. Rules vs. Rhetoric, or, The Five Paragraph Essay vs."Try Something!

"We started out by thinking of all the rules—all those "Don'ts"—that writers can face. Each of the metaphors here replaces a *rule* with an *idea* that helps you consider how real people communicate with each other through writing, and how writers make judgments and choices in order to have the most powerful effect on their readers. That is, we've been thinking *rhetorically,* about the audience and purpose and context of a writing situation.

Interestingly, many of those rules are just short-cut versions of re- ally good rhetorical principles. If you were a middle-school teacher faced with a room full of thirty squirrelly teenagers who all wanted to know *What's Due On Friday?* and who didn't have patience for one more part of their chaotic lives to be in the "it just depends" category, you might be tempted to make some rules, too. You might even come up with The Five Paragraph Essay.

That is, instead of saying, "Most readers in the U.S. prefer to know exactly what they're getting before they invest too much time," which is a thoughtful rhetorical analysis that can help writers make good choices, you might say, "Your thesis must come in the first paragraph." Instead of saying, "In Western cultures, many readers are comfortable with threes: three bears, three strikes,

three wishes, even the Christian Trinity," you might make a rule and say, "You must write an essay with a beginning, an end, and three middle paragraphs." Instead of saying, "Your readers need to know how your examples connect to one another, and how each set of examples is related to your overall point," you might say, "Every paragraph needs to start with a transition and a topic sentence and finish with a concluding sentence." And instead of saying, "Writers in the U.S. face one of the most heterogeneous groups of readers in the world, so we need to be as careful as possible to make our meaning clear rather than assuming that all readers know what we're talking about," you might just say, "Each paragraph needs to include two concrete-detail sentences and two commentary sentences."

You would intend to be helping your students by saying these things, and for many young writers, having clear *rules* is more useful than being told, "It depends." But eventually the rules start to be more limiting than helpful, like a great pair of shoes that are now a size too small. Good writers need some space to grow.

As a writer in college now, and as a writer in the larger world full of real readers—whether they're reading your Facebook page, your letter to the editor, or your business plan—you need to free yourself from the rules and learn to make rhetorical decisions. From now on, when you hear someone tell you a rule for writing, try to figure out the rhetorical challenge that lies behind it, and consider the balancing acts you may need to undertake. What do you want to say, and what will help the readers in your primary audience "see what you mean" and follow your main points?

There aren't any easy answers: writing is still hard. But the good news is that you can use a few helpful "rules" as starting points when they seem appropriate, and set aside the rest. You can draw on some key principles or metaphors to help you imagine the needs of your readers, and when you come to an open space where there doesn't seem to be a perfect rule or strategy to use, you can *trysomething*. In the end, that's what writers are always doing as we write: trying this, trying that, trying something else, hoping that we'll make a breakthrough so that our readers will say "Aha, I see what you mean!"—and they really, truly will see it. You know James Bond 007 would *trysomething;* Jane Eyre would *trysomething;* those Olympic medalists and rock stars and pioneering cardiac surgeons and Silicon Valley whiz kids are always *trying something*. In the same way, being a good writer is always more about *trying something* than about following the rules, about adapting to a new situation rather than replicating last year's essay. So take a deep breath, push all those nay-saying rule-makers into the far corners of your brain, focus on your current audience and purpose, and write!

Effective Communication and Persuasion

Whether for the benefit of your academic or professional life, or even for your personal life, writing is an effective tool to help you to be understood and to influence others. Much of what we've talked about so far regarding the value of writing has been about its ability to help you understand yourself and to help you understand the world. But writing also has an important power to help you to get others to understand your message.

As we've already stated in discussing its creative potential, writing gives you a voice. Writing can help you to state your position and support it in a way that might persuade others not only to understand your perspective, values, and beliefs, but also to adopt them. And when you're unsure about something, you can even use writing as a method for self-persuasion, to help you make up your mind about an important topic.

From resumes to term papers to work-related documents to journaling and self-exploration, writing is an important and powerful tool to have at the ready. This text can help you sharpen that tool and to use it to the best of your ability.

Writing Anxiety

What this handout is about

This handout discusses the situational nature of writer's block and other writing anxiety and suggests things you can try to feel more confident and optimistic about yourself as a writer.

What are writing anxiety and writer's block?

"Writing anxiety" and "writer's block" are informal terms for a wide variety of apprehensive and pessimistic feelings about writing. These feelings may not be pervasive in a person's writing life. For example, you might feel perfectly fine writing a biology lab report but apprehensive about writing a paper on a novel.You may confidently tackle a paper about the sociology of gender but delete and start over twenty times when composing an email to a cute classmate suggesting coffee. In other words, writing anxiety and writers' block are situational (Hjortshoj 7). These terms do NOT describe psychological attributes. People aren't born anxious writers; rather, they become anxious or blocked through negative or difficult experiences with writing.

When do these negative feelings arise?

Although there is a great deal of variation among individuals, there are also some common experiences that writers in general find stressful. For example, you may struggle when you are: adjusting to a new form of writing—for example, first year college writing, papers in a new field of study, or longer forms than you are used to (a long research paper, a senior thesis, a master's thesis, a dissertation) (Hjortshoj 56-76). writing for a reader or readers who have been overly critical or demanding in the past. remembering negative criticism received in the past—even if the reader who criticized your work won't be reading your writing this time. working with limited time or with a lot of unstructured time. responding to an assignment that seems unrelated to academic or life goals. dealing with troubling events outside of school.

What are some strategies for handling these feelings?

Get support Like 2 people like this. Choose a writing buddy, someone you trust to encourage you in your writing life. Your writing buddy might be a friend or family member, a classmate, a teacher, a colleague, or a Writing Center tutor. Talk to your writing buddy about your ideas, your writing process, your worries, and your successes. Share pieces of your writing. Make checking in with your writing buddy a regular part of your schedule. When you share pieces of writing with your buddy, use our handout on asking for feedback.

In his book Understanding Writing Blocks, Keith Hjortshoj describes how isolation can harm writers, particularly students who are working on long projects not connected with coursework (134-135). He suggests that in addition to connecting with supportive individuals, such students can benefit from forming or joining a writing group, which functions in much the same way as a writing buddy. A group can provide readers, deadlines, support, praise, and constructive criticism. For help starting one, see our handout about writing groups.

Identify your strengths

Often, writers who are experiencing block or anxiety have a worse opinion of their own writing than anyone else! Make a list of the things you do well. You might ask a friend or colleague to help you generate such a list. Here are some possibilities to get you started:

- I explain things well to people.
- I get people's interest.
- I have strong opinions.
- I listen well.
- I am critical of what I read.
- I see connections.

Choose at least one strength as your starting point. Instead of saying “I can’t write,” say “I am a writer who can …”

Recognize that writing is a complex process

Writing is an attempt to fix meaning on the page, but you know, and your readers know, that there is always more to be said on a topic. The best writers can do is to contribute what they know and feel about a topic at a particular point in time.

Writers often seek “flow,” which usually entails some sort of breakthrough followed by a beautifully coherent outpouring of knowledge. Flow is both a possibility—most people experience it at some point in their writing lives—and a myth. Inevitably, if you write over a long period of time and for many different situations, you will encounter obstacles. As Hjortshoj explains, obstacles are particularly common during times of transition—transitions to new writing roles or to new kinds of writing.

Think of yourself as an apprentice.

If block or apprehension is new for you, take time to understand the situations you are writing in. In particular, try to figure out what has changed in your writing life. Here are some possibilities:

- You are writing in a new format.
- You are writing longer papers than before.
- You are writing for new audiences.
- You are writing about new subject matter.
- You are turning in writing from different stages of the writing process—for example, planning stages or early drafts.

It makes sense to have trouble when dealing with a situation for the first time. It’s also likely that when you confront these new situations, you will learn and grow. Writing in new situations can be rewarding. Not every format or audience will be right for you, but you won’t know which ones might be right until you try them. Think of new writing situations as apprenticeships. When you’re doing a new kind of writing, learn as much as you can about it, gain as many skills in that area as you can, and when you finish the apprenticeship, decide which of the skills you learned will serve you well later on. You might be surprised.

Below are some suggestions for how to learn about new kinds of writing:

- Ask a lot of questions of people who are more experienced with this kind of writing. Here are some of the questions you might ask: What’s the purpose of this kind of writing? Who’s the audience? What are the most important elements to include? What’s not as important? How do you get started? How do you know when what you’ve written is good enough? How did you learn to write this way?
- Ask a lot of questions of the person who assigned you a piece of writing. If you have a paper, the best place to start is with the written assignment itself. For help with this, see our handout on understanding assignments.
- Look for examples of this kind of writing. (You can ask your instructor if he/she could recommend an example). Look, especially, for variation. There are often many different ways to write within a particular form. Look for ways that feel familiar to you, approaches that you like. You might want to look for published models or, if this seems too intimidating, look at your classmates’ writing. In either case, ask yourself questions about what these writers are doing, and take notes. How does the writer begin and end? In what order does the writer tell things? How and when does the writer convey her or his main point? How does the writer bring in other people’s ideas? What is the writer’s purpose? How does she or he achieve that purpose?
- Read our handouts about how to write in specific fields or how to handle specific writing assignments.
- Listen critically to your readers. Before you dismiss or wholeheartedly accept what they say, try to understand them. If a reader has given you written comments, ask yourself questions to figure out the reader’s experience of your paper: What is this reader looking for? What am I doing that satisfies this reader? In what ways is this reader still unsatisfied? If you can’t answer these questions from the reader’s comments, then talk to the reader, or ask someone else to help you interpret the comments.
- Most importantly, don’t try to do everything at once. Start with reasonable expectations. You can’t write like an expert your first time out. Nobody does! Use the criticism you get.

Once you understand what readers want, you are in a better position to decide what to do with their criticisms. There are two extreme possibilities—dismissing the criticisms and accepting them all—but there is also a lot of middle ground. Figure out which criticisms are consistent with your own purposes, and do the hard work of engaging with them. Again, don’t expect an overnight turn-around; recognize that changing writing habits is a process and that papers are steps in the process.

Chances are that at some point in your writing life you will encounter readers who seem to dislike, disagree with, or miss the point of your work. Figuring out what to do with criticism from such readers is an important part of a writer’s growth.

Try new tactics when you get stuck

Often, writing blocks occur at particular stages of the writing process. The writing process is cyclical and variable. For different writers, the process may include reading, brainstorming, drafting, getting feedback, revising, and editing. These stages do not always happen in this order, and once a writer has been through a particular stage, chances are she or he hasn't seen the last of that stage. For example, brainstorming may occur all along the way.

Figure out what your writing process looks like and whether there's a particular stage where you tend to get stuck. Perhaps you love researching and taking notes on what you read, and you have a hard time moving from that work to getting started on your own first draft. Or once you have a draft, it seems set in stone and even though readers are asking you questions and making suggestions, you don't know how to go back in and change it. Or just the opposite may be true; you revise and revise and don't want to let the paper go.

Wherever you have trouble, take a longer look at what you do and what you might try. Sometimes what you do is working for you; it's just a slow and difficult process. Other times, what you do may not be working; these are the times when you can look around for other approaches to try:

- Talk to your writing buddy and to other colleagues about what they do at the particular stage that gets you stuck.
- Read about possible new approaches in our handouts on brainstorming and revising.
- Try thinking of yourself as an apprentice to a stage of the writing process and give different strategies a shot.
- Cut your paper into pieces and tape them to the wall, use eight different colors of highlighters, draw a picture of your paper, read your paper out loud in the voice of your favorite movie star....

Okay, we're kind of kidding with some of those last few suggestions, but there is no limit to what you can try (for some fun writing strategies, check out our online animated demos). When it comes to conquering a block, give yourself permission to fall flat on your face. Trying and failing will you help you arrive at the thing that works for you.

Celebrate your successes

Start storing up positive experiences with writing. Whatever obstacles you've faced, celebrate the occasions when you overcome them. This could be something as simple as getting started, sharing your work with someone besides a teacher, revising a paper for the first time, trying out a new brainstorming strategy, or turning in a paper that has been particularly challenging for you. You define what a success is for you. Keep a log or journal of your writing successes and breakthroughs, how you did it, how you felt. This log can serve as a boost later in your writing life when you face new challenges.

Get support

Wait a minute, didn't we already say that? Yes. It's worth repeating. Most people find relief for various kinds of anxieties by getting support from others. Sometimes the best person to help you through a spell of worry is someone who's done that for you before—a family member, a friend, a mentor. Maybe you don't even need to talk with this person about writing; maybe you just need to be reminded to believe in yourself, that you can do it.

Conclusion

Apprehension about writing is a common condition on college campuses. Because writing is the most common means of sharing our knowledge, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves when we write. This handout has given some suggestions for how to relieve that pressure. Talk with others; realize we're all learning; take an occasional risk; turn to the people who believe in you. Counter negative experiences by actively creating positive ones. Even after you have tried all of these strategies and read every Writing Center handout, invariably you will still have negative experiences in your writing life. When you get a paper back with a bad grade on it or when you get a rejection letter from a journal, fend off the negative aspects of that experience. Try not to let them sink in; try not to let your disappointment fester. Instead, jump right back in to some area of the writing process. Failures of various kinds are an inevitable part of the writing process. Without them, it would be difficult if not impossible to grow as a writer. Learning often occurs in the wake of a startling event, something that stirs you up, something that makes you wonder. Use your failures to keep moving.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use

this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial.

Hjortshoj, Keith. 2001. Understanding Writing Blocks. Oxford: Oxford UP.

This is a particularly excellent resource for advanced undergraduates and graduate students. Hjortshoj writes about his experiences working with university students experiencing block. He explains the transitional nature of most writing blocks and the importance of finding support from others when working on long projects.

Rose, Mike, ed. 1985. When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. New York and London: The Guilford Press.

This collection of empirical studies is written primarily for writing teachers, researchers and tutors. Studies focus on writers of various ages, including young children, high school students, and college students.

Important Concepts

rhetorically

primary audience

secondary audiences

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2: REALLY? WRITING? AGAIN?

2.1: Yes. Writing. Again.
2.2: College Writing is Different
2.3: Academic Style

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2.1: Yes. Writing. Again.

Obviously you can write. And in the age of Facebook and smartphones, you might be writing all the time, perhaps more often than speaking. Many students today are awash in text like no other generation before. You may have even performed so well in high school that you're deemed fully competent in college level writing and are now excused from taking a composition course.

So why spend yet more time and attention on writing skills? Research shows that deliberate practice—that is, close focus on improving one's skills—makes all the difference in how one performs. Revisiting the craft of writing—especially on the early end of college—will improve your writing much more than simply producing page after page in the same old way. Becoming an excellent communicator will save you a lot of time and hassle in your studies, advance your career, and promote better relationships and a higher quality of life off the job. Honing your writing is a good use of your scarce time.

Also consider this: a recent survey of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 89 percent of employers say that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing."[1] It was the single-most favored skill in this survey. In addition, several of the other valued skills are grounded in written communication: "Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills" (81%); "The ability to analyze and solve complex problems" (75%); and "The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources" (68%). This emphasis on communication probably reflects the changing reality of work in the professions. Employers also reported that employees will have to "take on more responsibilities," "use a broader set of skills," "work harder to coordinate with other departments," face "more complex" challenges, and mobilize "higher levels of learning and knowledge."[2] If you want to be a professional who interacts frequently with others[3]—presumably you do; you're in college—you have to be someone who can anticipate and solve complex problems and coordinate your work with others,[4] all of which depend on effective communication.

> Writing is one of the most important skills to our society, and it almost always has been. Having the ability to write is what separates history from pre-history! That's a pretty big deal! Because most professors have different expectations, it can be tricky knowing what exactly they're looking for. Pay attention to the comments they leave on your paper, and make sure to use these as a reference for your next assignment. I try to pay attention and adapt to the professor's style and preferences.
>
> Aly Button

The pay-off from improving your writing comes much sooner than graduation. Suppose you complete about 40 classes for a 120-credit bachelors' degree, and—averaging across writing-intensive and non-writing-intensive courses—you produce about 2500 words of formal writing per class. Even with that low estimate, you'll write 100,000 words over your college career. That's about equivalent to a 330-page book. Spending a few hours sharpening your writing skills will make those 100,000 words much easier and more rewarding to write. All of your professors care about good writing, whether or not they see their courses as a means to improve it. Formal written work is the coin of the academic realm. Creating and sharing knowledge—the whole point of the academy—depends on writing. You may have gotten a lot of positive feedback on your writing before college, but it's important to note that writing in college is distinct in ways that reflect the origins of higher education.

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2.2: College Writing is Different

The origins of the university help explain why even skilled wordsmiths benefit from studying the assumptions and expectations behind college-level writing. College is a fundamentally different educational model; as a result the purposes and expectations for writing are different. You have learned many of the essential skills and practices of formal written communication throughout your schooling; now it's time to take your writing a step further.

By the end of high school you probably mastered many of the key conventions of standard academic English such as paragraphing, sentence-level mechanics, and the use of thesis statements. The essay portion of the SAT measures important skills such as organizing evidence within paragraphs that relate to a clear, consistent thesis, and choosing words and sentence structures to effectively convey your meaning. These practices are foundational, and your teachers have given you a wonderful gift in helping you master them. However, college writing assignments require you to apply those skills to new intellectual challenges. Professors assign papers because they want you to think rigorously and deeply about important questions in their fields. To your instructors, writing is for working out complex ideas, not just explaining them. A paper that would earn a top score on the SAT might only get a C or D in a college class if it doesn't show original and ambitious thinking.

Professors look at you as independent junior scholars and imagine you writing as someone who has a genuine, driving interest in tackling a complex question. They envision you approaching an assignment without a pre-existing thesis. They expect you to look deep into the evidence, consider several alternative explanations, and work out an original, insightful argument that you actually care about. This kind of scholarly approach usually entails writing a rough draft, through which you work out an ambitious thesis and the scope of your argument, [9] and then starting over with a wholly rewritten second draft containing a mostly complete argument anchored by a refined thesis. In that second round, you'll discover holes in the argument that should be remedied, counter-arguments that should be acknowledged and addressed, and important implications that should be noted. When the paper is substantially complete, you'll go through it again to tighten up the writing and ensure clarity.[10] Writing a paper isn't about getting the "right answer" and adhering to basic conventions; it's about joining an academic conversation with something original to say, borne of rigorous thought.

My own experience as an instructor indicates that few students approach writing college papers in the way that professors envision. Many students first figure out what they want to say and then (and only then) write it down as clearly (and quickly) as they can. One quick round of proof-reading and they're done. Many students have a powerful distaste for truly revising (i.e., actually rewriting) a paper because it feels like throwing away hard-won text. Consequently, when students are invited or required to revise an essay, they tend to focus on correcting mechanical errors, making a few superficial changes that do not entail any rethinking or major changes. Professors find that tendency incredibly frustrating. Some instructors craft an assignment sequence to force a true revising process; others leave it up to you. Virtually all shape their expectations for the final project around the idea that you're writing to learn, writing to develop, writing to think—not just writing to express.

> On my first college paper, I was scared. I did not know what to expect or what my professor would want. All I kept thinking about was whether or not I would get a good grade. But do not fear! At the end of the day, I talked to my professor about how I could better my writing. Professors love to be asked questions and interact with students. If you ever need help, do not hesitate to ask for advice on how you could do better.
>
> Timothée Pizarro

Another major impact of this shift to a junior-scholar role is that you not only have to learn to write like a scholar, you also have to learn to write like a political scientist, a chemist, an art historian, and a statistician—sometimes all in the same semester. While most of the conventions of academic writing are common across disciplines, there is some variation. Your professors—immersed as they are in their own fields—may forget that you have such varied demands, and they may not take class time to explain the particular conventions of their field. For every new field of study, you're like a traveler visiting a foreign culture and learning how to get along. Locals will often do you the kindness of explaining something, but you'll have to sleuth out a lot of things on your own.

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2.3: Academic Style

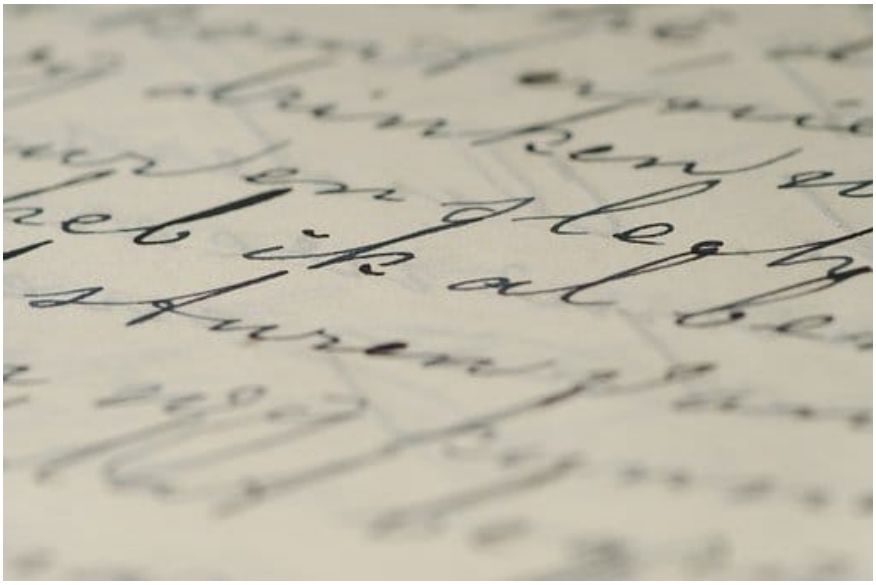


Figure: Image from Pixabay

Academic Style

Many students enter their first year college reading-writing course thinking that academic style means using "big words," never using I, and making their sentences as long as possible. Student may have read academic readings in which the style sounded "overblown" or wordy. A lot of academic writing exists that does read this way, but such writing is not necessarily *good* academic writing. Some writers come into college already writing in what they feel is academic writing style, and others don't know how to write in that way, but think that is the goal.

In reality, academic style involves using clear, specific word choice and sentence constructions (including active voice as much as possible); staying focused on the topic at hand; generally using third person voice to build your argument and incorporate your sources; and generally avoiding personal experience or discussing your process of writing the paper. Some of these parts of academic style are discussed elsewhere in this e-book (see "Word Choice"). Here, we will focus on some of the sentence level conventions that academic style involves.

Example of Good Academic Style

The following example by Professor Peter Bowler from publicdomainreview.org demonstrates good academic style in humanities writing:

> H. G. Wells worried constantly about the future of humanity. While he hoped for progress in human affairs, he was only too well aware that it was not inevitable and might not be sustained. Throughout his career he celebrated the technological developments that were revolutionizing life but feared they might lead to eventual degeneration or, as came to pass in 1914, a catastrophic war. He was also aware that there were disagreements over what would actually count as progress. Providing everyone with the benefits of modern industry might not be enough, especially as continued technological innovation would require the constant remodeling of society. Progressive steps introducing entirely new functions were episodic, open-ended and unpredictable, in both biological and social evolution. These uncertainties were compounded by a realization that, where technological innovation was concerned, it was virtually impossible to predict future inventions or what their long-term consequences might be. Even if progress continued, it would be much more open-ended than advocates of the traditional idea of progress had imagined.
>
> For Wells the most basic level of uncertainty arose from the fear that the human race might not sustain its current rate of development. In his 1895 story “The Time Machine” he imagined his time traveler projected through eras of future progress:

> "I saw great and splendid architecture rising about me, more massive than any buildings of our time, and yet, as it seemed, built of glimmer and mist" (27). But the time traveler ends up in a world brought down by social division and degeneration. The brutal Morlocks are the descendants of the industrial workers, while the childlike Eloi are the remnants of the leisured upper classes. This prediction was based on his zoologist friend E. Ray Lankester's extension of the Darwinian theory. Lankester argued that because evolution works by adapting populations to their environment, progress is not inevitable and any species that adapts itself to a less active and hence less challenging way of life will degenerate (Lankester 127 and 198-202). Here was the model for a more complex vision of progress in which any advance would depend on the circumstances of the time and could not be predicted on the basis of previous trends.

While a couple of uses of the passive voice are present (paragraph 1, sentence 7 and paragraph 2, sentence 4), the uses are acceptable because the author wanted to focus on the object of the sentences and needed them to cohere well with the previous sentences. However, all of the other sentences are in active voice.

The paragraphs focus on the topic at hand and what others say about topic. The author uses many types of descriptive phrases and clauses, uses specific and meaningful word choice, and varies the sentence length depending on what he wants to empahsize. In addition, when writing about an event within a book, he uses simple present tense ("But the time traveler ends up in a world brought down by social division and degeneration.")

Some Academic Style Recommendations

What to Avoid

1. Avoid using "I" unless writing about personal experience or actively comparing your opinion to another author's.

Do not write: *I think greed is the principal cause of Americans' debt.*

Do write: Greed is the principal cause of Americans' debt.

(It will be clear that the opinion is yours simply by the fact that you are writing the paper. If the opinion is someone else's, say whose opinion it is. Otherwise, the focus will move from the topic you are writing about to you.)

2. Avoid "you" (or "your" or "yours") **unless you are seeking to address the reader directly.**

Do not write: *If you shop too much, you can become addicted.*

Do write: People who shop too much can become addicted.

Your audience is a general academic audience, and one's purpose in writing a paper is not generally to give personal advice. "You" addresses one person, but an academic essay's audience is multiple people.

3. Avoid (unanswered) questions, especially if they occur where you should be writing analysis.

Do not write: *How can children know how to resist advertising?*

Do write: Children do not have the maturity to resist advertising.

Just say what you mean to say because questions can prevent a writer from getting their point across with precision. It is occasionally acceptable to use a question as a hook or transition, but avoid using them more than once or twice in an essay.

4. Avoid using casual language or slang unless it contributes to the effect you want.

Do not write: *The author talks about how corporations pollute.*

Do write: The author explains that, without regulation, corporations pollute.

Do not write: The authors describe *this* family, the Joneses...

Do write: The authors describe a family, the Joneses... casual tone might undermine your authority.

A casual tone may undermine your authority and is not the usual accepted tone for academic writing.

5. Avoid sweeping, obvious, vague, or clichéd phrases and statements:

- Nowadays
- In today's society
- This proves that no one cares about anyone but himself.
- Everyone is addicted to shopping.
- Pollution affects everyone and everything.
- Pollution must end today or everyone will die soon.
- In society, many things happen that are connected to each other.

To correct these kinds of statements, refine your thinking and decide what specifically you mean – and can reasonably claim.

What to Do

1. Use simple present verb tense, rather than past tense, when writing about what you read.

Do not write: The author **wrote** about the need to reduce vaping among people of all ages.

Write: The author **writes** about the need to reduce vaping among people of all ages.

Using simple present tense is academic convention because of the idea that once something is written on paper (or recorded on film or video), it always exists and lives in an "eternal present."

2. Vary your sentence length.

Review the example at the top of the page and notice how having short sentences after long sentences helps to keep your attention and move you forward while you read.

3. Use strong, descriptive words -- especially verbs.

Avoid weak verbs that no longer have much meaning, such as "get," "have", "being," "make," and their variants. Also try to avoid verbs that have a preposition (but no prepositional phrase) after them.

Do not write: I **ate up** my food quickly.

Do write: I **gobbled** my food.

Depending on your meaning, the following table includes some stronger words for these notoriously weak verbs.

Get	Have (as a main verb)	Be(ing)	Make
obtain	possess	exist	cause
understand	keep	am	require
fetch	own	feel	produce
receive	contract (as a disease)	are	create

4. Write with focused sentence; this includes active voice.

- Use active voice wherever possible. The situations in which using passive voice is acceptable are when:
- A writer needs to begin with the object of the sentence so that the sentence flows well from the previous sentence (cohesion)
- A writer needs to describe a process they followed (such as might appear in the methodology section of a scientific research paper or lab report)
- The subject or agent of the sentence is unknown.Other guidelines for writing focused sentences can be found here.

The following videos can reinforce what you just read. While they refer to APA style, all of the tips here are relevant for MLA also.

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Video 2.3.1

Writing in an Academic Style Part 1 and 2. **Authored by:** JMU Writing Center. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Practice with Academic Style

Exercise 1

Rewrite these sentences in a clear, academic style using the above guidelines.

1. You will never be happy if you don't spend time with your friends and family.
2. How can communities regulate corporations without the help of the government?
3. In my opinion, I think that people nowadays are materialistic.
4. There was this guy who was talking in this book called *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* – I think his name was Arne – saying that women only entered the workforce in the 70s because men were deadbeat earners.
5. Who do you think will make you happy if not yourself?
6. There are all these advertisements that try to get kids to buy things.
7. I believe that advertising damages women.
8. The authors of "Iron Maiden" say that you will have lower self-esteem if you read too many fashion magazines.

Exercise 2

Rewrite the following paragraph in a clear, academic style using the above guidelines.

> Food stamps have recently been proposed to be restricted by the U.S. government. To write this paper, I examine five sources that discussed the topic of food stamps. All of the sources look at the topic of food stamps from the federal level, rather than from the perspective of a particular state. Almost all of the sources acknowledge that some people will no longer receive food stamps. In fact, only those with great need could receive help! Food banks will all be inundated with new people who need help, or children will go hungry. And hungry children don't learn as well as those who have had a good breakfast. Food stamps should not be restricted to only the most needy because, in our gig-based economy, many people go hungry some of the time. It's just offloading the problem onto the private sector.

Contributors

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3: WHAT DOES THE PROFESSOR WANT? UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT

3.1: Writing for Whom? Writing for What?
3.2: So What Do Professors Want?
3.3: The Prompt- What Does “Analyze” Mean Anyway?
3.4: Rubrics as Road Maps

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3.1: Writing for Whom? Writing for What?

The first principle of good communication is knowing your audience. This is where writing papers for class gets kind of weird. As Peter Elbow explains[1]:

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

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

It helps to remember the key tenet of the university model: you're a junior scholar joining the academic community. Academic papers, in which scholars report the results of their research and thinking to one another, are the lifeblood of the scholarly world, carrying useful ideas and information to all parts of the academic corpus. Unless there is a particular audience specified in the assignment, you would do well to imagine yourself writing for a group of peers who have some introductory knowledge of the field but are unfamiliar with the specific topic you're discussing. Imagine them being interested in your topic but also busy; try to write something that is well worth your readers' time. Keeping an audience like this in mind will help you distinguish common knowledge in the field from that which must be defined and explained in your paper. Understanding your audience like this also resolve the audience mismatch that Elbow describes. As he notes, "You don't write *to* teachers, you write *for* them."[2]

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

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

Professors don't assign writing lightly. Grading student writing is generally the hardest, most intensive work instructors do.[3] With every assignment they give you, professors assign themselves many, many hours of demanding and tedious work that has to be completed while they are also preparing for each class meeting, advancing their scholarly and creative work, advising students, and serving on committees. Often, they're grading your papers on evenings and weekends because the conventional work day is already saturated with other obligations. You would do well to approach every assignment by putting yourself in the shoes of your instructor and asking yourself, "Why did she give me this assignment? How does it fit into the learning goals of the course? Why is this question/topic/problem so important to my professor that he is willing to spend evenings and weekends reading and commenting on several dozen novice papers on it?"

As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, most instructors do a lot to make their pedagogical goals and expectations transparent to students: they explain the course learning goals associated with assignments, provide grading rubrics in advance, and describe several strategies for succeeding. Other professors … not so much. Some students perceive more open-ended assignments as evidence of a lazy, uncaring, or even incompetent instructor. Not so fast! Professors certainly vary in the quantity and specificity of the guidelines and suggestions they distribute with each writing assignment. Some professors make a point to give very few parameters about an assignment—perhaps just a topic and a length requirement—and they likely have some good reasons for doing so. Here are some possible reasons:

1. *They figured it out themselves when they were students*. Unsurprisingly, your instructors were generally successful students who relished the culture and traditions of higher education so much that they strove to build an academic career. The current

emphasis on student-centered instruction is relatively recent; your instructors much more often had professors who adhered to the classic model of college instruction: they gave lectures together with, perhaps, one or two exams or papers. Students were on their own to learn the lingo and conventions of each field, to identify the key concepts and ideas within readings and lectures, and to sleuth out instructors' expectations for written work. Learning goals, rubrics, quizzes, and preparatory assignments were generally rare.

2. *They think figuring it out yourself is good for you*. Because your professors by and large succeeded in a much less supportive environment, they appreciate how learning to thrive in those conditions gave them life-long problem-solving skills. Many think you *should* be able to figure it out yourself and that it would be good practice for you to do so. Even those who do include a lot of guidance with writing assignments sometimes worry that they're depriving you of an important personal and intellectual challenge. Figuring out unspoken expectations is a valuable skill in itself.
3. *They're egg-heads*. As I explained in Chapter 1, many of your instructors have been so immersed in their fields that they may struggle to remember what it was like to encounter a wholly new discipline for the first time. The assumptions, practices, and culture of their disciplines are like the air they breathe; so much so that it is hard to describe to novices. They may assume that a verb like "analyze" is self-evident, forgetting that it can mean very different things in different fields. As a student, you voluntarily came to study with the scholars, artists, and writers at your institution. Rightly or wrongly, the burden is ultimately on you to meet them where they are.
4. *Professors value* academic freedom; that is, they firmly believe that their high-level expertise in their fields grants them the privilege of deciding what is important to focus on and how to approach it. As I also explain in Chapter 1, college professors differ in this way from high school teachers who are usually obligated to address a defined curriculum. Professors are often extremely wary of anything that seems to threaten academic freedom. Some see specified learning goals and standardized rubrics as the first step in a process that would strip higher education of its independence, scholarly innovation, and sense of discovery. While a standardized set of expectations and practices might make it easier to earn a degree, it's also good to consider the benefits of the more flexible and diversified model.

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

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3.2: So What Do Professors Want?

At one time or another, most students will find themselves frustrated by a professor's recalcitrant refusal to simply "Tell us what you want!" It's a natural feeling and, at times, a legitimate one. While all professors want to set you up to succeed, they may find their expectations hard to articulate, in part because they struggle to remember what it's like to be a beginner in the field. Often, however, the bigger and better reason that professors won't just tell you what to do is that there simply isn't a particular "answer" they want you to give in the paper. They want to see your own ambitious and careful analysis. Some students assume that they should be able to envision a paper and its thesis within minutes of receiving the assignment; if not, they complain that the assignment is unclear. Other students assume that every professor has a completely different set of expectations and, consequently, conclude that writing papers is just an unavoidable guessing game about entirely subjective and idiosyncratic standards. Neither of those assumptions are true. Good, well constructed writing assignments are supposed to be challenging to write, and professors are, above all, looking for your own self-motivated intellectual work.

Despite some variations by discipline, college instructors are bringing similar standards to evaluating student work. Recently, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has brought together faculty members from across the country to deliberate on the core knowledge and skills that define liberal arts education. They have also worked out benchmarks of success, as summarized in a rubric for written communication. Check it out! While few instructors are sitting down with the AAC&U rubric to determine grades on papers, you can be confident that these are the kinds of things almost all professors are looking for. The language of the "capstone" column illustrates especially well the scholarly mindset and independent work habits they expect students to bring to their work:

"thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose,"

"mastery of the subject,"

"detailed attention" to writing conventions,

"skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources," and

"graceful language."

Professors want to see that you've thought through a problem and taken the time and effort to explain your thinking in precise language.

The following chapters in this book seek to concretize these ideas. They begin with the most fundamental issues (the purpose of the assignment and the thesis), move through organizational strategies, and end with sentence-level expression. The expectations laid out here may seem daunting—and perhaps unreasonable, given that very few of you are going to follow your professors into academic life. But communication isn't just about expressing yourself; it's about connecting with others. And it's other people—in families, couples, communities, and workplaces—that shape the most important experiences of your life.

> Don't get discouraged! On my first college paper I got a very low grade. It felt like a slap in the face because I was a straight-A student in high school. It's just a fact of life. Talk to your professor about what you could have done differently. This will help you be better prepared for future papers.
>
> Kaethe Leonard

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3.3: The Prompt- What Does “Analyze” Mean Anyway?

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

1. *Focus on the* verbs. Look for verbs like “compare,” “explain,” “justify,” “reflect” or the all-purpose “analyze.” You’re not just producing a paper as an artifact; you’re conveying, in written communication, some intellectual work you have done. So the question is, what kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning?
2. *Put the assignment in context*. Many professors think in terms of assignment sequences. For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then a first draft, then a final draft, and, perhaps, a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you’re on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date, and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing your discussion.[5]If the assignment isn’t part of a sequence, think about where it falls in the semester, and how it relates to readings and other assignments. Are there headings on the syllabus that indicate larger units of material? For example, if you see that a paper comes at the end of a three-week unit on the role of the Internet in organizational behavior, then your professor likely wants you to synthesize that material in your own way. You should also check your notes and online course resources for any other guidelines about the workflow. Maybe you got a rubric a couple weeks ago and forgot about it. Maybe your instructor posted a link about “how to make an annotated bibliography” but then forgot to mention it in class.
3. *Try a free-write*. When I hand out an assignment, I often ask students to do a five-minute or ten-minute free-write. A free-write is when you just write, without stopping, for a set period of time. That doesn’t sound very “free;” it actually sounds kind of coerced. The “free” part is *what* you write—it can be whatever comes to mind. Professional writers use free-writing to get started on a challenging (or distasteful) writing task or to overcome writers block or a powerful urge to procrastinate. The idea is that if you just make yourself write, you can’t help but produce some kind of useful nugget. Thus, even if the first eight sentences of your free write are all variations on “I don’t understand this” or “I’d really rather be doing something else,” eventually you’ll write something like “I guess the main point of this is …” and—booyah!—you’re off and running. As an instructor, I’ve found that asking students to do a brief free-write right after I hand out an assignment generates useful clarification questions. If your instructor doesn’t make time for that in class, a quick free-write on your own will quickly reveal whether you need clarification about the assignment and, often, what questions to ask.
4. *Ask for clarification the right way*. Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, especially because students’ familiarity with the field can vary enormously. Asking for clarification is a good thing. Be aware, though, that instructors get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and instead receive an exact recipe for an A paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification, but try to convey that you want to learn and you’re ready to work.In general, avoid starting a question with “Do we have to …” because I can guarantee that your instructor is thinking, “You don’t *have* to do crap. You’re an adult. You chose college. You chose this class. You’re free to exercise your right to fail.” Similarly, avoid asking the professor about what he or she “wants.” You’re not performing some service for the professor when you write a paper. What they “want” is for you to really think about the material.

Potentially annoying questions	Preferable alternatives
I don’t get it. Can you explain this more? or What do you want us to do?	I see that we are comparing and contrasting these two cases. What should be our focus? Their causes? Their impacts? Their implications? All of those things? or I’m unfamiliar with how art historians analyze a painting. Could you say more about what questions I should have in mind to do this kind of analysis?
How many sources do we have to cite?	Is there a typical range for the number of sources a well written paper would cite for this assignment? or Could you say more about what the sources are for? Is it more that we’re analyzing these texts in this paper, or are we using these texts to analyze some other case?

Potentially annoying questions	Preferable alternatives
What do I have to do to get an A on this paper?	Could I meet with you to get feedback on my (pre-prepared) plans/outline/thesis/draft? or I'm not sure how to approach this assignment. Are there any good examples or resources you could point me to?

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3.4: Rubrics as Road Maps

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

Even the best rubrics aren't completely transparent. They simply can't be. Take, for example, the AAC&U rubric discussed in Chapter 1. It has been drafted and repeatedly revised by a multidisciplinary expert panel and tested multiple times on sample student work to ensure reliability. But it is still seems kind of vague. What is the real difference between "demonstrating a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose" and "demonstrating adequate consideration" of the same? It depends on the specific context. So how can you know whether you've done that? A big part of what you're learning, through feedback from your professors, is to judge the quality of your writing for yourself. Your future bosses are counting on that. At this point, it is better to think of rubrics as roadmaps, displaying your destination, rather than a GPS system directing every move you make.

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

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4: READING, INTERPRETATION, AND TEXT WRESTLING

4.1: Techniques

4.2: Activities

4.3: Student samples

4.4: What's Critical About Critical Thinking?

Section Introduction: Text Wrestling Analysis

Chapter Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Definition
critical/active reading	also referred to in this text as "engaged reading," a set of strategies and concepts to interrupt projection and focus on a text. See Appendix B: Engaged Reading Strategies
interpretation	the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. "An interpretation" refers to a specific meaning we build as we encounter a text, focusing on certain ideas, language, or patterns.
text	any artifact through which a message is communicated. Can be written or spoken; digital, printed, or undocumented; video, image, or language. Every text is rhetorical in nature. See rhetoric.
text wrestling	a rhetorical mode in which an author analyzes a text using close reading, then presents an interpretation supported by evidence from the text.

Along the way to this point of your educational career, you've probably encountered the term **critical reading** or **active reading** more than a few times. Teachers tell students of all ages that using active reading skills is important for reading comprehension, critical thinking, and even effective writing. But what exactly does it mean to read critically or actively?

Perhaps it would serve us to step back and first consider what is being read.



" CSAF releases 2009 reading list" by Master Sgt. Steven Goestsch in the Public Domain

Most often, we think of a text as a written piece- an essay, a poem, a newspaper article, a novel. While this is often the case, a **text** can be anything: it is an articulation of rhetoric, bearing in mind that we are constantly surrounded by rhetoric. An advertisement is a text; a series of tweets is a text; a TV show is a text; an improvised dance number is a text.

Every text, in turn, is subject to **interpretation**. Interpretation refers to the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. A text by itself does not actually *mean* anything; rather, we *build* meaning as we engage with a text. This is an important distinction to make because

- As a reader, your interpretation is unique, informed by your lived experiences, your education, your mood(s), your purpose, and your posture. To an extent, no two readers will interpret a text exactly the same way.
- As an author, you must be cognizant that your writing only impacts your audience when they encounter it from their unique interpretive position. You may carefully construct a piece of writing to capture meaning, but that meaning only exists when a reader engages with what you've written.

Because texts can come in such diverse and complex forms, the strategies entailed in "critical" and "active reading" are only the first step: they are tools in our toolkits that lay the groundwork for interpretation. In other words, *engaged reading strategies* (like those in the so-titled Appendix A) prepare us for **text wrestling**.

Text wrestling refers to an analytical encounter with a text during which you, the reader, make observations and informed arguments about the text as a method of creating meaning and cultivating unique insight. Most often, this encounter will eventually lead to an essay that shares your analysis with your classmates, your teacher, or a broader audience.

The following section explores the cognitive and rhetorical techniques that support text wrestling. While your teacher may ask you to focus on a particular medium or genre of text for a text wrestling essay, this section will explore analytical processes that can be applied to many different kinds of texts. First, in Chapter Four, we will review the ideas and skills for thinking analytically. After that, we will turn to ideas and skills for writing about that analytical thinking, including summary, note-taking, and synthesis.

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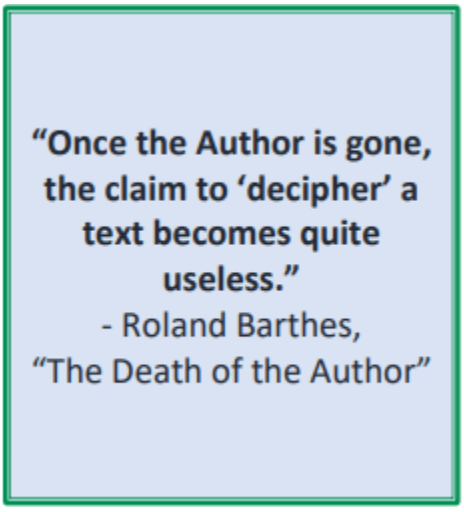
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4.1: Techniques

Techniques

Authorial Intent

In a groundbreaking 1967 essay, Roland Barthes declared that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."[57] In the fifty years since its publication, "The Death of the Author" has greatly influenced the way students, teachers, and academics conduct analysis. Most critics have come to acknowledge that the personal and historical context of the author is not entirely irrelevant, as Barthes might seem to suggest; rather, most people value Barthes' notion that we must free ourselves from the trap of **authorial intent**. This is to say, what we have to work with it the text itself, so it doesn't matter what the author *wanted* to say, but instead what they *did* say. Therefore, we should work from the assumption that every choice the author made was *deliberate*.



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

This idea might seem to contradict one of the central frameworks of this textbook: that unpacking the rhetorical situation is crucial to critically consuming and producing rhetoric.

Overlooking authorial intent does not mean that the authors' rhetorical situation is no longer important. Instead, we should simply avoid unproductive speculation: we can consider the author's occasion, but we shouldn't try to guess about their motives. For instance, we can say that Malcolm X's writing was influenced by racial oppression in the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S., but not by his preferences for peas over carrots. It's a fine line, but an important one.

Moreover, the choice to focus on what the author actually wrote, assuming that each word is on purpose, is *part* of the rhetorical situation of analysis. Your audience might also be curious about the author's intent, but your rhetorical purpose in this situation is to demonstrate an interpretation of the *text* - not the author.

Radical Noticing: Seeing What's on the Page

When we were early readers, we were trained to encounter texts in a specific way: find the main idea, focus on large-scale comprehension, and ignore errors, digressions, or irrelevant information. As Jane Gallop discusses in her essay, "The Ethics of

Reading: Close Encounters," this is a useful skill but a problematic one. Because we engage a text from a specific interpretive position (and because we're not always aware of that position), we often project what we anticipate rather than actually reading. Instead of reading what *is* on the page, we read what we think *should* be.

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

When the reader concentrates on the familiar, she is reassured that what she already knows is sufficient in relation to this new book. Focusing on the surprising, on the other hand, would mean giving up the comfort of the familiar, of the already known for the sake of learning, of encountering something new, something she didn't already know.

In fact, this all has to do with learning. Learning is very difficult; it takes a lot of effort. It is of course much easier if once we learn something we can apply what we have learned again and again. It is much more difficult if every time we confront something new, we have to learn something new.

Reading what one expects to find means finding what one already knows. Learning, on the other hand, means coming to know something one did not know before. Projecting is the opposite of learning. As long as we project onto a text, we cannot learn from it, we can only find what we already know. Close reading is thus a technique to make us learn, to make us see what we don't already know, rather than transforming the new into the old.[58]

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

Perhaps the most important part of analysis is this attention to detail. If we assume that every word the author published is intentional (in order to avoid speculation about authorial intent), then we can question the meaning and impact of each word, each combination of words, each formal feature of the text. In turn, you should pay special attention to words or forms that surprise you or confuse you: the eye-catching and the ambiguous.

Symbols, Patterns, and References[59]

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

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

Here are a few examples:

- Barack Obama's 2008 campaign logo: the O, of course, stands in for the candidate's last name; the red lines seem to suggest a road (implying progress), or maybe waving American flag; the blue curve represents a clear, blue sky (implying safety or wellbeing); the colors themselves are perhaps symbolic of bipartisan cooperation, or at the very least, the American color palette of red, white, and blue.



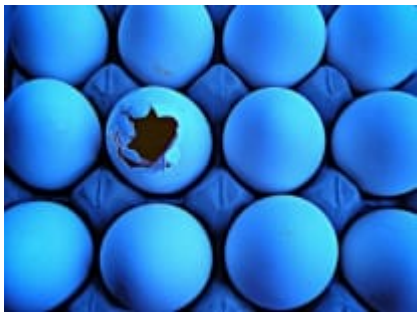
"Obama Iphone Wallpaper" by Tony Gumbel is licensed under CC BY 2.0

- In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat," the titular black cat symbolizes the narrator's descent into madness, alcoholism, and violence, and later his guilt for that descent.
- The teaspoon used to hypnotize people ion the film *Get Out* (2017) symbolizes wealth, power, and privilege (a "silver spoon [Wikipedia entry]"), suggesting that those structures are tools for control and domination.
- In *Beowulf*, the Old English epic poem, the monster Grendel symbolizes a fear of the unknown and the intractability of nature.
- In *The Great Gatsby*, the green light at the end of the Buchanan's dock symbolizes nostalgia and hope.

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

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

- The episode of the TV series *Master of None* titled "Parents" (Season 1, Episode 2) tells the respective stories of two immigrant families. By tracing the previous generation of each immigrant families through a series of flashbacks, the episode establishes a pattern in chronology: although the families have unique stories, the pattern highlights the similarities of these two families' experiences. In turn, this pattern demonstrates the parallel but distinct challenges and opportunities faced by the immigrants and first-generation American citizens the episode profiles.
- In Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce Et Decorum Est," each line of the first stanza contains ten syllables. However, the following stanzas contain occasional deviations -more or fewer syllables- creating a sense of disorder and also drawing emphasis to the pattern-breaking lines.
- Tyehimba Jess, author of *Olio* and *Leadbelly*, painstakingly crafts patterns in his poetry. For instance, his series of sonnets on Millie and Christine McKoy [Wikipedia entry] follows not only the conventions of traditional sonnets, but are also interlocking, exemplifying the distinct but overlapping voices of conjoined twins.



"No More Breaks" by jlaytarts2090 is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

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

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

Sociocultural Lenses[60]

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

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

- Gender and sexuality

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

What relationships- familial, friendly, romantic, sexual, etc. - are portrayed in the text? How do these relationships compare to the relationships of the dominant culture?How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed to LGBTQIA25+ people?

- Disability

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

- Race, ethnicity, and nationality

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

- Social Class and economy

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

- Ecologies and the environment

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

- (Post)colonialism

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

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

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4.2: Activities

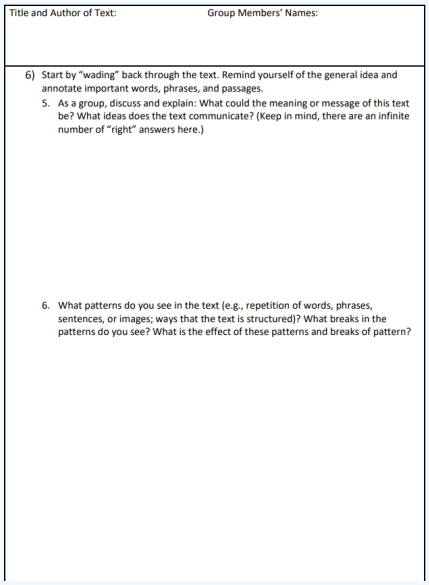
Activities

Idea Generation: Close Reading Graphic Organizer

The first time you read a text, you most likely will not magically stumble upon a unique, inspiring insight to pursue as a thesis. As discussed earlier in this section, close reading is an iterative process, which means that you must repeatedly encounter a text (reread, re-watch, re-listen, etc.) trying to challenge it, interrogate it, and gradually develop a working thesis.

Very often, the best way to practice analysis is collaboratively, through discussion. Because other people will necessarily provide different perspectives through their unique interpretive positions, reading groups can help you grow your analysis. By discussing a text, you open yourself up to more nuanced and unanticipated interpretations influenced by your peers. Your teacher might ask you to work in small groups to complete the following graphic organizer in response to a certain text. (You can also complete this exercise independently, but it might no yield the same results.)

Exercise 1



Title and Author of Text: Group Members' Names:

6) Start by "wading" back through the text. Remind yourself of the general idea and annotate important words, phrases, and passages.

5. As a group, discuss and explain: What could the meaning or message of this text be? What ideas does the text communicate? (Keep in mind, there are an infinite number of "right" answers here.)

6. What patterns do you see in the text (e.g., repetition of words, phrases, sentences, or images; ways that the text is structured)? What breaks in the patterns do you see? What is the effect of these patterns and breaks of pattern?

7. What symbols and motifs do you see in the text? What might they represent? What is the effect of these symbols? What themes do they cultivate or gesture to?

8. What references do you see in the text? Does the author allude to, quote, imitate, or parody another text, film, song, etc.? Does the author play on connotations? What is the effect of these references?

9. What about this text surprises you? What do you get hung up on? Consider Jane Gallop's brief list from "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters" –

> (1) unusual vocabulary, words that surprise either because they are unfamiliar or because they seem to belong to a different context; (2) words that seem unnecessarily repeated, as if the word keeps insisting on being written; (3) images or metaphors, especially ones that are used repeatedly and are somewhat surprising given the context; (4) what is in italics or parentheses; and (5) footnotes that seem too long[79]

– but also anything else that strikes you as a reader.

10. Analytical lenses: Do you see any of the following threads represented in the work? What evidence of these ideas do you see? How do these parts contribute to a whole?

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality	Gender and Sexuality

Disability	Social Class and Economy
Ecologies and the Environment	(Post)colonialism

Thesis Builder

Your thesis statement can and should evolve as you continue writing your paper: teachers will often refer to a thesis as a "working thesis" because the revision process should include tweaking, pivoting, focusing, expanding, and/or rewording your thesis. The exercise on the next two pages, though, should help you develop a working thesis to begin your project. Following the examples, identify the components of your analysis that might contribute to a thesis statement.

Your approach to building a thesis will depend on your rhetorical mode; for instance, an analytical thesis (like this one), might not be most appropriate for a persuasive, expository, or research essay.

Example 1

Topic (Name your focus text and its author)	Ex.: "A Wind from the North" by Bill Capossere
Analytical focus (Identify at least one *part* of the *whole* you're studying)	Ex.: Repeated phrase "five or six days" (104) Symbol – uncle's car Motif – snow
Analytical insight (Explain the function of that *part* in relationship to the *whole*)	Ex.: They imply that living in isolation makes you lonely **(continued on next page)**

Stakes (So what? Why does it matter?)	Ex.: Sheds light on the fragility of life and the relationships we build throughout it.
Consider adding... • A concession statement ("Although," "even though," etc.) Ex.: Although there's nothing wrong with preferring time alone, … • A question that you might pursue Ex.: Can Capossere's uncle represent other isolated people?	
THESIS: Ex.: Although there's nothing wrong with preferring time alone, "A Wind from the North" by Bill Capossere sheds light on the fragility of life and the relationships we build throughout it. The text conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle by symbolizing Capossere's uncle with a "untouchable" car. Additionally, the narrator repeats images and phrases in the essay to reinforce his uncle's isolation.	

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4.3: Student samples

Model Texts by Student Authors

Songs[80]

(A text wrestling analysis of "Proofs" by Richard Rodriguez)

Songs are culturally important. In the short story "Proofs" by Richard Rodriguez, a young Mexican American man comes to terms with his bi-cultural life. This young man's father came to America from a small and poverty-stricken Mexican village. The young man flashes from his story to his father's story in order to explore his Mexican heritage and American life. Midway through the story Richard Rodriguez utilizes the analogies of songs to represent the cultures and how they differ. Throughout the story there is a clash of cultures. Because culture can be experienced through the arts and teachings of a community, Rodriguez uses the songs of the two cultures to represent the protagonist's bi-cultural experience.

According to Rodriguez, the songs that come from Mexico express an emotional and loving culture and community: "By my mama says there are no songs like the love songs of Mexico" (50). The songs from that culture can be beautiful. It is amazing the love and beauty that come from social capital and community involvement. The language Richard Rodriguez uses to explain these songs is beautiful as well. "-it is the raw edge of sentiment" (51). The author explains how it is the men who keep the songs. No matter how stoic the men are, they have an outlet to express their love and pain as well as every emotion in between. "The cry of a Jackal under the moon, the whistle of a phallus, the maniacal song of the skull" (51). This outlet is an outlet for men to express themselves that is not prevalent in American culture. The songs from the American culture are different. In America the songs get lost. There is assimilation of cultures. The songs of Mexico are important to the protagonist of the story. There is a clash between the old culture in Mexico and the subject's new American life represented in these songs.

A few paragraphs later in the story, on page 52, the author tells us the difference in the American song. America sings a different tune. America is the land of opportunity. It represents upward mobility and the ability to "make it or break it." But it seems there is a cost for all this material gain and all this opportunity. There seems to be a lack of love and emotion, a lack of the ability to express pain and all other feelings, the type of emotion which is expressed in the songs of Mexico. The songs of America say, "You can be anything you want to be" (52). The song represents the American Dream. The cost seems to be the loss of compassion, love, and emotion that is expressed through the songs of Mexico. There is no outlet quite the same for the stoic men of America. Rodriguez explains how the Mexican migrant workers have all that pain and desire, all that emotion penned up inside until it explodes in violent outbursts. "Or they would come into town on Monday nights for the wrestling matches or on Tuesdays for boxing. They worked over in Yolo County. They were men without women. They were Mexicans without Mexico" (49). Rodriguez uses the language in the story almost like a song in order to portray the culture of the American dream. The phrase "I will send for you or I will come home rich," is repeated twice throughout the story. The gain for all this loss of love and compassion is the dream of financial gain. "You have come into the country on your knees with your head down. You are a man" (48). That is the allure of the American Dream.

The protagonist of the story was born in America. Throughout the story he is looking at this illusion of the American Dream through a different frame. He is also trying to come to terms with his own manhood in relation to his American life and Mexican heritage. The subject has the ability to see the two songs in a different light. "The city will win. The city sings mean songs, dirty songs" (52). Part of the subject's reconciliation process with himself is seeing that all the material stuff that is dangled as part of the American Dream is not worth the love and emotion that is held in the old Mexican villages and expressed in their songs.

Rodriguez represents this conflict of culture on page 53. The protagonist of the story is taking pictures during the arrest of illegal border-crossers. "I stare at the faces. They stare at me. To them I am not bearing witness; I am part of the process of being arrested" (53). The subject is torn between the two cultures in a hazy middle ground. He is not one of the migrants and he is not one of the police. He is there taking pictures of the incident with a connection to both of the groups and both of the groups see him connected with the others.

The old Mexican villages are characterized by a *lack of:* "Mexico is poor" (50). However, this is not the reason for the love and emotion that is held. The thought that people have more love and emotion because they are poor is a misconception. There are both rich people and poor people who have multitudes of love and compassion. The defining elements in creating love and emotion for each other comes from the level of community interaction and trust- the ability to sing these love songs and express

emotion towards one another. People who become caught up in the American Dream tend to be obsessed with their own personal gain. This diminishes the social interaction and trust between fellow humans. There is no outlet in the culture of America quite the same as singing love songs towards each other. It does not matter if they are rich or poor, lack of community, trust, and social interaction; lack of songs can lead to lack of love and emotion that is seen in the old songs of Mexico.

The image of the American Dream is bright and shiny. To a young boy in a poor village the thought of power and wealth can dominate over a life of poverty with love and emotion. However, there is poverty in America today as well as in Mexico. The poverty here looks like a little different but many migrants and young men find the American Dream to be an illusion. "Most immigrants to America came from villages. The America that Mexicans find today, at the decline of the century, is a closed-circuit city of ramps and dark towers, a city without God. The city is evil. Turn. Turn" (50). The song of America sings an inviting tune for young men from poor villages. When they arrive though it is not what they dreamed about. The subject of the story can see this. He is trying to come of age in his own way, acknowledging America and the Mexico of old. He is able to look back and forth in relation to the America his father came to for power and wealth and the America that he grew up in. All the while, he watches this migration of poor villages, filled with love and emotion, to a big heartless city, while referring back to his father's memory of why he came to America and his own memories of growing up in America. "Like wandering Jews. They carried their home with them, back and forth: they had no true home but the tabernacle of memory" (51). The subject of the story is experiencing all of this conflict of culture and trying to compose his own song.

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Rodriguez, Richard. "Proofs." *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction,* edited by Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, Norton, 1996, pp. 48-54.

Teacher Takeaways

"The student clearly states their thesis in the beginning, threading it through the essay, and further developing it through a synthesized conclusion. The student's ideas build logically through the essay via effective quote integration: the student sets up the quote, presents it clearly, and then responds to the quote with thorough analysis that links it back to their primary claims. At times this thread is a bit difficult to follow; as one example, when the student talks about the text's American songs, it's not clear how Rodriguez's text illuminates the student's thesis. Nor is it clear why the student believes Rodriguez is saying the "American Dream is not worth the love and emotion." Without this clarification, it's difficult to follow some of the connections the student relies on for their thesis, so at times it seems like they may be stretching their interpretation beyond what the text supplies."

– Professor Dannemiller

Normal Person: An Analysis of the Standards of Normativity in "A Plague of Tics"[81]

David Sedaris' essay "A Plague of Tics" describes the Sedaris' psychological struggles he encountered in his youth, expressed through obsessive-compulsive tics. These abnormal behaviors heavily inhibited his functionings, but more importantly, isolated and embarrassed him during his childhood, adolescence, and young adult years. Authority figures in his life would mock him openly, and he constantly struggled to perform routine simple tasks in a timely manner, solely due to the amount of time that needed to be set aside for carrying out these compulsive tics. He lacked the necessary social support an adolescent requires because of his apparent abnormality. But when we look at the behaviors of his parents, as well as the socially acceptable tics of our society more generally, we see how Sedaris' tics are in fact not too different, if not less harmful than those of the society around him. By exploring Sedaris' isolation, we can discover that socially constructed standards of normativity are at best arbitrary, and at worst violent.

As a young boy, Sedaris is initially completely unaware that his tics are not socially acceptable in the outside world. He is puzzled when his teacher, Miss Chestnut, correctly guesses that he is "going to hit [himself] over the head with [his] shoe" (361), despite the obvious removal of his shoe during their private meeting. Miss Chestnut continues by embarrassingly making fun out of the fact that Sedaris' cannot help but "bathe her light switch with [his] germ-ridden tongue" (361) repeatedly throughout the school

day. She targets Sedaris with mocking questions, putting him on the spot in front of his class; this behavior is not ethical due to Sedaris' age. It violates the trust that students should have in their teachers and other caregivers. Miss Chestnut criticizes him excessively for his ambiguous, child-like answers. For example, she drills him on whether it is "healthy to hit ourselves over the head with our shoes" (361) and he "guess[es] that it was not," (361) as a child might praise it. She ridicules his use of the term "guess," using obvious examples of instances when guessing would not be appropriate, such as "[running] into traffic with a paper sack over [her] head" (361). Her mockery is not only rude, but ableist and unethical. Any teacher- at least nowadays- should recognize that Sedaris needs compassion and support, not emotional abuse.

These kinds of negative responses to Sedaris' behavior continue upon his return home, in which the role of the insensitive authority figure is taken on by his mother. In a time when maternal support is crucial for a secure and confident upbringing, Sedaris' mother was never understanding of his behavior, and left little room for open, honest discussion regarding ways to cope with his compulsiveness. She reacted harshly to the letter sent home by Miss Chestnut, nailing Sedaris, exclaiming that his "goddamned math teacher" (363) noticed his strange behaviors, as if it should have been obvious to young, egocentric Sedaris. When teachers like Miss Chestnut meet with her to discuss young David's problems, she makes fun of him, imitating his compulsions; Sedaris is struck by "a sharp, stinging sense of recognition" upon viewing this mockery (365). Sedaris' mother, too, is an authority figure who maintains ableist standards of normativity by taunting her own son. Meeting with teachers should be an opportunity to truly help David, not tease him.

On the day that Miss Chestnut makes her appearance in the Sedaris household to discuss his behaviors with his mother, Sedaris watches them from the staircase, helplessly embarrassed. We can infer from this scene that Sedaris has actually become aware of that fact that his tics are not considered to be socially acceptable, and that he must be "the wierd kid" among his peers- and even to his parents and teachers. his mother's cavalier derision demonstrates her apparent disinterest in the well-being of he son, as she blatantly brushes off his strange behaviors except in the instance during which she can put them on display for the purpose of entertaining a crowd. What all of these pieces of his mother's flawed personality show us is that she has issues too- drinking and smoking, in addition to her poor mothering- but yet Sedaris is the one being chastised while she lives a normal life. Later in the essay, Sedaris describes how "a blow to the nose can be positively narcotic" (366), drawing a parallel to his mother's drinking and smoking. From this comparison, we can begin to see flawed standards of "normal behavior": although many people drink and smoke (especially at the time the story takes place), these habits are much more harmful than what Sedaris does in private.

Sedaris' father has an equally harmful personality, but it manifests differently. Sedaris describes him as a hoarder, one who has, "saved it all: every last Green Stamp and coupon, every outgrown bathing suit and scrap of linoleum" (365). Sedaris' father attempts to "cure [Sedaris] with a series of threats" (366). In one scene, he even enacts violence upon David by slamming on the brakes of the car while David has his nose pressed against a windshield. Sedaris reminds us that his behavior might have been unusual, but it wasn't violent: "So what if I wanted to touch my nose to the windshield? Who was I hurting?" (366). In fact, it is in that very scene that Sedaris draws the aforementioned parallel to his mother's drinking: when Sedaris discovers that "a blow to the nose can be positively narcotic," it is while his father is driving around "with a lapful of rejected, out-of-state coupons" (366). Not only is Sedaris' father violating the trust David places in him as a caregiver; his hoarding is an arguably unhealthy habit that simply happens to be more socially acceptable than licking a concrete toadstool. Comparing Sedaris's tics to his father's issues, it is apparent that his father's are much more harmful than his own. None of the adults in Sedaris' life are innocent-"mother smokes and Miss Chestnut massaged her waist twenty, thirty times a day- and here *I* couldn't press my nose against the windshield of a car" (366)- but nevertheless, Sedaris's problems are ridiculed or ignored by the 'normal' people in his life, again bringing into question what it means to be a normal person.

In high school, Sedaris' begins to take certain measures to actively control and hide his socially unacceptable behaviors. "For a time," he says, "I thought that if I accompanied my habits with an outlandish wardrobe, I might be viewed as eccentric rather than just plain retarded" (369). Upon this notion, Sedaris starts to hang numerous medallions around his neck, reflecting that he "might as well have worn a cowbell" (369) due to the obvious noises they made when he would jerk his head violently, drawing more attention to his behaviors (the opposite of the desired effect). He also wore large glasses, which he now realizes made it easier to observe his habit of rolling his eyes into his head, and "clunky platform shoes [that] left lumps when used to discreetly tap [his] foreground" (369). Clearly Sedaris was trying to appear more normal, in a sense, but was failing terribly. After high school, Sedairs faces the new wrinkle of sharing a college dorm room. He conjures up elaborate excuses to hide specific tics, ensuring his roommate that "there's a good chance the brain tumor will shrink" (369) if he shakes his head around hard enough and that specialists have ordered him to perform "eye exercises to strengthen what they call he 'corneal fibers'" (369). He eventually comes to a point of such paranoid hypervigilance that he memorizes his roommate's class schedule to find moments to carry his tics in privacy. Sedaris worries himself sick attempting to approximate 'normal': "I got exactly fourteen minutes of sleep during my entire first year of college" (369). When people are pressured to perform an identity inconsistent with their own-pressured by socially constructed standards of normativity- they harm themselves in the process. Furthermore, even though the responsibility does not necessarily fall on Sedaris' peers to offer support, we can assume that their condemnation of his behavior reinforces the standards that oppress him.

Sedaris' compulsive habits peak and begin their slow decline when he picks up the new habit of smoking cigarettes, which is of course much more socially acceptable while just as compulsive in nature once addiction has the chance to take over. He reflects, from the standpoint of an adult, on the reason for the acquired habit, speculating that "maybe it was coincidental, or perhaps ... much more socially acceptable than crying out in tiny voices" (371). He is calmed by smoking, saying that "everything's fine as long I know there's a cigarette in my immediate future" (372). (Remarkably, he also reveals that he has not truly been cured, as he revisits his former ticks and will "dare to press [his] nose against the doorknob or roll his eyes to achieve that once-satisfying ache" [372.]) Sedaris has officially achieved the tiresome goal of appearing 'normal', as his compulsive tics seemed to "[fade] out by the time [he] took up with cigarettes" (371). It is important to realize, however, that Sedaris might have found a socially acceptable way to mask his tics, but not a *healthy* one. The fact that the only activity that could take place of his compulsive tendencies was the dangerous use of a highly addictive substance, one that has proven to be dangerously harmful with frequent and prolonged use, shows that he is conforming to the standards of society which do not correspond with healthy behaviors.

In a society full of dangerous, inconvenient, or downright strange habits that are nevertheless considered socially acceptable, David Sedaris suffered through the psychic and physical violence and negligence of those who should have cared for him, With what we can clearly recognize as a socially constructed disability, Sedaris was continually denied support and mocked by authority figures. He struggled to socialize and perform academically while still carrying out each task he was innately compelled to do, and faced consistent social hardship because of his outlandish appearance and behaviors that are viewed in our society as "weird." Because of ableist, socially constructed standards of normativity, Sedaris had to face a long string of turmoil and worry taht most of society may never come to completely understand. We can only hope that as a greater society, we continue sharing and studying stories like Sedairs' so that we critique the flawed guidelines we force upon different bodies and minds, and attempt to be more accepting and welcoming of the idiosyncrasies we might deem to be unfavorable.

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Sedaris, David. "A Plague of Tics." *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th edition, edited by Samuel Cohen, Bedford, 2013, pp. 359-372.

Teacher Takeaways

"I like how this student follows their thesis through the text, highlighting specific instances from Sedaris's essay that support their analysis. Each instance of this evidence is synthesized with the student's observations and connected back to their thesis statement, allowing for the essay to capitalize on the case being built in their conclusion. At the ends of some earlier paragraphs, some of this 'spine-building' is interrupted with suggestions of how characters in the essay should behave, which doesn't always clearly link to the thesis's goals. Similarly, some information isn't given a context to help us understand its relevance, such as what violating the student-teacher trust has to do with normativity being a social construct, or how Sedaris's description of 'a blow to the nose' being a narcotic creates a parallel to his mother's drinking and smoking. Without further analysis and synthesis of this information the reader is left to guess how these ideas connect."

– Professor Dannemiller

Analyzing "Richard Cory"[82]

In the poem "Richard Cory" by Edward Arlington Robinson, a narrative is told about the character Richard Cory by those who admired him. In the last stanza, the narrator, who uses the pronoun "we," tells use that Richard Cory commits suicide. Throughout most of the poem, though, Cory had been described as a wealthy gentleman. The "people on the pavement" (2), the speakers of the poem, admired him because he presented himself well, was educated, and was wealthy. The poem presents the idea that, even though Cory seemed to have everything going for him, being wealthy does not guarantee happiness or health.

Throughout the first three stanzas Cory is described in a positive light, which makes it seem like he has everything that he could ever need. Specifically, the speaker compares Cory directly and indirectly to royalty because of his wealth and his physical appearance: "He was a gentleman from sole to crown, / Clean favored and imperially slim" (Robinson 3-4). In line 3, the speaker is punning on "soul" and "crown." At the same time, Cory is both a gentleman from foot (sole) to head (crown) and also soul to crown.

The use of the word "crown" instead of head is a clever way to show that Richard was thought of as a king to the community. The phrase "imperially slim" can also be associated with royalty because imperial comes from "empire." The descriptions used gave clear insight that he was admired for his appearance and manners, like a king or emperor.

In other parts of the poem, we see that Cory is 'above' the speakers. The first lines, "When Richard Cory went down torn, / We people on the pavement looked at him" (1-2), show that Cory is not from the same place as the speakers. The words "down" and "pavement" also suggest a difference in status between Cory and the people. The phrase "We people on the pavement" used in the first stanza (Robinson 2), tells us that the narrator and those that they are including in their "we" may be homeless and sleeping on the pavement; at the least, this phrase shows that "we" are below Cory.

In addition to being 'above,' Cory is also isolated from the speakers. In the second stanza, we can see that there was little interaction between Cory and the people on the pavement: "And he was always human when he talked; / But still fluttered pulses when he said, / 'Good- morning'" (Robinson 6-8). Because people are "still fluttered" by so little, we can speculate that it was special for them to talk to Cory. But these interactions gave those on the pavement no insight into Richard's real feelings or personality. Directly after the descriptions of the impersonal interactions, the narrator mentions that "he was rich-yes, richer than a king" (Robinson 9). At the same time that Cory is again compared to royalty, this line reveals that people were focused on his wealth and outward appearance, not his personal life or wellbeing.

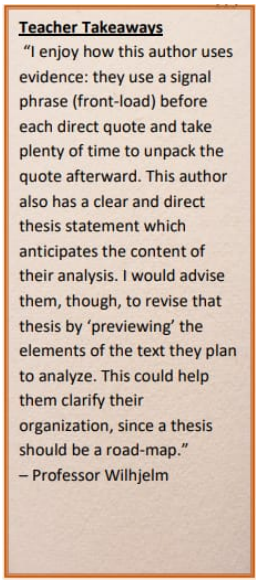
The use of the first-person plural narration to describe Cory gives the reader the impression that everyone in Cory's presence longed to have the life that he did. Using "we," the narrator speaks for many people at once. From the end of the third stanza to the end of the poem, the writing turns from admirable description of Richard to a noticeably more melancholy, dreary description of what those who admired Richard had to do because they did not have all that Richard did. These people had nothing, but they thought that he was everything. To make us wish that we were in his place. So on we worked, and waited for the light,

And went without the meat, and cursed the bread... (Robinson 9-12) They sacrificed their personal lives and food to try to rise up to Cory's level. They longed to not be required to struggle. A heavy focus on money and materialistic things blocked their ability to see what Richard Cory was actually feeling or going through. I suggest that "we" also includes the reader of the poem. If we read the poem this way, "Richard Cory" critiques the way we glorify wealthy people's lives to the point that we hurt ourselves. Our society values financial success over mental health and believes in a false narrative about social mobility.

Though the piece was written more than a century ago, the perceived message has not been lost. Money and materialistic things do not create happiness, only admiration and alienation from those around you. Therefore, we should not sacrifice our own happiness and leisure for a lifestyle that might not make us happy. The poem's messages speaks to our modern society, too, because it shows a stigma surrounding mental health: if people have "everything / To make us wish that we were in [their] place" (11-12), we often assume that they don't deal with the same mental health struggles as everyone. "Richard Cory" reminds us that we should take care of each other, not assume that people are okay because they put up a good front.

Works Cited

Robinson, Edward Arlington. "Richard Cory." *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, Shorter 12th edition, edited by Kelly J. Mays, Norton, 2017, p.482.



To Suffer or Surrender? An Analysis of Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" [83]

Death is a part of life that everyone must face at one point or another. The poem "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" depicts the grief and panic one feels when a loved is approaching the end of their life, while presenting a question; is it right to surrender to death, or should it be resisted? In this poem, Dylan Thomas opposses the idea of a peaceful passing, and uses various literary devices such as repetition, metaphor, and imagery to argue that death should be resisted at all costs.

The first thing that one may notice while reading Thomas's piece is that there are key phrases repeated throughout the poem. As a result of the poem's villanelle structure, both lines "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" (Thomas) are repeated often. This repetition gives the reader a sense of panic and desperation as the speaker pleads with their father to stay. The first line showcases a bit of alliteration of n sounds at the beginning of "not" and "night," as well as alliteration of hard g sounds in the words "go" and "good." These lines are vital to the poem as they reiterate its central meaning, making it far from subtle and extremely hard to miss. These lines add even more significance due to their placement in the poem. "Dying of the light" and "good night" are direct metaphors for death, and with the exception of the first line of the poem, they only appear at the end of a stanza. This structural choice is a result of the villanelle form, but we can interpret it to highlight the predictability of life itself, and signifies the undeniable and unavoidable fact that everyone must face death at the end of one's life. The line "my father, there on the sad height" (Thomas 16) confirms that this poem is directed to the speaker's father, the idea presented in these lines is what Thomas wants his father to recognize above all else.

This poem also has many contradictions. In the fifth stanza, Thomas describes men near death "who see with blinding sight" (Thomas 13). "Blinding sight" is an oxymoron, which implies that although with age most men lose their sight, they are wiser and enlightened, and have a greater understanding of the world. In this poem "night" is synonymous with "death"; thus, the phrase "good night" can also be considered an oxymoron if one does not consider death good. Presumably the speaker does not, given their desperation for their father to avoid it. The use of the word "good" initially seems odd, however, although it may seem like the speaker rejects the idea of death itself, this is not entirely the case. Thomas presents yet another oxymoron by saying "Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears" (Thomas 17). By referring to passionate tears as a blessing and a curse, which insinuates that the speaker does not necessarily believe death itself is inherently wrong, but to remain complicit in the face of death would be. These tears would be a curse because it is difficult to watch a loved one cry, but a blessing because the tears are a sign that the father is unwilling to surrender to death. This line is especially significant as it distinguishes the author's beliefs about death versus dying, which are vastly different. "Good night" is an acknowledgement of the bittersweet relief of the struggles and hardships of life that come with death, while "fierce tears" and the repeated line "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" show that the speaker sees the act of dying as a much more passionate, sad, and angering experience. The presence of these oxymorons creates a sense of conflict in the reader, a feeling that is often felt by those who are struggling to say goodbye to a loved one.

At the beginning of the middle four stanzas they each begin with a description of a man, "Wise men... Good men... Wild men... Grave men..." (Thomas 4; 7; 10; 13). Each of these men have one characteristic that is shared, which is that they all fought against death for as long as they could. These examples are perhaps used in an attempt to inspire the father. Although the speaker begs

their father to "rage" against death, this is not to say that they believe death is avoidable. Thomas reveals this in the 2nd stanza that "wise men at their end know dark is right" (Thomas 4), meaning that wise men know that death is inevitable, which in return means that the speaker is conscious of this fact as well. It also refers to the dark as "right", which may seem contradicting to the notion presented that death should not be surrendered to; however, this is yet another example of the contrast between the author's beliefs about death itself, and the act of dying. The last perspective that Thomas shows is "Grave men". Of course, the wordplay of "grave" alludes to death. Moreover, similarly to the second stanza that referred to "wise men", this characterization of "grave men" alludes to the speaker's knowledge of impending doom, despite the constant pleads for their father to resist it.

Another common theme that occurs in the stanzas about these men is regret. A large reason the speaker is so insistent that his father does not surrender to the "dying of the light" is because the speaker does not want their father to die with regrets, and believes that any honorable man should do everything they can in their power to make a positive impact in the world. Thomas makes it clear that it is cowardly to surrender when one can still do good, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant.

All these examples of men are positively associated with the "rage" that Thomas so often refers to, further supporting the idea that rage, passion, and madness are qualities of honorable men. Throughout stanza 2, 3, 4 and 5, the author paints pictures of these men dancing, singing in the sun, and blazing like meteors. Despite the dark and dismal tone of the piece, the imagery used depicts life as joyous and lively. However, a juxtaposition still exists between men who are truly living, and men who are simply avoiding death. Words like burn, rave, sad, and rage are used when referencing the prime of one's life. None of these words give the feeling of peace; however those alluding to life are far more cheerful. Although the author rarely uses the words "life" and "death", the text symbolizes them through light and night. The contrast between the authors interpretation of life versus death is drastically different. Thomas wants the reader to see that no matter how old they become, there is always something to strive for and fight for, and to accept death would be to deprive the world of what you have to offer.

In this poem Dylan Thomas juggles the complicated concept of mortality. Thomas perfectly portrays the fight against time as we age, as well as the fear and desperation that many often feel when facing the loss of a loved one. Although the fight against death cannot be won, in "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" Dylan Thomas emphasizes how despite this indisputable fact, one should still fight against death with all their might. Through the use of literary devices such as oxymorons and repetition, Thomas inspires readers to persevere, even in the most dire circumstances.

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Thomas, Dylan. "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night." *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, edited by Kelly J. Mays, portable 12th ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 2015, pp. 659

Teacher Takeaways

"One of my favorite things about this essay is that the student doesn't only consider what the poem means, but how it means: they explore the way that the language both carries and creates the message. I notice this especially when the student is talking about the villanelle form, alliteration, and oxymorons. That said, I think that the student's analysis would be more coherent if they foregrounded the main insight—that death and dying are different—in their thesis, then tracked that insight throughout the analysis. In other words, the essay has chosen evidence (parts) well but does not synthesize that evidence into a clear interpretation (whole)."

– Professor Dawson

Christ Like [84]

in Raymond Carver's "Cathedral", the character Robert plays a Christ-like role. To mirror that, the narrator plays the role of Saul, a man who despised and attacked Christ and his followers until he became converted. Throughout the story there are multiple instances where Robert does things similar to miracles performed in biblical stories, and the narrator continues to doubt and

judge him. Despite Robert making efforts to converse with the narrator, he refuses to look past the oddity of his blindness. The author also pays close attention to eyes and blindness. To quote the Bible, "Having eyes, see ye not?" (*King James Bible*, Mark, 8. 18). The characters who have sight don't see as much as Robert, and he is able to open their eyes and hearts.

When Robert is first brought up, it is as a story. The narrator has heard of him and how wonderful he is, but has strong doubts about the legitimacy of it all. He shares a specific instance in which Robert asked to touch his wife's face. He says, "She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose- even her neck!", and goes on to talk about how she tried to write a poem about it (Carver 34). The experience mentioned resembled the story of Jesus healing a blind man by putting his hands on his eyes and how, afterward, the man was restored (Mark 8.21-26). While sharing the story, however, the only thing the narrator cares about is that the blind man touched his wife's neck. At this point in the story the narrator still only cares about what's right in front of him, so hearing retellings means nothing to him.

When Saul is introduced in the Bible, it is as a man who spent his time persecuting the followers of Christ and "made havoc of the church" (Acts 8.3-5). From the very beginning of the story, the narrator makes it known that, "A blind man in my house was not something that I looked forward to" (Carver 34). He can't stand the idea of something he'd only seen in movies and heard tell of becoming something real. Even when talking about his own wife, he disregards the poem she wrote for him. When he hears the name of Robert's deceased wife, his first response is to point out how strange it sounds (Carver 36). He despises Robert, so he takes out his aggression on the people who don't, and drives them away.

The narrator's wife drives to the train station to pick up Robert while he stays home and waits, blaming Robert for his boredom. When they finally do arrive, the first thing he notices about Robert is his beard. It might be a stretch to call this a biblical parallel since a lot of people have beards, but Carver makes a big deal out of this detail. The next thing the narrator points out, though, is that his wife "had this blind man by his coat sleeve" (Carver 37). This draws the parallel to another biblical story. In this story a woman who has been suffering from a disease sees Jesus and says to herself, "If I may but touch his garment I shall be whole" (Matt. 9.21). Before they had gotten in the house the narrator's wife had Robert by the arm, but even after they were at the front porch, she still wanted to hold onto his sleeve.

The narrator continues to make observations about Robert when he first sees him. One that stood out was when he was talking more about Robert's physically, saying he had "stooped shoulder, as if he carried a great weight there" (Carver 38). There are many instances in the Bible where Jesus is depicted carrying some type of heavy burden, like a lost sheep, the sins of the world, and even his own cross. He also points out on multiple occasions that Robert has a big and booming voice, which resembles a lot of depictions of a voice "from on high."

After they sit and talk for a while, they have dinner. This dinner resembles the last supper, especially when the narrator says, "We ate like there was no tomorrow" (Carver 39). He also describes how Robert eats and says "he'd tear of a hunk of buttered bread and eat that. He'd follow this up with a big drink of milk" (Carver 39). Those aren't the only things he ate, but the order in which he ate the bread and took a drink is the same order as the sacrament, a ritual created at the last supper. The author writing it in that order, despite it being irrelevant to the story, is another parallel that seems oddly specific in an otherwise normal sequence of events. What happens after the dinner follows the progression of the Bible as well.

After they've eaten a meal like it was their last the narrator's wife falls asleep like Jesus' apostles outside the garden of Gethsemane. In the Bible, the garden of Gethsemane is where Jesus goes after creating the sacrament and takes on the sins of all the world. He tells his apostles to keep watch outside the garden, but they fall asleep and leave him to be captured by the non-believers (Matt. 26.36-40). In "Cathedral," Robert is left high and alone with the narrator when the woman who holds him in such high regard falls asleep. Instead of being taken prisoner, however, Robert turns the tables and puts all focus on the narrator. His talking to the narrator is like a metaphorical taking on of his sins. On page 46 the narrator tries to explain to him what a cathedral looks like. It turns out to be of no use, since the narrator has never talked to a blind person before, much like a person trying to pray who never has before. Robert decides he needs to place his hands on the narrator like he did to his wife on the first page.

When Saul becomes converted, it is when Jesus speaks to him as a voice "from on high." As soon as the narrator begins drawing with Robert (a man who is high), his eyes open up. When Jesus speaks to Saul, he can no longer see. During the drawing of the cathedral, Robert asks the narrator to close his eyes. Even when Robert tells him he can open his eyes, the narrator decides to keep them closed. He went from thinking Robert coming over was a stupid idea to being a full believer in him. He says, "I put in windows with arches. I drew flying buttresses. I hung great doors. I couldn't stop" (Carver 45). Even with all the harsh things the narrator said about Robert, being touched by him and made his heart open up. Carver ends the story after the cathedral has been drawn and has the narrator say, "It's really something" (Carver 46).

Robert acts as a miracle worker, not only to the narrator's wife, but to him as well. Despite the difficult personality, the narrator

can't help but be converted. He says how resistant he is to have him over, and tries to avoid any conversation with him. He pokes fun at little details about him, disregards peoples' love for him, but still can't help being converted by him. Robert's booming voice carries power over the narrator, but his soft touch is what finally makes him see.

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Teacher Takeaways

"This author has put together a convincing and well-informed essay; a reader who lacks the same religious knowledge (like me) would enjoy this essay because it illuminates something they didn't already realize about 'Cathedral.' The author has selected strong evidence from both the short story and the Bible. I would advise the student to work on structure, perhaps starting off by drafting topic-transition sentences for the beginning of each paragraph. I would also encourage them to work on sentence-level fluff. For example, 'Throughout the story there are multiple instances where Robert does things similar to miracles performed in biblical stories' could easily be reduced to 'Robert's actions in the story are reminiscent of Biblical miracles.' It's easiest to catch this kind of fluff when you read your draft out loud."

– Professor Wilhjelm

The Space Between the Racial Binary [85]

Toni Morrison in "Recitatif" confronts race as a social construction, where race is not biological but created from human interactions. Morrison does not disclose the race of the two main characters, Twyla and Roberta, although she does provide that one character is black and the other character is white. Morrison emphasizes intersectionality by confounding stereotypes about race through narration, setting, and allusion. We have been trained to 'read' race through a variety of signifers, but "Recitatif" puts those signifers at odds.

Twyla is the narrator throughout "Recitatif" where she describes the events from her own point of view. Since the story is from Twyla's perspective, it allows the readers to characterize her and Roberta solely based on what she mentions. At the beginning of the story Twyla states that "[her] mother danced all night", which is the main reason why Twyla is "taken to St. Bonny's" (Morrison 139). Twyla soon finds that she will be "stuck... with a girl from a while other race" who "never washed [her] hair and [she] smelled funny" (Morrison 139). From Twyla's description of Roberta's hair and scent, one could assume that Roberta is black due to the stereotype revolves around a black individual's hair. Later on in the story Twyla runs into Roberta at her work and describes Roberta's hair as "so big and wild" the "[she] coul hardly see her face", which is another indicator that Roberta has Afro-textured hair (Morrison 144). Yet, when Twyla encounters Roberta at a grocery store "her huge hair was sleek" and "smooth" resembling a white woman's hair style (Morrison 146). Roberta's hairstyles are stereotypes that conflict with one another; one attributing to a black woman, the other to a white woman. The differences in hair texture, and style, are a result of phenotypes, not race. Phenotypes are observable traits that "result from interactions between your genes and the environment" ("What are Phenotypes?"). There is not a specific gene in the human genome that can be used to determine a person's race. Therefore, the racial catergories in society are not constructed on the genetic level, but the social. Dr. J Craig Venter states, "We all evolved in the last 100,000 years from the same small number of tribes that migrated out of Africa and colonized the world", so it does not make sense to claim that race has evolved a specific gene and certain people inherit those specific genes (Angier). From Twyla's narration of Roberta, Roberta can be classified into one of two racial groups based on the stereotypes ascribed to her.

Intersectionality states that people are at a disadvantage by multiple sources of oppressions, such their race and class. "Recitatif" seems to be written during the Civil Rights Era where protests against racial integration took place. This is made evident when Twyla says, "strife came to us that fall... Strife. Racial strife" (Morrison 150). According to NPR, the Supreme Court ordered school busing in 1969 and went into effect in 1973 to allow for desegregation ("Legacy"). Twyla "thought it was a good thing until she heard it was a bad thing", while Roberta picketed outside "the school they were trying to integrate" (Morrison 150). Twyla and Roberta both become irritated with one another's reaction to the school busing order, but what woman is on which side? Roberta

seems to be a white woman against integrating black students into her children's school, and Twyla suggests that she is a black mother who simply wants best for her son Joesph even if that does mean going to a school that is "far-out-of-the-way" (Morrison 150). At this point in the story Roberta lives in "Annandale" which is "a neighborhood full of doctors and IBM executives" (Morrison 147), and at the same time, Twyla is "Mrs. Benson" living in "Newburgh" where "half the population... is on welfare..." (Morrison 145). Twyla implies that Newburgh is being gentrified by these "smart IBM people", which inevitably results in an increase in rent and property values, as well as changes the area's culture. In America, minorities are usually the individuals who are displaced and taken over by wealthier, middle-class white individuals who are displaced and taken over by wealthier, middle-class white individuals. From Twyla's tone, and the setting, it seems that Twyla is a black individual that is angry towards "the rich IBM crowd" (Morrison 146). When Twyla and Roberta are bickering over school busing, Roberta claims that America "is a free country" and she is not "doing anything" to Twyla (Morrison 150). From Roberta's statements, it suggests that she is a affluent, and ignorant white person that is oblivious to the hardships that African Americans had to overcome, and still face today. Rhonda Soto contends that "Discussing race without including class analysis is like watching a bird fly without looking at the sky...". It is ingrained in America as the normative that whites are mostly part of the middle-class and upper-class, while blacks are part of the working-class. Black individuals are being classified as low-income based entirely on their skin color. It is pronounced that Twyla is being discriminated against because she is a black woman, living in a low-income neighborhood where she lacks basic resources. For example. when Twyla and Roberta become hostile with one another over school busing, the supposedly white mothers start moving towards Twyla's car to harass her. She points out that "[my] face [] looked mean to them" and that these mothers "could not wait to throw themselves in front of a police car" (Morrison 151). Twyla is indicating that these mothers are priviliged based on their skin color, while she had to wait until her car started to rock back and forth to a point where "the four policeman who had been drinking Tab in their car finally got the message and [then] strolled over" (Morrison 151). This shows that Roberta and the mothers protesting are white, while Twyla is a black woman fighting for her resources. Not only is Twyla being targeted due to her race, but as well her class by protesting mothers who have classified her based on intersectionality.

Intersectionality is also alluded in "Recitatif" based on Roberta's interests. Twyla confronts Roberta at the "Howard Johnson's" while working as a waitress with her "blue and white triangle on [her] head" and "[her] hair shapeless in a net" (Morrison 145). Roberta boasts that her friend has "an appointment with Hendrix" and shames Twyla for not knowing Jimi Hendrix (Morrison 145). Roberta begins to explain that "he's only the biggest" rockstar, guitarist, or whatever Roberta was going to say. It is clear that Roberta is infatuated with Jimi Hendrix, who was an African American rock guitarist. Because Jimi Hendrix is a black musician, the reader could also assume that Roberta is also black. At the same time, Roberta may be white since Jimi Hendrix appealed to a plethora of people. In addition, Twyla illustrates when she saw Roberta "sitting in [the] booth" she was "with two guys smothered in head and facial" (Morrison 144). These men may be two white counter culturists, and possible polygamists, in a relationship with Roberta who is also white. From Roberta's enthusiasm in Jimi Hendrix it alludes that she may be black or white, and categorized from this interest.

Intersectionality states that people are prone to "predict an individual's identity, beliefs, or values based on categories like race" (Williams). Morrison chose not to disclose the race of Twyla and Roberta to allow the reader to make conclusions about the two women based on the vague stereotypes Morrison presented throughout "Recitatif". Narration, setting, and allusion helped make intersectionality apparent, which in turn allowed the readers understand, or see, that race is in fact a social construction. "Recitatif" forces the readers to come to terms with their own racial prejudices.

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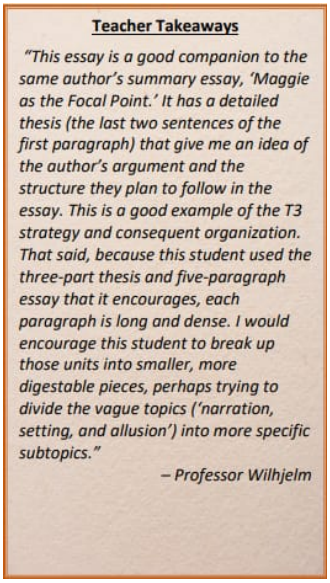
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4.4: What's Critical About Critical Thinking?

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

Despite the prevalent ambiguities, critical thinking actually does mean something. The Association of American Colleges and Universities usefully defines it as "a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion."[6]

That definition aligns with the best description of critical thinking I ever heard; it came from my junior high art teacher, Joe Bolger.[7] He once asked us, "What color is the ceiling?" In that withering tween tone, we reluctantly replied, "Whiiiite." He then asked, "What color is it really?" We deigned to aim our pre-adolescent eyes upwards, and eventually began to offer more accurate answers: "Ivory?" "Yellow-ish tan." "It's grey in that corner." After finally getting a few thoughtful responses, Mr. Bolger said something like, "Making good art is about drawing what you see, not what you think you're supposed to see." The AAC&U definition, above, essentially amounts to the same thing: taking a good look and deciding what you *really* think rather than relying on the first idea or assumption that comes to mind.

The critical thinking rubric produced by the AAC&U describes the relevant activities of critical thinking in more detail. To think critically, one must ...

(a) "clearly state and comprehensively describe the issue or problem",

(b) "independently interpret and evaluate sources",

(c) "thoroughly analyze assumptions behind and context of your own or others' ideas",

(d) "argue a complex position and one that takes counter-arguments into account," and

(e) "arrive at logical and well informed conclusions".[8]

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

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

> As soon as I see the phrase "critical thinking," the first thing I think is more work. It always sounds as if you're going to have to think harder and longer. But I think the AAC&U's definition is on point, critical thinking is a habit. Seeing that phrase shouldn't be a scary thing because by this point in many people's college career this is an automatic response. I never expect an answer to a question to be in the text; by now I realize that my professors want to know what I have to say about something or what I have learned. In a paper or essay, the three-step thesis process explained in Chapter 3 is a tool that will help you get this information across. While you're doing the hard work (the thinking part), this formula offers you a way to clearly state your position on a subject. It's as simple as: make a general statement, make an arguable statement, and finally, say why it is important. This is my rule of thumb, and I would not want to start a thesis-driven paper any other way!
>
> Aly Button

Critical thinking is hard work. Even those who actively choose to do it experience it as tedious, difficult, and sometimes surprisingly emotional. Nobel-prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains that our brains aren't designed to think; rather, they're designed to save us from having to think.[9] Our brains are great at developing routines and repertoires that enable us to accomplish fairly complex tasks like driving cars, choosing groceries, and having a conversation without thinking consciously and thoroughly about every move we make. Kahneman calls this "fast thinking." "Slow thinking," which is deliberate and painstaking, is something our brains seek to avoid. That built-in tendency can lead us astray. Kahneman and his colleagues often used problems like this one in experiments to gauge how people used fast and slow thinking in different contexts:[10]

Example 4.4.1:

A bat and ball cost $1.10.

The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.

How much does the ball cost?

Most people automatically say the ball costs $0.10. However, if the bat costs $1 more, than the bat would cost $1.10 leading to the incorrect total of $1.20. The ball costs $0.05. Kahneman notes, "Many thousands of university students have answered the bat-and-ball puzzle, and the results are shocking. More than 50% of students at Harvard, MIT, and Princeton gave the intuitive—incorrect—answer." These and other results confirm that "many people are overconfident, prone to place too much faith in their intuitions."[11] Thinking critically—thoroughly questioning your immediate intuitive responses—is difficult work, but every organization and business in the world needs people who can do that effectively. Some students assume that an unpleasant critical thinking experience means that they're either doing something wrong or that it's an inherently uninteresting (and oppressive) activity. While we all relish those times when we're pleasantly absorbed in a complex activity (what psychologist Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi calls "flow"[12]), the more tedious experiences can also bring satisfaction, sort of like a good work-out.

Critical thinking can also be emotionally challenging, researchers have found. Facing a new realm of uncertainty and contradiction without relying on familiar assumptions is inherently anxiety-provoking because when you're doing it, you are, by definition, incompetent. Recent research has highlighted that both children and adults need to be able to regulate their own emotions in order to cope with the challenges of building competence in a new area.[13] The kind of critical thinking your professors are looking for—that is, pursuing a comprehensive, multi-faceted exploration in order to arrive at an arguable, nuanced argument—is inevitably a struggle and it may be an emotional one. Your best bet is to find ways to make those processes as efficient, pleasant, and effective as you can.

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

As Chapter 1 explains, the demands students face are not at all unique to their academic pursuits. Professional working roles demand critical thinking, as 81% of major employers reported in an AAC&U-commissioned survey[14], and it's pretty easy to imagine how critical thinking helps one make much better decisions in all aspects of life. Embrace it. And just as athletes, artists, and writers sustain their energy and inspiration for hard work by interacting with others who share these passions, look to others in the scholarly community—your professors and fellow students—to keep yourself engaged in these ongoing intellectual challenges. While writing time is often solitary, it's meant to plug you into a vibrant academic community. What your professors want, overall, is for you to join them in asking and pursuing important questions about the natural, social, and creative worlds.

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5: THE WRITING PROCESS

Learning Objectives

- Use prewriting to prepare to write a well-developed college essay.
- Strategically draft, revise, and edit an effective college essay appropriate to the audience and purpose of the assignment.

5.1: Introduction

5.2: Understanding the Writing Process

5.3: Why It Matters- Writing Process

5.4: Prewriting

5.4.1: Prewriting

5.4.1.1: Prewriting Strategies

5.4.1.1.1: What Is Brainstorming?

5.4.1.1.2: What is Clustering?

5.4.1.1.3: What is Freewriting?

5.4.1.2: Strategies for Narrowing a Topic

5.4.1.3: Rhetorical Situation

5.4.1.4: Working Thesis Statement

5.4.1.5: What is an Annotated Bibliography?

5.4.1.6: Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

5.5: Drafting

5.5.1: Organizing and Writing your Draft

5.5.1.1: Moving From Outline to Draft

5.5.1.2: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme

5.5.1.3: Types of Essays and Suggested Structures

5.5.1.4: The First Draft is the Ugliest

5.5.1.5: Constructing and revising a thesis statement

5.5.1.6: Opening Paragraphs

5.5.1.7: In Today's World ...

5.5.1.8: Conclusions

5.6: Revising and Editing

5.6.1: Revising and Editing

5.6.1.1: General Revision Points to Consider

5.6.1.2: Points for Successful Revision

5.6.1.3: General Editing Points to Consider

5.6.1.4: Editing for clarity and conciseness

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5.1: Introduction

A Student's Story

When Kiana started taking college classes, she brought with her a belief that she was not a very strong writer. This lack of confidence was, unfortunately, developed throughout her K-12 education. In elementary school, she struggled with spelling. In middle school, she found that her vocabulary were embarrassingly limited. In high school, she struggled with what she thought must be writer's block, sitting down to finally write a draft right before it was due, and finding that she could only produce a paragraph before feeling like she had nothing else to say.

As she entered college and enrolled in her first-year writing course, she was anxious about attending a required conference with her instructor, who was meeting with each student to discuss the rough drafts of their first essays. She handed her draft to her instructor knowing that it was far from the required length. Before reading it, he asked her about the process that she had used to write it. Kiana confessed that she had worked on it just the night before.

"Did you do any prewriting?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I just sat down and wrote this."

When Kiana was asked to read her essay aloud, several issues became evident. The overall purpose of her essay was unclear, and the narrative rambled making many points but not developing any of them. The narrative lacked detail in some parts and had too much information in other parts. Throughout the composition, Kiana heard words and phrases that were completely repetitive, and she also used some words awkwardly because she had searched for synonyms that didn't actually work within the context of the sentence.

When she finished reading, her instructor suggested that she avoid directly working on that draft until she had done some prewriting activities that would help her organize her ideas, develop her thesis, and refine and develop her content.

"Don't worry yet about spelling and word choice. First, you need to explore and identify your ideas. Here are some fun, helpful exercises that will help you to do that efficiently. Then, when you come back to drafting, you'll find it goes more quickly. Worry about the mechanics such as your grammar and punctuation after you've written a draft that says what you want to say."

Kiana went home feeling better about getting back on her computer to work on her essay. Once Kiana learned the value of prewriting, drafting, and revision techniques as parts of the writing process, she started to enjoy the writing process a bit more. She was able to avoid the feeling of writer's block, and she found herself feeling more confident as a writer and better able to produce essays that she was proud to submit to her instructors.

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5.2: Understanding the Writing Process

No matter what type of writing you are doing, academic writing, professional writing, or personal writing, it can be made easier by using the writing process. The writing process consists of the different stages that a writer follows to produce a good piece of writing. Although different sources may label and group the stages in various ways, the stages of the writing process are essentially as follows:

Prewriting – Deciding what to write about (the topic) and gathering information to support or explain what you want to say about your subject, and planning how to organize your ideas in a way that effectively develops the topic.

Drafting -Writing the first copy of the piece (essay, article, etc.). This is often called the rough draft. Ultimately, you should have multiple copies or drafts of your work.

Revising -Reconsidering the ideas and content of the essay as well as refining the style and structure of the paper.

Editing/Proofreading – Correcting grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics.

Publishing – Sharing the final draft with others.



Figure 4.1.14.1.1The Writing Process

However, the writing process is not a series of neatly developed steps and may differ somewhat for everyone. Sometimes ideas do not flow easily, and the essay that you originally start out to write is not the essay that you end up writing. Often the stages proceed erratically and overlap; the important thing is to keep writing and improving until a final product is achieved. The more that you write, the better you will become as a writer.

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5.3: Why It Matters- Writing Process

Skills to Develop

- Analyze topic selection activities
- Analyze prewriting activities
- Analyze activities to find evidence in support of a claim
- Analyze essay organizational techniques
- Analyze drafting activities
- Analyze revision activities
- Analyze proofreading activities

Why is it necessary to analyze the process of writing?

You've likely heard the phrase "writing process" before, and the steps below may be familiar to you.



Figure 5.3.1

Though these steps are often talked about as separate tasks, they are actually much more fluid. Don't overlook the importance of the arrows around each item. These arrows indicate the most vital aspect of the writing process: it doesn't just go in one direction.

One step bleeds into the next. Sometimes an issue comes up late in the process, such as during revision, which requires going back to the prewriting stage for a bit. This kind of dance through the steps is expected, and healthy. You make your own path through the process.

The Writing Process, Illustrated

The video below is a beautiful example of one person's application of the writing process. He narrates the stages he goes through to complete blog entries for a course he's taking. Though you may not be writing the same kind of product, you can certainly analyze his process to see how it might be applied in other writing situations.

YouTube Video

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

View this YouTube Video online

Were there steps in this video that surprised you? That seemed out of order to you? Would you be able to adapt his process to the next writing task you're faced with?

The rest of this module will address the individual stages of the writing process, and how they work together.

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5.4: Prewriting

Prewriting is an essential activity for most writers. Through robust prewriting, writers generate ideas, explore directions, and find their way into their writing. When students attempt to write an essay without developing their ideas, strategizing their desired structure, and focusing on precision with words and phrases, they can end up with a "premature draft"—one that is more writer-based than reader-based and, thus, might not be received by readers in the way the writer intended.

In addition, a lack of prewriting can cause students to experience writer's block. Writer's block is the feeling of being stuck when faced with a writing task. It is often caused by fear, anxiety, or a tendency toward perfectionism, but it can be overcome through prewriting activities that allow writers to relax, catch their breath, gather ideas, and gain momentum.

The following exist as the goals of prewriting:

- Contemplating the many possible ideas worth writing about.
- Developing ideas through brainstorming, freewriting, and focused writing.
- Planning the structure of the essay overall so as to have a solid introduction, meaningful body paragraphs, and a purposeful conclusion.

Discovering and Developing Ideas

Quick Prewriting Activities

Quick strategies for developing ideas include brainstorming, freewriting, and focused writing. These activities are done quickly, with a sense of freedom, while writers silence their inner critic. In her book *Wild Mind*, teacher and writer Natalie Goldberg describes this freedom as the "creator hand" freely allowing thoughts to flow onto the page while the "editor hand" remains silent. Sometimes, these techniques are done in a timed situation (usually two to ten minutes), which allows writers to get through the shallow thoughts and dive deeper to access the depths of the mind.

Brainstorming begins with writing down or typing a few words and then filling the page with words and ideas that are related or that seem important without allowing the inner critic to tell the writer if these ideas are acceptable or not. Writers do this quickly and without too much contemplation. Students will know when they are succeeding because the lists are made without stopping.

Freewriting is the "most effective way" to improve one's writing, according to Peter Elbow, the educator and writer who first coined the term "freewriting" in pivotal book *Writing Without Teachers*, published in 1973. Freewriting is a great technique for loosening up the writing muscle. To freewrite, writers must silence the inner critic and the "editor hand" and allow the "creator hand" a specified amount of time (usually from 10 to 20 minutes) to write nonstop about whatever comes to mind. The goal is to keep the hand moving, the mind contemplating, and the individual writing. If writers feel stuck, they just keep writing "I don't know what to write" until new ideas form and develop in the mind and flow onto the page.

Focused freewriting entails writing freely—and without stopping, during a limited time—about a specific topic. Once writers are relaxed and exploring freely, they may be surprised about the ideas that emerge.

Researching

Unlike quick prewriting activities, researching is best done slowly and methodically and, depending on the project, can take a considerable amount of time. Researching is exciting, as students activate their curiosity and learn about the topic, developing ideas about the direction of their writing. The goal of researching is to gain background understanding on a topic and to check one's original ideas against those of experts. However, it is important for the writer to be aware that the process of conducting research can become a trap for procrastinators. Students often feel like researching a topic is the same as doing the assignment, but it's not.

The two aspects of researching that are often misunderstood are as follows:

1. Writers start the research process too late so the information they find never really becomes their own setting themselves up

for way more quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing the words of others than is appropriate for the 70% one's own words and 30% the words of others ratio necessary for college-level research-based writing.
2. Writers become so involved in the research process that they don't start the actual writing process soon enough so as to meet a due date with a well written, edited, and revised finished composition.

Being thoughtful about limiting one's research time—and using a planner of some sort to organize one's schedule—is a way to keep oneself from starting the research process too late to

See Part V of this book for more information about researching.

Audience and Purpose

It's important that writers identify the audience and the purpose of a piece of writing. To whom is the writer communicating? Why is the writer writing? Students often say they are writing for whomever is grading their work at the end. However, most students will be sharing their writing with peers and reviewers (e.g., writing tutors, peer mentors). The audience of any piece of college writing is, at the very minimum, the class as a whole. As such, it's important for the writer to consider the expertise of the readers, which includes their peers and professors). There are even broader applications. For example, students could even send their college writing to a newspaper or a legislator, or share it online for the purpose of informing or persuading decision-makers to make changes to improve the community. Good writers know their audience and maintain a purpose to mindfully help and intentionally shape their essays for meaning and impact. Students should think beyond their classroom and about how their writing could have an impact on their campus community, their neighborhood, and the wider world.

Planning the Structure of an Essay

Planning Based on Audience and Purpose

Identifying the target audience and purpose of an essay is a critical part of planning the structure and techniques that are best to use. It's important to consider the following:

- Is the the purpose of the essay to educate, announce, entertain, or persuade?
- Who might be interested in the topic of the essay?
- Who would be impacted by the essay or the information within it?
- What does the reader know about this topic?
- What does the reader need to know in order to understand the essay's points?
- What kind of hook is necessary to engage the readers and their interest?
- What level of language is required? Words that are too subject-specific may make the writing difficult to grasp for readers unfamiliar with the topic.
- What is an appropriate tone for the topic? A humorous tone that is suitable for an autobiographical, narrative essay may not work for a more serious, persuasive essay.

Hint: Answers to these questions help the writer to make clear decisions about diction (i.e., the choice of words and phrases), form and organization, and the content of the essay.

Use Audience and Purpose to Plan Language

In many classrooms, students may encounter the concept of language in terms of correct versus incorrect. However, this text approaches language from the perspective of appropriateness. Writers should consider that there are different types of communities, each of which may have different perspectives about what is "appropriate language" and each of which may follow different rules, as John Swales discussed in "The Concept of Discourse Community." Essentially, Swales defines discourse communities as "groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals."

Writers (and readers) may be more familiar with a home community that uses a different language than the language valued by the academic community. For example, many people in Hawai'i speak Hawai'i Creole English (HCE colloquially regarded as "Pidgin"), which is different from academic English. This does not mean that one language is better than another or that one community is homogeneous in terms of language use; most people "code-switch" from one "code" (i.e., language or way of speaking) to another. It helps writers to be aware and to use an intersectional lens to understand that while a community may value certain

language practices, there are several types of language practices within our community.

What language practices does the academic discourse community value? The goal of first-year-writing courses is to prepare students to write according to the conventions of academia and Standard American English (SAE). Understanding and adhering to the rules of a different discourse community does not mean that students need to replace or drop their own discourse. They may add to their language repertoire as education continues to transform their experiences with language, both spoken and written. In addition to the linguistic abilities they already possess, they should enhance their academic writing skills for personal growth in order to meet the demands of the working world and to enrich the various communities they belong to.

Use Techniques to Plan Structure

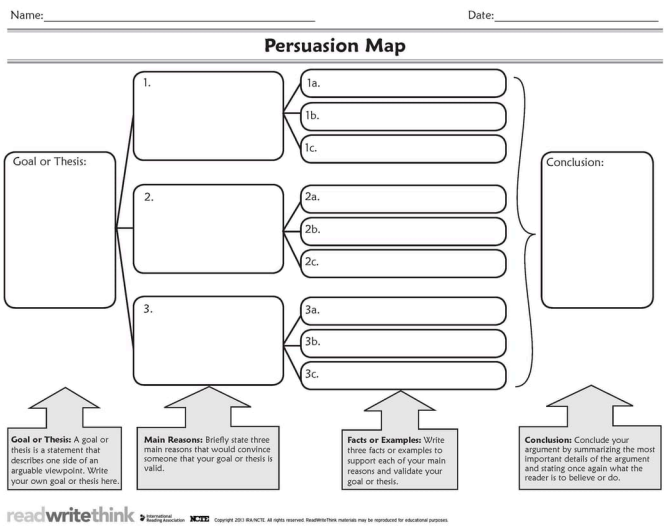
Before writing a first draft, writers find it helpful to begin organizing their ideas into chunks so that they (and readers) can efficiently follow the points as organized in an essay.

First, it's important to decide whether to organize an essay (or even just a paragraph) according to one of the following:

- Chronological order (organized by time)
- Spatial order (organized by physical space from one end to the other)
- Prioritized order (organized by order of importance)

There are many ways to plan an essay's overall structure, including mapping and outlining.

Mapping (which sometimes includes using a graphic organizer) involves organizing the relationships between the topic and other ideas. The following is example (from ReadWriteThink.org, 2013) of a graphic organizer that could be used to write a basic, persuasive essay:



Persuasion Map. Copyright 2013 IRA/NCTE. All rights reserved. ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Outlining is also an excellent way to plan how to organize an essay. Formal outlines use levels of notes, with Roman numerals for the top level, followed by capital letters, Arabic numerals, and lowercase letters. Here's an example:

1. Introduction
    1. Hook/Lead/Opener: According to the Leilani was shocked when a letter from Chicago said her "Aloha Poke" restaurant was infringing on a non-Hawaiian Midwest restaurant that had trademarked the words "aloha" (the Hawaiian word for love, compassion, mercy, and other things besides serving as a greeting) and "poke" (a Hawaiian dish of raw fish and seasonings).
    2. Background information about trademarks, the idea of language as property, the idea of cultural identity, and the

question about who owns language and whether it can be owned.
3. Thesis Statement (with the main point and previewing key or supporting points that become the topic sentences of the body paragraphs): While some business people use language and trademarks to turn a profit, the nation should consider that language cannot be owned by any one group or individual and that former (or current) imperialist and colonialist nations must consider the impact of their actions on culture and people groups, and legislators should bar the trademarking of non-English words for the good of internal peace of the country.

2. Body Paragraphs
    1. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Some business practices involve co-opting languages for the purpose of profit.
        1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Book 1—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint
        2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Article 1—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint
            2. Subpoint
    2. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Language cannot be owned by any one group or individual.
        1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Book 1—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint
        2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Article 1—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint
            2. Subpoint
    3. Main Point (Topic Sentence): Once (or currently) imperialist and colonialist nations must consider the impact of their actions on culture and people groups.
        1. Supporting Detail
            1. Subpoint
    4. Legislators should bar the trademarking of non-English words for the good and internal peace of the country.
3. Conclusion (Revisit the Hook/Lead/Opener, Restate the Thesis, End with a Twist—a strong more globalized statement about why this topic was important to write about)

Note about outlines: Informal outlines can be created using lists with or without bullets. What is important is that main and subpoint ideas are linked and identified.

Activities

1. Use 10 minutes to freewrite with the goal to "empty your cup"—writing about whatever is on your mind or blocking your attention on your classes, job, or family. This can be a great way to help you become centered, calm, or focused, especially when dealing with emotional challenges in your life.
2. For each writing assignment in class, spend three 10-minute sessions either listing (brainstorming) or focused-writing about the topic before starting to organize and outline key ideas.
3. Before each draft or revision of assignments, spend 10 minutes focused-writing an introduction and a thesis statement that lists all the key points that supports the thesis statement.
4. Have a discussion in your class about the various language communities that you and your classmates experience in your town or on your island.
5. Create a graphic organizer that will help you write various types of essays.
6. Create a metacognitive, self-reflective journal: Freewrite continuously (e.g., 5 times a week, for at least 10 minutes, at least half a page) about what you learned in class or during study time. Document how your used your study hours this week, how it felt to write in class and out of class, what you learned about writing and about yourself as a writer, how you saw yourself learning and evolving as a writer, what you learned about specific topics. What goals do you have for the next week?

    During the second half of the semester, as you begin to tackle deeper and lengthier assignments, the journal should grow to at least one page per day, at least 20 minutes per day, as you use journal writing to reflect on writing strategies (e.g., structure, organization, rhetorical modes, research, incorporating different sources without plagiarizing, giving and receiving feedback, planning and securing time in your schedule for each task involved in a writing assignment) and your ideas about topics, answering research questions, and reflecting on what you found during research and during discussions with peers, mentors, tutors, and instructors. The journal then becomes a record of your journey as a writer, as well as a source of freewriting on content that you can shape into paragraphs for your various assignments.

Works Cited

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. 2nd edition, 1973, Oxford UP, 1998.

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For more about discourse communities, see the online class by Robert Mohrenne "What is a Discourse Community?" ENC 1102 13 Fall 0027. University of Central Florida, 2013.

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5.4.1.1: Prewriting Strategies

Prewriting is the first stage in the writing process. When using a prewriting strategy, you jot your initial thoughts about a topic down on paper. Prewriting has no set structure or organization; it is usually just a collection of ideas that may find themselves in your paper over time. Prewriting is also a great way to get past writer's block — that period of time when you find you have no ideas or don't know how to put your thoughts together.

There is no right or wrong way to approach prewriting, but there are some strategies that can get you thinking.

Mind-mapping Strategy

Mind-mapping is very similar to freewriting, but the outcome often looks more like a list of ideas. This strategy is quite similar to brainstorming where the listed ideas may or may not be connected with arrows or lines. You should set a time limit of 5 to 10 minutes and jot down all the ideas you have about the topic. Instead of writing sentences, you are quickly jotting down ideas, perhaps showing connections and building a map of your thoughts. Here are some online tools that can help with this process:

- Check out **Inspiration Software** where you can use a free trial of their software for thirty days.
- Try **XMind**, a free mind mapping tool that runs on both Mac and PC computers.
- Use **Mindomo**, which is a collaborative mind-mapping tool. You may use the basic tool for free or pay a minimal fee for extra features.

MIND-MAPPING STRATEGY IN ACTION

Explore an example of mind-mapping created for the topic: *how can I reinvent myself with a new job role?*



Figure 5.4.1.1.1

Freewriting Strategy

Freewriting Strategy is the process of simply writing down any and all ideas about the topic that pop into your mind. Set a timer for yourself and write continuously for 5 or 10 minutes on your topic. If you run out of ideas, rewrite the last word or phrase on the page until another idea jumps into your thoughts. Keep writing, even if it doesn't make sense! At this point, you are just getting your ideas down on paper without editing or judging them. If you are trying to decide between topics, it is a good idea to freewrite on all of them to see which one provides you with the best ideas.

FREEWRITING IN ACTION

Explore an example of free-writing created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

Fire control, fire prevention, look at two different environments, contrasting ecosystems and the role of fire and impact on humans — Dene in Alberta — what is the role of fire in their environment? How does this contrast or compare with an African tribe? Didn't I read something about the Kissi tribe and how colonization affected their environment because the French outlawed their land management practices? What is the landscape there? Savannah is much different than the Boreal forests of Canada, and might provide a good comparison. I need to look at the European view and how it affected both communities with their policies — How did it interfere or support the traditional use of fire in these communities? They didn't appreciate the knowledge of the people who were there before . . .

Questioning Strategy

This is a basic strategy, useful at many levels, that helps you jot down the basic important information about a topic.

QUESTIONING STRATEGY IN ACTION

Explore the answers created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

Who? The Dene and Kissi tribes from two different ecosystems were impacted by European colonizers and their fire management policies.

What? Consider the impact of fire on the peoples in both environments.

Where? Canadian policies and historical data compared to African policies and historical data.

When? As far back as the last ice age, there is evidence of how fire has impacted the land. I will focus on the impact of colonization and the policies that affected the land management practices of the indigenous peoples. I will also consider the current implications of controlling and preventing fires.

Why? This information is important because the knowledge from the indigenous peoples and their traditional practices provides important insights into how to improve current fire practices.

How? Look at historical and current records, such as Lewis, Wuerthner, Fairhead and Leach . . .

Note: Notice how this series of questions and answers is more developed than the same topic explored previously in Freewriting. This author has done a bit of preliminary reading on the subject between the two prewriting activities. This helps illustrate how prewriting can be useful to return to, even after later stages of the writing process.

Sketching Strategy

A picture is worth a thousand words. Your first thinking is done in pictures. So, if you are a visual learner and like to sketch out your thoughts, grab a pen and paper and draw what you are thinking. This strategy is especially effective if you are trying to conceptualize an idea or clarify relationships between parts of an idea.

Sketching involves drawing out your ideas using a pen and paper. One strategy that can be useful for planning comparison and contrast type papers is a **Venn diagram**. A Venn diagram is a strategy that uses two (or more) overlapping circles to show relationships between sets of ideas. The information written where two circles overlap is common to both ideas. The information written outside the overlapping area is information distinct to only one of the ideas.

SKETCHING STRATEGY IN ACTION

Explore the sketch of a Venn diagram created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

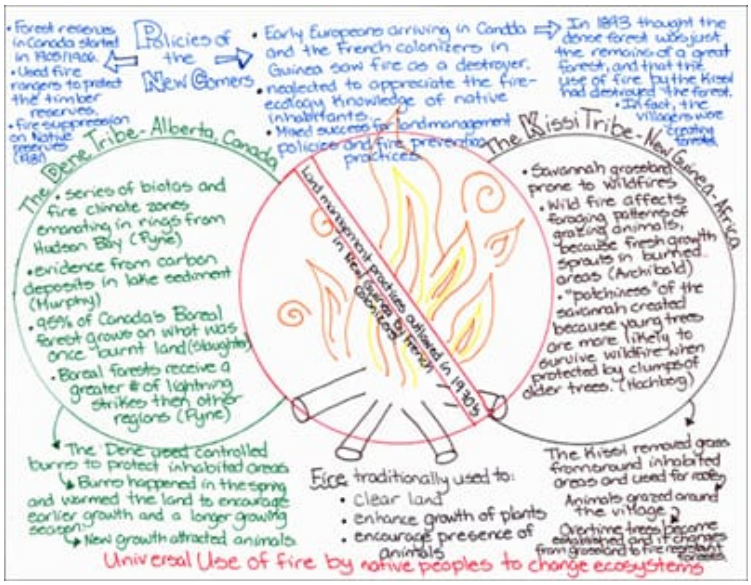


Figure 5.4.1.1.1

Note

Notice how this Venn Diagram is even more developed than the same topic explored previously in Freewriting and Questioning. This author has done even deeper research on the subject, demonstrated by the citations given after some facts here. Again, this helps illustrate how prewriting can be useful to return to, even after later stages of the writing process.

Whichever strategy you choose, be sure to save your prewriting work. You may want to revisit this stage of the writing process again to make sure that you captured all your thoughts in your outline or first draft.

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5.4.1.1.1: What Is Brainstorming?

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

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

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

Examples

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

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

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

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

At this stage, every idea is good because you are trying to come up with as many ideas as possible. Second, ask yourself, *What do I know that I could teach others?*



Figure 5.4.1.1.1.1 *- Photo credit: molossus, who says Life Imitates Doodles via VisualHunt.com / CC BY-NC-N*

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

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

Anything is fine. You are still brainstorming.

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

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

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

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

A majority of academic writing begins with brainstorming. Go ahead! Try one or many of the ideas for brainstorming either by yourself or in a group. Working together to come up with ideas means that there are more ideas coming from many different minds.

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5.4.1: PREWRITING

5.4.1.1: Prewriting Strategies

5.4.1.1.1: What Is Brainstorming?

5.4.1.1.2: What is Clustering?

5.4.1.1.3: What is Freewriting?

5.4.1.2: Strategies for Narrowing a Topic

5.4.1.3: Rhetorical Situation

5.4.1.4: Working Thesis Statement

5.4.1.5: What is an Annotated Bibliography?

5.4.1.6: Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

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 5.4.1.1: 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 5.4.1.2: "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 5.4.1.1

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.

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5.4.1.1.2: What is Clustering?

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

Example

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

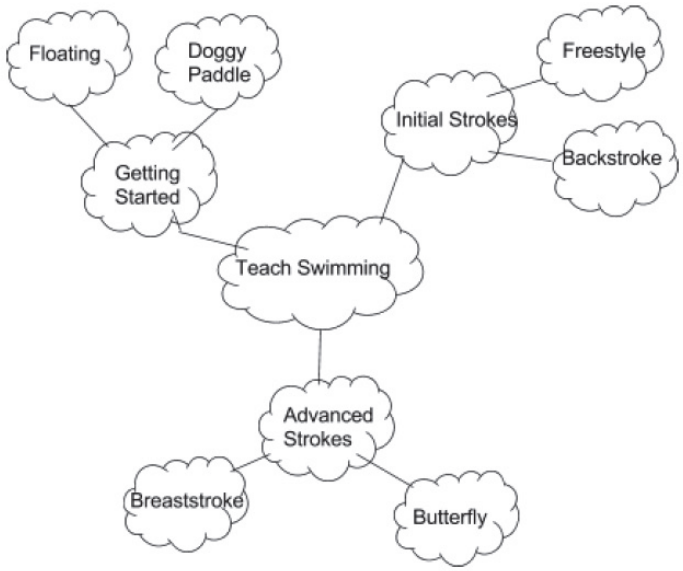


Figure 5.4.1.1.2.1

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5.4.1.1.3: What is Freewriting?

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

Example

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

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

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

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5.4.1.2: Strategies for Narrowing a Topic

Introduction



Figure 5.4.1.2.1

Once you've settled on a problem to address for a writing assignment, the next step is to narrow it down to an appropriate focus.

Narrowing a topic can be done in various ways. Most of the time you will need to use two or more of the following strategies. However, the requirements and scope of your assignment will determine which ones you use.

To narrow a topic, ask yourself the following questions.

Can you focus your project on a specific aspect of the topic?

Most issues or concepts can be subdivided into narrower issues or concepts. If you can't subdivide your topic, then, most of the time, your topic is as narrow as it can get. In addition, it is probably better suited to a short or small project than a long or substantial one.

In some cases, you might find you need to expand, rather than narrow, a topic selection.

Can you narrow your topic to a specific time period?

- Restricting your topic to a specific time period can narrow most topics. Many activities or things exist through time. Restricting yourself to that activity or thing within a specific time period reduces the amount of material you have to cover.

For example, armies and soldiers have existed from before recorded history. Restricting yourself to "Army life during World War II" or "Army life in Ancient Egypt" reduces the scope of what you need to cover.

hint

There is likely to be a lot more primary and secondary material on army life in World War II than there is on army life in ancient Egypt simply because more information from recent centuries has survived than from ancient centuries.

Can you narrow your topic to a specific geographic area?

Many topics can be limited to a specific region of the country or the world.

For example, "Wolves" can be limited to "Arctic Wolves."

Can you narrow your topic to a specific event?

Restricting your topic to a specific event is another way to narrow a topic. However, the amount of information available on a specific event will depend upon the relative importance of that event.

For example, you will find more information on the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki than you will on the bomb used by robbers to blow up the safe of a bank.

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5.4.1.3: Rhetorical Situation

Another component of planning a writing project is to figure out the **rhetorical situation** you're responding to. The video below illustrates the role the rhetorical situation plays, and how you can analyze the needs you when faced with a new writing task.

YouTube Video

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

View this YouTube Video online

Can you identify

- your purpose for writing?
- your target audience you hope to inform or influence?
- your context for writing in the first place?
- your background and experience that help shape what you think about this subject?

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5.4.1.4: Working Thesis Statement

Defining “thesis statement”



Figure 5.4.1.4.1

A thesis statement:

- tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
- is a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or *Moby Dick*; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
- makes a claim that others might dispute.
- is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper (the body of the essay) gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.
- If your assignment asks you to take a position or develop a claim about a subject, you may need to convey that position or claim in a thesis statement near the beginning of your draft. The assignment may not explicitly state that you need a thesis statement because your instructor may assume you will include one.

If your assignment asks you to take a position or develop a claim about a subject, you may need to convey that position or claim in a thesis statement near the beginning of your draft. The assignment may not explicitly state that you need a thesis statement because your instructor may assume you will include one.

When in doubt, ask your instructor if the assignment requires a thesis statement. When an assignment asks you to analyze, to interpret, to compare and contrast, to demonstrate cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue, it is likely that you are being asked to develop a thesis and to support it persuasively.

Writing a thesis statement

A thesis is the result of a lengthy thinking process. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading an essay assignment. Before you develop an argument on any topic, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as surprising contrasts or similarities), and think about the significance of these relationships. Once you do this thinking, you will probably have a **working thesis statement**: a basic or main idea, an argument

that you think you can support with evidence but that may need adjustment along the way.

Ensuring a thesis is strong



Figure 5.4.1.4.2

If there's time to get some feedback on your thesis, consult your teacher. Even if you do not have time to get advice elsewhere, you can do some thesis evaluation of your own. When reviewing your working thesis, ask yourself the following:

- Do I answer the question?
  - Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
- Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?
  - If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
- Is my thesis statement specific enough?
  - Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like "good" or "successful," see if you could be more specific: why is something "good"; what specifically makes something "successful"?
- Does my thesis pass the "So what?" test?
  - If a reader's first response is, "So what?" then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?
  - If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It's o.k. to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
- Does my thesis pass the "how and why?" test?
  - If a reader's first response is "how?" or "why?" your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

Exercise 5.4.1.4.1

Suppose you are taking a course on 19th-century America, and the instructor hands out the following essay assignment: **Compare and contrast the reasons why the North and South fought the Civil War**.

1. At what stage of the writing process would you expect a student to write a statement like this?

   The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

2. At what stage of the writing process would you expect a student to write a statement like this?

   While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.

3. At what stage of the writing process would you expect a student to write a statement like this?

> *While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.*
>
> *Answer available at the end of this section.*

Answers

Exercise 5.4.1.4.1

1. This kind of statement is likely to appear early in a writing process, likely during initial prewriting activities. It restates the question without providing any additional information. It's not yet a thesis statement in any form, because it makes no original claims.

   A reader of this weak thesis might think, "What reasons? How are they the same? How are they different?"
2. This is a working thesis. It likely was written at the end of prewriting, during evidence-gathering, or early in the drafting process.

   Included in this working thesis is a reason for the war and some idea of how the two sides disagreed over this reason. Note that while this does make a claim, it's still a little vague.
3. This is a final draft of a thesis statement, likely written near the end of the writing process during revision and editing. It presents a way of interpreting evidence that illuminates the significance of the question. It is also an arguable claim–not every reader will automatically agree with this statement.

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5.4.1.5: What is an Annotated Bibliography?

As you develop a working thesis for your research project and begin to collect different pieces of evidence, you will soon find yourself needing some sort of system for keeping track of everything. The system discussed in this chapter is an **annotated bibliography,** which is a list of sources on a particular topic that includes a brief summary of what each source is about. This writing exercise is a bit different from the others in this part of *The Process of Research Writing* in that isn't an "essay" per se; rather it is an ongoing writing project that you will be "building" as you discover new pieces of evidence for your research project.

Here is an example of an entry from an annotated bibliography in MLA style:

Example 5.4.1.5.1:

Parsons, Matt. "Protecting Children on the Electronic Frontier: A Law Enforcement Challenge." FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin 69.10 (2000): 22-26.

This article is about an educational program used by the U.S. Navy to educate people in the Navy and their families about some of the things that are potentially dangerous to children about the Internet. Parsons says that the educational program has been effective.

Annotated bibliography entries have two parts. The top of the entry is the **citation**. It is the part that starts "Parsons, Matt'" and that lists information like the name of the writer, where the evidence appeared, the date of publication, and other publishing information.

Hyperlink: For guidelines on how to properly write citations for your Annotated bibliographies, see Chapter 12, "Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style."

The second part of the entry is the **summary** of the evidence being cited. A good annotated bibliography summary provides enough information in a sentence or two to help you and others understand what the research is about in a neutral and non-opinionated way.

The first two sentences of this annotation are an example of this sort of very brief, "just the facts" sort of summary. In the brief summaries of entries in an annotated bibliography, stay away from making evaluations about the source—"I didn't like this article very much" or "I thought this article was great." The most important goal of your brief summary is to help you, colleagues, and other potential readers get an idea about the subject of the particular piece of evidence.

Summaries can be challenging to write, especially when you are trying to write them about longer and more complicated sources of research. Keep these guidelines in mind as you write your own summaries.

- **Keep your summary short.** Good summaries for annotated bibliographies are not "complete" summaries; rather, they provide the highlights of the evidence in as brief and concise a manner as possible, no more than a sentence or two.
- **Don't quote from what you are summarizing.** Summaries will be more useful to you and your colleagues if you write them in your own words. Instead of quoting directly what you think is the point of the piece of evidence, try to paraphrase it. (For more information on paraphrasing your evidence, see Chapter 3, "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism").
- **Don't "cut and paste" from database abstracts.** Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library's computer system include abstracts of articles. Do no "cut" this abstract material and then "paste" it into your own annotated bibliography. For one thing, this is plagiarism. Second, "cutting and pasting" from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography in the first place, which is to help you understand and explain your research.

Different writers will inevitably write slightly different summaries of the same evidence.Some differences between different writers' summaries of the same piece of evidence result from different interpretations of what it important in the research; there's nothing wrong with that.

However, two summaries from different writers should both provide a similar summary. In other words, its not acceptable when the difference of interpretation is the result of a lack of understanding of the evidence.

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5.4.1.6: Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

An annotated bibliography is an excellent way to keep track of the research you gather for your project. Make no mistake about it— **it is extremely important that you keep track of all of your evidence for your research project, and that you keep track of it from the beginning of the process of research writing.**

There's nothing more frustrating than finding an excellent article or book chapter you are excited about incorporating into your research project, only to realize you have forgotten where you found the article or book chapter in the first place. This is extremely frustrating, and it's easily avoided by doing something like writing an annotated bibliography.

You could use other methods for keeping track of your research. For example, you could use note cards and write down the source information as a proper citation, then write down the information about the source that is important. If the material you know you want to use from a certain source is short enough, you might even write a direct quote, which is where you write down word for word what the source says exactly as it is written. At other times, you can write a paraphrase, which is where you write down what the source means using your own words.

While note cards and other methods have their advantages, annotated bibliographies are an extremely useful tool for keeping track of your research. An annotated bibliography:

- Centralizes your research into one document that you can keep track of both as a print-out of a word-processed file and as a file you save electronically.
- Allows you to "copy and paste" citation information into the works cited part of your research project.

An annotated bibliography also gives you the space to start writing and thinking a bit about how some of your research might fit into your project. Consider these two sample entries from an annotated bibliography from a research project on pharmaceutical advertising:

Example 5.4.1.6.1:

Siegel, Marc. "Fighting the Drug (ad) Wars." The Nation 17 June 2002: 21.

Siegel, who is a doctor himself, writes about how drug advertising has undermined the communication between doctors and patients. He says that drug ads have driven up the costs of prescription drugs, particularly big selling drugs like those for cholesterol.

Wechsler, Jill. "Minority Docs See DTC Ads as Way to Address 'Race Gap.'" Pharmaceutical Executive May 2002: 32, 34. WilsonSelect Database. Eastern Michigan University Halle Library. 20 October 2002. <http://www.emich.edu/halle>.

This article is about a study that said that African-American doctors saw advertising of prescription drugs as a way of educating their patients. The ads are useful because they talk about diseases that affect African-Americans.

Even from the limited amount of information available in these entries, it's clear that a relationship between these articles exists. Both are similar articles about how the doctor/patient relationship is affected by drug advertising. But both are also different. The first article is from the newspaper *The Nation,* which is in many ways similar to an academic journal and which is also known for its liberal views. The second article is from a trade journal (also similar to academic journals in many ways) that obviously is an advocate for the pharmaceutical industry.

In other words, in the process of compiling an annotated bibliography, you are doing more than keeping track of your research. You are starting to make some comparisons and beginning to see some relationships between your evidence, a process that will become increasingly important as you gather more research and work your way through the different exercises that lead to the research project.

But remember: However you decide to keep track of your research as you progress through your project—annotated bibliography, note cards, or another method—**the important thing is that you need to keep track of your research as you progress**

through your project!

How many sources do I need?

Inevitably, students in research writing classes always ask how many sources they need to include in their research projects. In one sense, “how many sources do I need?” is a utilitarian question, one usually attached to a student’s exploration of what it will take to get a particular grade. Considered more abstractly, this question is also an effort to explore the scope of a research project. Like a certain page or word count requirement, the question “how many sources do I need?” is an effort to get a handle on the scope of the research project assignment. In that sense, asking about the number of sources is probably a good idea, a little like asking how much something weighs before you attempt to pick it up.

But ultimately, there is no right or wrong answer to this question. Longer research projects tend to have evidence from more different sources than shorter projects, but there is no cut-and-dry formula where “X” number of pages will equal “X” number of sources.

However, an annotated bibliography should contain significantly more entries than you intend or expect to include in your research project. For example, if you think you will need or if your instructor requires you to have research from about seven different sources, you should probably have about 15 different entries on your annotated bibliography.

The reasons you need to find twice as many sources as you are likely to use is that you want to find and use the *best* research you can reasonably find, not the *first* pieces of research you can find. Usually, researchers have to look at a lot more information than they would ever include in a research writing project to begin making judgements about their research. And by far the worst thing you can do in your research is to stop right after you have found the number of sources required by the instructor for your project.

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5.5: Drafting

Once students have spent time and effort preparing to write by gathering ideas and organizing activities, they are ready to begin drafting. Many instructors recommend a practice that is referred to as fast drafting, in which the student writes under the pressure of a time limit, much like freewriting. This allows students to create without their inner critic undermining their momentum. It empowers the "creator hand" to work with agency, while silencing the "editor hand."

To do fast drafting, students first need to set up the conditions that will help in their success and is appropriate to their abilities to focus. The following are easy steps writers follow:

- Create a block of time in which there are no interruptions. This should be a realistic length, given a writer's ability to focus, from 10 minutes at a time to 75 minutes or longer.
- Decide on the goal: Write a paragraph in 10 minutes, 2 pages in 1 hour, or a complete essay in 1 hour and 15 minutes.

For some, 75 minutes is a good length, but some students find that after 30 minutes they can no longer concentrate. If that is the case, they should plan on several shorter sessions of distraction-free time.

During this time, students should turn off their phones and social media, let the dog outside, and ensure that it's time for children to be asleep. This needs to be quiet, concentrated time.

Students need to let go of their worries about good and bad ideas. There will be time to rethink, rephrase, and rework during the revision process.

Activities

Prepare for writing a 75-minute fast draft by doing several prewriting activities including brainstorming, focused writing, outlining, and perhaps reading and researching, depending on the assignment. Then, in an intense, 75-minute time span, write your entire essay as quickly as possible including the introduction and conclusion. Don't stop to concern yourself with word choice, citations, or grammar. Just get into the flow of ideas and write your essay all the way to the end. Remember: You can go back and revise and edit all you want, but that is much easier to do once you have a draft.

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5.5.1.1: Moving From Outline to Draft

At this point in the writing process, you'll have accomplished quite a lot of work. It may feel pretty scattered across notes you've made, sources you've pulled together, and different trains of thought in your head. That's fine!

You'll have some sort of outline at this point: some plan for what sections you'll need, and an idea of their order. This may be a very formal Roman numeral outline, a more informal list of ideas, a mind map, a Powerpoint outline–whatever is comfortable for you.

The next step is a big one: starting to flesh out those pieces of an outline into a substantial essay draft.

Consider this guidance from an English professor. She's talking about a specific essay assignment for her students, but the general concepts of the video apply to all writing situations. Professor Pell's best advice is to NOT write the sections of your paper in order. Instead, take advantage of the outline to skip around to the parts that are easiest to develop first, and that will have the biggest impact of your paper overall.

YouTube Video

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

View this YouTube Video online

While you'll have different sections of your paper, the concept still applies. Decide for yourself what order will be most effective to write in, and free yourself up to put off the difficult parts until last!

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5.5.1.2: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme

As an instructor, I've noted that a number of new (and sometimes not-so-new) students are skilled wordsmiths and generally clear thinkers but are nevertheless stuck in a high-school style of writing. They struggle to let go of certain assumptions about how an academic paper *should be*. Chapter 1points to the essay portion of the SAT as a representative artifact of the writing skills that K-12 education imparts. Some students who have mastered that form, and enjoyed a lot of success from doing so, assume that college writing is simply more of the same. The skills that go into a very basic kind of essay—often called the five-paragraph theme—are indispensable. If you're good at the five-paragraph theme, then you're good at identifying a clear and consistent thesis, arranging cohesive paragraphs, organizing evidence for key points, and situating an argument within a broader context through the intro and conclusion.

In college you need to build on those essential skills. The five-paragraph theme, as such, is bland and formulaic; it doesn't compel deep thinking. Your professors are looking for a more ambitious and arguable thesis, a nuanced and compelling argument, and real-life evidence for all key points, all in an organically[1] structured paper.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 contrast the standard five-paragraph theme and the organic college paper. The five-paragraph theme, outlined in Figure 3.1 is probably what you're used to: the introductory paragraph starts broad and gradually narrows to a thesis, which readers expect to find at the very end of that paragraph. In this idealized format, the thesis invokes the magic number of three: three reasons why a statement is true. Each of those reasons is explained and justified in the three body paragraphs, and then the final paragraph restates the thesis before gradually getting broader. This format is easy for readers to follow, and it helps writers organize their points and the evidence that goes with them. That's why you learned this format.

Figure 3.2, in contrast, represents a paper on the same topic that has the more organic form expected in college. The first key difference is the thesis. Rather than simply positing a number of reasons to think that something is true, it puts forward an arguable statement: one with which a reasonable person might disagree. An arguable thesis gives the paper purpose. It surprises readers and draws them in. You hope your reader thinks, "Huh. Why would they come to that conclusion?" and then feels compelled to read on. The body paragraphs, then, build on one another to carry out this ambitious argument. In the classic five-paragraph theme (Figure 3.1) it hardly matters which of the three reasons you explain first or second. In the more organic structure (Figure 3.2) each paragraph specifically leads to the next.

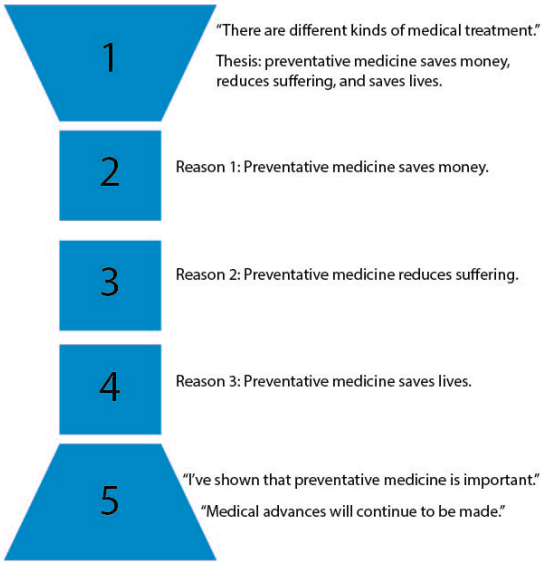


Figure 3.1 *- The five-paragraph "theme"*

The last key difference is seen in the conclusion. Because the organic essay is driven by an ambitious, non-obvious argument, the reader comes to the concluding section thinking "OK, I'm convinced by the argument. What do you, author, make of it? Why does it matter?" The conclusion of an organically structured paper has a real job to do. It doesn't just reiterate the thesis; it explains why the thesis matters.

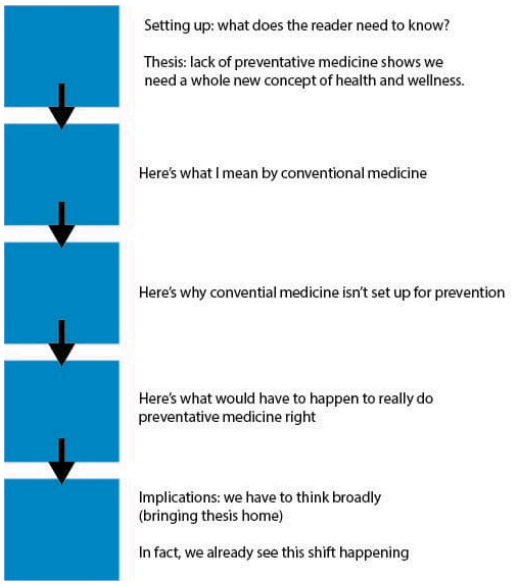


Figure 3.2 *- The organic college paper*

The substantial time you spent mastering the five-paragraph form in Figure 3.1 was time well spent; it's hard to imagine anyone succeeding with the more organic form without the organizational skills and habits of mind inherent in the simpler form. But if you assume that you must adhere rigidly to the simpler form, you're blunting your intellectual ambition. Your professors will not be impressed by obvious theses, loosely related body paragraphs, and repetitive conclusions. They want you to undertake an ambitious independent analysis, one that will yield a thesis that is somewhat surprising and challenging to explain.

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5.5.1.3: Types of Essays and Suggested Structures

Introduction

The structural organization of an essay will vary, depending on the type of writing task you've been assigned. Below are outline templates for specific types of writing projects. Keep in mind these are just a starting point: there is always room for variation and creativity in how a subject is most effectively presented to a reader.

Analytical essay

This is perhaps the most common structure. Examples of this include questions which ask you to *discuss*, *analyze*, *investigate*, *explore,* or *review*. In an analytical structure you are required to break the topic into its different components and discuss these in separate paragraphs or sections, demonstrating balance where possible.

- 1. Introduction
    - Background information on topic
    - Overall point of view of the topic (thesis)
    - Overview of components to be discussed (structure)
2. Body paragraphs
    - paragraph 1
        1. Topic sentence outlining first component
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - paragraph 2
        1. Topic sentence outlining second component
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - Following body paragraphs
        1. These follow the same structure for as many components as you need to outline
3. Conclusion
    - Summary of the main points of the body
    - Restatement of the main point of view
    - Justification/evaluation (if required by task)

Argumentative essay

Examples of this type of essay include questions which ask you to take a position on a topic, such as a particular decision or policy, and present arguments which support your position. An effective way to argue a point can be to present the opposing view first then counter this view with stronger evidence.

- 1. Introduction
    - Background information on topic
    - Statement of your position on the topic (thesis)
    - Overview of arguments to be presented (structure)
2. Body paragraphs
    - paragraph 1
        1. Topic sentence outlining first argument
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - paragraph 2
        1. Topic sentence outlining second argument
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph

- Following body paragraphs
    1. These follow the same structure for as many arguments as you wish to put forward in support of the topic.
3. Conclusion
    - Summary of the main points of the body
    - Restatement of the position

Interpretive essay

Examples of this type of essay include assignments where you are given data such as a case study or scenario, a diagram, graphical information, or a picture and expected to interpret this information to demonstrate your application of knowledge when answering the task. Based on this data, you may be asked to do a range of things such as provide recommendations or solutions, develop a nursing care plan, a teaching plan, suggest legal advice, or plan a marketing strategy.

- 1. Introduction
    - Brief background information on topic
    - Overview of issues to be addressed in the essay (structure)
    - State overall interpretation (thesis)
2. Body paragraphs
    - paragraph 1
        1. Topic sentence outlining first issue identified from the data
        2. Sentences giving further explanation and providing evidence from both the literature and the data, e.g. the case study to support the topic sentence (it is very important in this types of essays to make reference to the data you have been supplied to give your essay context).
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - paragraph 2
        1. Topic sentence outlining second issue identified
        2. As above
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - Following body paragraphs
        1. These follow the same structure for as many issues as you wish to discuss from the data you have been supplied.
3. Conclusion
    - Statement of overall interpretation
    - Summary of the main issues from the data supplied
    - Make recommendations or suggest solutions to address the issues arising from the data supplied.

Comparative essay

Examples of this type of essay include *compare*, *compare and contrast*, or *differentiate* questions. In this structure the similarities and/or differences between two or more items (for example, theories or models) are discussed paragraph by paragraph. Your assignment task may require you to make a recommendation about the suitability of the items you are comparing.

- 1. Introduction
    - Brief background information on topic
    - Outline of two (or more) things being compared or contrasted
    - Purpose for making the comparison / contrast
    - Overview of the specific points to be compared / contrasted
2. Body paragraphs
    - paragraph 1
        1. Topic sentence outlining first similarity or difference
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - paragraph 2
        1. Topic sentence outlining second similarity or different
        2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
        3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
    - Following body paragraphs

        1. These follow the same structure for as many items or aspects as you need to compare/contrast
    3. Conclusion
        - Restatement of the main purpose for the comparison / contrast
        - Summary of the main similarities and differences
        - Recommendation about suitability of compared items for purpose (if requirement of assessment task)
        - Overall conclusion

Problem and solution essay

These essay questions often require you to structure your answer in several parts. An example may be to ask you to investigate a problem and explore a range of solutions. You may also be asked to choose the best solution and justify your selection, so allow space for this in your essay if needed.

- 1. Introduction
    - Background information about the problem
    - Description of the problem and why it is serious
    - Overview of the solutions to be outlined
    2. Body paragraphs
        - paragraph 1
            1. Topic sentence outlining first solution
            2. Explanation of the positive and negative aspects of the solution
            3. Evidence to support explanations
            4. Concluding sentence
        - paragraph 2
            1. Topic sentence outlining second solution
            2. Explanation of the positive and negative aspects of the solution
            3. Evidence to support explanation
            4. Concluding sentence
        - Following body paragraphs
            1. These follow the same structure for as many solutions as you need to discuss
    3. Conclusion
        - Summary of the problem and overview of the solutions
        - Evaluation of solutions and recommendation of best option

Note: Depending on the topic, body paragraphs in a problem and solution essay could be devoted to discussing the problem in more detail, as well as the solution. It's up to the writer to assess the needs of the project, in order to decide how much time is spent on each part.

Cause and effect essay

Examples of this type of essay include questions which ask you to state or investigate the effects or outline the causes of the topic. This may be, for example, an historical event, the implementation of a policy, a medical condition, or a natural disaster. These essays may be structured in one of two ways: either the causes(s) of a situation may be discussed first followed by the effect(s), or the effect(s) could come first with the discussion working back to outline the cause(s). Sometimes with cause and effect essays you are required to give an assessment of the overall effects, such as on a community, a workplace, an individual. Space must be allocated for this assessment in your structure if needed.

- 1. Introduction
    - Background information on situation under discussion
    - Description of the situation
    - Overview of the causes or effects to be outlined
    2. Body paragraphs
        - paragraph 1
            1. Topic sentence outlining first cause or effect
            2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support the topic sentence
            3. Concluding sentence – linking to next paragraph
        - paragraph 2

1. Topic sentence outlining second cause or effect
2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
3. Concluding sentence – linking to next paragraph

- Following body paragraphs
  1. These follow the same structure for as many causes or effects as you need to outline

3. Conclusion
   - Summary of the main points of the body
   - Conclusion, prediction or recommendation

Conclusion

Finally, consider that some essay assignments may ask you to combine approaches, especially in more advanced classes. At that point, you may have to vary your body paragraph strategy from section to section.

This chart gives an idea of what different roles paragraphs can play in a mixed-structure essay assignment.

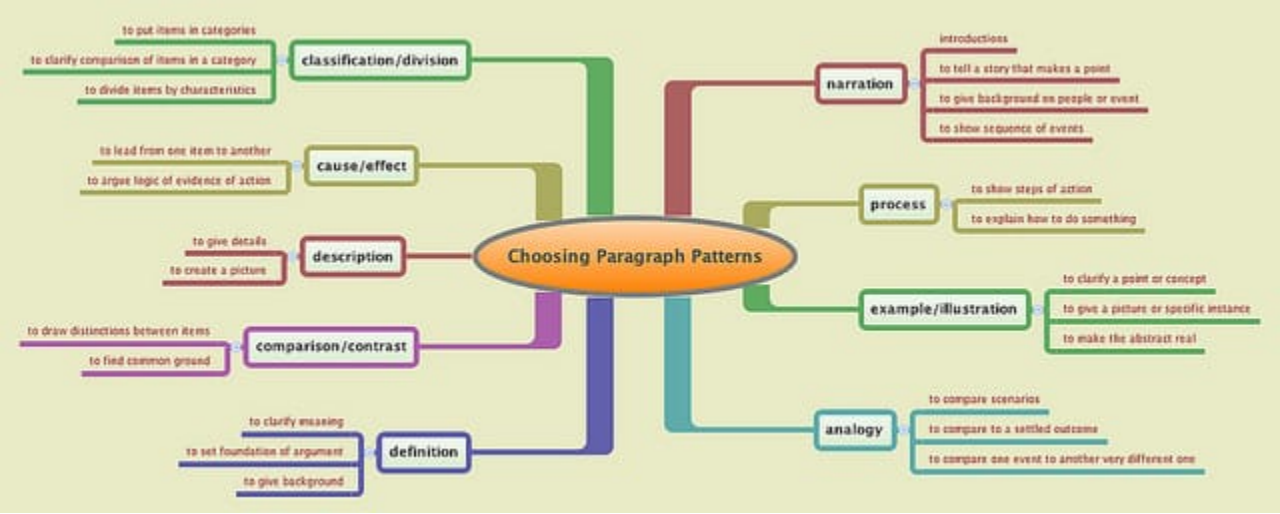


Figure 5.5.1.3.1

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5.5.1.4: The First Draft is the Ugliest



Figure 5.5.1.4.1 - *Consider this skywriting the fireflies' first draft.*

If one is the loneliest number, the first draft is the ugliest draft. The end. There's no way around it. If you can accept that reality, carry on. If you can't, writing will be an ever-frustrating task. You will struggle to find joy in doing the work.

Consider the truth a sort of Jedi mind trick. It frees you from having to write something "golden" every time you come to the page. The pressure eases. You can write terribly. You can use cliches and jargon and run-on sentences. Don't worry about any of it. You can – and should – revise and edit later.

Let the words fill the page. If no words come, use a writing exercise. Steal a line from someone (cited, of course). Get your writing muscles working, and your mind will follow suit. It will start to make connections.

Stop waiting to "feel" like writing and do the hard work of writing. Feelings more often follow actions rather than the other way around. Waiting to feel like writing is the same thing as waiting for inspiration. Neither typically happen unless you're working.

Don't be afraid of the horrible, no-good words. At least you have words. That's an accomplishment. Many give up before even getting that far. You didn't. You have an ugly first draft.

Now get to work on the second. It'll still be ugly but much less so than the first.

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5.5.1: ORGANIZING AND WRITING YOUR DRAFT

5.5.1.1: Moving From Outline to Draft

5.5.1.2: Moving Beyond the Five-paragraph Theme

5.5.1.3: Types of Essays and Suggested Structures

5.5.1.4: The First Draft is the Ugliest

5.5.1.5: Constructing and revising a thesis statement

5.5.1.6: Opening Paragraphs

5.5.1.7: In Today's World ...

5.5.1.8: Conclusions

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.

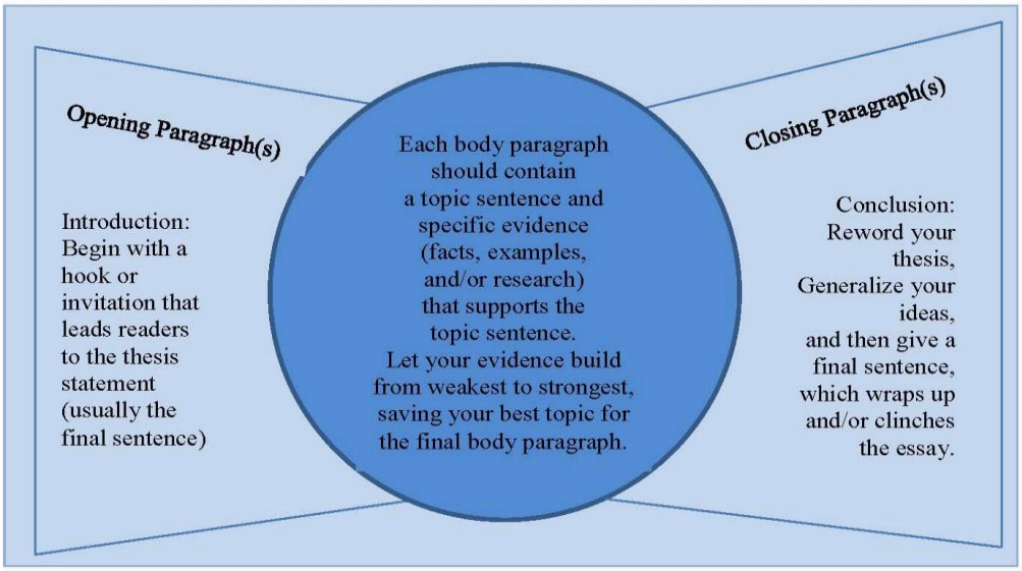


Figure 5.5.1.1 - Figure of the “Bowtie Method”

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.

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5.5.1.5: Constructing and revising a thesis statement

Learning Objectives

- Develop a strong, clear thesis statement with the proper elements.
- Revise your thesis statement

Have you ever known a person who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following his train of thought as he jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe he told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. His ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.



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Just as a personal anecdote can be a disorganized mess, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body. Just like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

Elements of a Thesis Statement

For every essay you write, you must focus on a central idea. This idea stems from a topic you have chosen or been assigned or from a question your teacher has asked. It is not enough merely to discuss a general topic or simply answer a question with a yes or no. You have to form a specific opinion, and then articulate that into a controlling idea —the main idea upon which you build your thesis.

Remember that a thesis is not the topic itself, but rather your interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic your professor gives you, 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.

A thesis is one sentence long and appears toward the end of your 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.

A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

- **Specificity.** A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.
- **Precision.** A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.
- **Ability to be argued.** A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.
- **Ability to be demonstrated.** For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.
- **Forcefulness.** A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.
- **Confidence.** In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as *I feel* or *I believe* actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as *in my opinion* or *I believe*. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Exercise

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.

Topics

- Texting while driving
- The legal drinking age in the United States
- Steroid use among professional athletes
- Abortion
- Racism

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
- Precision
- Ability to be argued
- Ability to be demonstrated
- Forcefulness

- Confidence

1. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.
2. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
3. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
4. J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.
5. 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.
6. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
7. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

- 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

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.

Writing at work

Often in your career, you will need to ask your boss for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your boss know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Remember from Chapter 8 that 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.

Tip

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

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

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke*. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions. (See Chapter 8 for more information on the 5WH questions.) By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

3. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.

Revised thesis: The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, "Why are they not paid enough?" But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered "enough"?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results?

4. Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: Today's teenage girls are too sexualized.

Revised thesis: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman's worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

It is true that some young women in today's society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
- What constitutes "too" sexualized?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behavior show up?
- What are the repercussions?

Writing Assigment #1 Preparation Exercise

During week 2 you submitted your potential topic list for your narrative essay, which included some pre-writing. Now you must determine your purpose for writing and your audience. Using that general topic, narrow it down by answering the 5WH questions. After you answer these questions, you should do some additional prewriting to gather possible supporting details for your working thesis statement. Then, craft your working thesis statement. Identify any weaknesses in this sentence and revise the statement to reflect the elements of a strong thesis statement. Make sure it is specific, precise, arguable, demonstrable, forceful, and confident.

Writing at work

In your career you may have to write a project proposal that focuses on a particular problem in your company, such as reinforcing the tardiness policy. The proposal would aim to fix the problem; using a thesis statement would clearly state the boundaries of the problem and tell the goals of the project. After writing the proposal, you may find that the thesis needs revision to reflect exactly what is expressed in the body. Using the techniques from this chapter would apply to revising that thesis

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.

Constructing and Revising a Thesis Statement was adapted from Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement found at

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5.5.1.6: Opening Paragraphs

An introduction exists as the first paragraph in a 5-page essay, and it serves the following purposes:

- Establishes reader interest.
- Introduces the general topic of the essay while establishing the writer's voice, tone, or attitude, toward the subject.
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs.

Establishing Reader Interest

Introductions should begin with an engaging lead or opener (sometimes called a "hook" in middle school or high school) that is devised to evoke readers' interest. Capturing readers' attention motivates them to continue reading. Writers can garner a reader's interest by doing the following:

- Beginning by quoting an expert on the respective topic or an inspirational individual.
- Beginning by offering some statistical evidence that is both informative and intriguing.
- Opening with a striking mental image.
- Appealing to the reader's emotions.
- Raising a question or series of questions.
- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for the essay.
- Including a personal anecdote.
- Stating in the middle of a story with the conclusion of the story existing as the first sentence in the conclusion paragraph.

Transition Sentences

After the opener or hook, writers need to add transition sentences that should introduce the readers to the topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. These important sentences help readers move or "transition" from the hook toward the thesis statement.

A Strong Thesis Statement

An introduction usually contains a thesis statement (i.e., the main point of the essay). A thesis statement is a promise to the reader about what the essay will be about. A thesis is not the topic itself, but rather the writer's angle on the topic. For whatever topic a professor gives, writers must ask themselves, "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.

A thesis is usually 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 the writer will organize the information.

Specificity

A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. The creation of a thesis statement begins when writers choose a broad subject and then narrow it down until they have pinpointed a specific aspect of that topic. For example, healthcare is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic and essentially answer the following question. "What are the options for individuals without healthcare coverage?"

Precision

A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic pertains to options for individuals without healthcare coverage, then the precise thesis statement must make an exact, related, claim, such as the following: "Limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers." To elaborate

on this topic further, the writer might discuss how limited options impact the lives of the uninsured.

Ability to be Argued

A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement is often not considered arguable. A thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

However, a wise way to think about a thesis statement within a persuasive or "argumentative" essay is to write one that strikes up or furthers a conversation versus creating an argument. Imagine someone reading only your thesis statement and the two of you, then, having a conversation in which you share your stance, your reader shares his or her stance, and you continue your discussion with the information from your body paragraphs.

Ability to be Demonstrated

For any claim in the thesis, the writer must be able to provide reasons and examples for this opinion. Personal observations can help, or the writer can consult outside sources to demonstrate validity. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.

The demonstration of validity comes from incorporating the voices of the experts—those who have already had their work on your topic published, vetted, and added to the respective canon. Use the strategies of quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing.

Remember that the only way to hit a word or page requirement when writers feel like they have already said everything is to add examples.

Forcefulness

A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that the writer is, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

That being said, college-level thesis statements would do well to not include the word "should," as a means of trying to sound authoritative so as to make a solid argument.

Confidence

In addition to using forcefulness in their thesis statement, writers must also be confident in their claims. Phrases such as "I feel" or "I believe" actually weaken the readers' sense of confidence in what they are reading because these phrases imply that the writer may be the only person who feels this way.

Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades readers to have faith in the argument and to open their minds to the point of view of the writer. So, no thesis should contain phrases such as "in my opinion" or "I believe." These statements reduce credibility and weaken the argument.

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the requirements: specificity, precision, ability to be argued, ability to be demonstrated, forcefulness, and confidence.

- The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the 1986 play *Fences* symbolize the challenges faced by black men who lived through segregation and integration in the United States, and their life stories can be considered as critical to understand the challenge black men continue to face over thirty years later.
- Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one idea proposed so as to deal with illegal immigration; however, contemporary strategies regarding this issue do not address the essential human right for safety along with the essentials of food, clothing, and shelter.
- J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused and somewhat rebellious young person who voices his disgust with "phonies." Yet, in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions making him a complicated character within one of Salinger's most celebrated novels.
- Compared to an absolute divorce, a no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown, although no divorce is easy since the issues involved extend well beyond the monetary and are usually based in an unfortunate undercurrent of misunderstandings and sorrow.
- Discussing the dangers of illegal drug use is with elementary and middle school students is one method that schools use to

help dissuade young people from abusing drugs as they grow up. However, children learn a great deal from what they observe making it imperative that parents monitor what their children watch on tv, see in movies, and glean from their friends and family members.
- In today's challenging professional world, a high school diploma is not a significant enough confirmation of one's education so as to obtain a stable, lucrative, lifelong job. Therefore, many colleges and universities are offering more online courses making it possible for more individuals to work toward a college degree while still working to make a living.

Avoid Weak Thesis Statements

Here are some pitfalls to avoid when composing a thesis:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of a subject or a description of what the writer will discuss in the essay. *Weak thesis statement:* My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge. Remember, do not refer to your essay in your essay. By the time one enters college, such strategies for writing thesis statements have passed.
- 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 often use sexual or romantic appeal to sell their products.
- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad. *Weak thesis statement:* The life and presidency of Abraham Lincoln was challenging.

Sources

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5.5.1.7: In Today's World ...

Those opening words—so common in student papers—represent the most prevalent misconception about introductions: that they shouldn't really say anything substantive. As noted in Chapter 2, the five-paragraph format that most students mastered before coming to college suggests that introductory paragraphs should start very general and gradually narrow down to the thesis. As a result, students frequently write introductions for college papers in which the first two or three (or more) sentences are patently obvious or overly broad. Charitable and well rested instructors just skim over that text and start reading closely when they arrive at something substantive. Frustrated and overtired instructors emit a dramatic self-pitying sigh, assuming that the whole paper will be as lifeless and gassy as those first few sentences. If you've gotten into the habit of beginning opening sentences with the following phrases, firmly resolve to strike them from your repertoire right now:

> In today's world ...
>
> Throughout human history ...
>
> Since the dawn of time ...
>
> Webster's Dictionary defines [CONCEPT] as ...

For one thing, sentences that begin with the first three stems are often wrong. For example, someone may write, "Since the dawn of time, people have tried to increase crop yields." In reality, people have not been trying to increase crop yields throughout human history—agriculture is only about 23,000 years old, after all—and certainly not since the dawn of time (whenever that was). For another, sentences that start so broadly, even when factually correct, could not possibly end with anything interesting.

> I started laughing when I first read this chapter because my go-to introduction for every paper was always "Throughout history..." In high school it was true—my first few sentences did not have any meaning. Now I understand it should be the exact opposite. Introductions should scream to your readers, HEY GUYS, READ THIS! I don't want my readers' eyes to glaze over before they even finish the first paragraph, do you? And how annoying is it to read a bunch of useless sentences anyways, right? Every sentence should be necessary and you should set your papers with a good start.
>
> Aly Button

So what should you do? Well, start at the beginning. By that I mean, start explaining what the reader needs to know to comprehend your thesis and its importance. For example, compare the following two paragraphs:

Five-Paragraph Theme Version:

> Throughout time, human societies have had religion. Major world religions since the dawn of civilization include Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Animism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These and all other religions provide a set of moral principles, a leadership structure, and an explanation for unknown questions such as what happens after people die. Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason. However, the notion of embodied cognition is a place where physical phenomena connect with religious ones. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an *embodied cognition* that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions, in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state towards spiritual transcendence.

Organically Structured Version:[1]

> Religion is an endeavor to cultivate freedom from bodily constraints to reach a higher state of being beyond the physical constraints of reality. But how is it possible to employ a system, the human body, to transcend its own limitations? Religion and science have always had an uneasy relationship as empiricism is stretched to explain religious phenomena, but psychology has recently added a new perspective to the discussion. *Embodiment* describes the interaction between humans and the environment that lays a foundation for cognition and can help explain the

> mechanisms that underlie religion's influence on believers. This is a rare moment where science and religion are able to coexist without the familiar controversy. Paradoxically, religion can emphasize a deep involvement in reality, an *embodied cognition* that empowers followers to escape from physical constraints and reach a new spirituality. Religion carefully constructs a physical environment to synthesize an individual's memories, emotions, and physical actions, in a manner that channels the individual's cognitive state towards spiritual transcendence.

In the first version, the first three sentences state well known facts that do not directly relate to the thesis. The fourth sentence is where the action starts, though that sentence ("Since the dawn of religion, it has always been opposed to science because one is based on faith and the other on reason") is still overstated: when was this dawn of religion? And was there "science," as we now understand it, at that time? The reader has to slog through to the fifth sentence before the intro starts to develop some momentum.

Training in the five-paragraph theme format seems to have convinced some student writers that beginning with substantive material will be too abrupt for the reader. But the second example shows that a meatier beginning isn't jarring; it is actually much more engaging. The first sentence of the organic example is somewhat general, but it specifies the particular aspect of religion (transcending physical experience) that is germane to the thesis. The next six sentences lay out the ideas and concepts that explain the thesis, which is provided in the last two sentences. Overall, every sentence is needed to thoroughly frame the thesis. It is a lively paragraph in itself, and it piques the reader's interest in the author's original thinking about religion.

Sometimes a vague introductory paragraph reflects a simple, obvious thesis (see Chapter 3) and a poorly thought-out paper. More often, though, a shallow introduction represents a missed opportunity to convey the writer's depth of thought from the get-go. Students adhering to the five-paragraph theme format sometime assume that such vagueness is needed to book-end an otherwise pithy paper. As you can see from these examples, that is simply untrue. I've seen some student writers begin with a vague, high-school style intro (thinking it obligatory) and then write a wonderfully vivid and engaging introduction as their second paragraph. Other papers I've seen have an interesting, original thesis embedded in late body paragraphs that should be articulated up front and used to shape the whole body. If you must write a vague "since the dawn of time" intro to get the writing process going, then go ahead. Just budget the time to rewrite the intro around your well developed, arguable thesis and ensure that the body paragraphs are organized explicitly by your analytical thread.

Here are two more examples of excellent introductory paragraphs written by undergraduate students in different fields. Note how, in both cases, (1) the first sentence has real substance, (2) every sentence is indispensable to setting up the thesis, and (3) the thesis is complex and somewhat surprising. Both of these introductory paragraphs set an ambitious agenda for the paper. As a reader, it's pretty easy to imagine how the body paragraphs that follow will progress through the nuanced analysis needed to carry out the thesis:

From Davis O'Connell's "Abelard":[2]

> He rebelled against his teacher, formed his own rival school, engaged in a passionate affair with a teenager, was castrated, and became a monk. All in a day's work. Perhaps it's no surprise that Peter Abelard gained the title of "heretic" along the way. A 12th-century philosopher and theologian, Abelard tended to alienate nearly everyone he met with his extremely arrogant and egotistical personality. This very flaw is what led him to start preaching to students that he had stolen from his former master, which further deteriorated his reputation. Yet despite all of the senseless things that he did, his teachings did not differ much from Christian doctrine. Although the church claimed to have branded Abelard a heretic purely because of his religious views, the other underlying reasons for these accusations involve his conceited personality, his relationship with the 14-year-old Heloise, and the political forces of the 12th century.

From Logan Skelly's "Staphylococcus aureus:[3]

> Bacterial resistance to antibiotics is causing a crisis in modern healthcare. The evolution of multi-drug resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* is of particular concern because of the morbidity and mortality it causes, the limited treatment options it poses, and the difficulty in implementing containment measures for its control. In order to appreciate the virulence of S. *aureus* and to help alleviate the problems its resistance is causing, it is important to study the evolution of antibiotic resistance in this pathogen, the mechanisms of its resistance, and the factors that may limit or counteract its evolution. It is especially important to examine how human actions are causing evolutionary changes in this bacterial species. This review will examine the historical sequence of causation that has led to antibiotic resistance in this microorganism and why natural selection favors the resistant trait. It is the goal of this review to illuminate the scope of the problem produced by antibiotic resistance in S. *aureus*and to illustrate the need for judicious antibiotic usage to prevent this pathogen from evolving further pathogenicity and virulence.

If vague introductory paragraphs are bad, why were you taught them? In essence you were taught the form so that you could later use it to deepen your thinking. By producing the five-paragraph theme over and over, it has probably become second nature for you to find a clear thesis and shape the intro paragraph around it, tasks you absolutely must accomplish in academic writing. However, you've probably been taught to proceed from "general" to "specific" in your intro and encouraged to think of "general" as "vague". At the college level, think of "general" as context: begin by explaining the conceptual, historical, or factual context that the reader needs in order to grasp the significance of the argument to come. It's not so much a structure of general-to-specific; instead it's context-to-argument.

> My average for writing an intro is three times. As in, it takes me three tries at writing one to get it to say exactly what I want it to. The intro, I feel, is the most important part of an essay. This is kind of like a road map for the rest of the paper. My suggestion is to do the intro first. This way, the paper can be done over a period of time rather than running the risk of forgetting what you wanted to say if you stop.
>
> Kaethe Leonard

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5.5.1.8: Conclusions

Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when approaching the conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade during the labor of writing an essay. However, 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 with the rest of the essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle the reader and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if the student has worked hard to write the introduction and body, the conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

The ideas in the conclusion must conform to the rest of the essay. But in a sense it's easier to think of the conclusion of an essay as making the essay come full circle.

When students are asked what they think about writing conclusions to essays, the response is usually less than enthusiastic. When asked what makes conclusion paragraphs an unsatisfying part of their essay, the responses are often the same.

"I have nothing else to say. I've already said everything."

"I know I'm supposed to summarize my main points, but I feel stupid doing that when I just stated all those points."

A conclusion paragraph that is based primarily in summary is also less than satisfying for readers. It feels almost disrespectful in that a reader might think, "I just read all of that. Do you think I already forgot your main points?"

The good thing is that there's a model that exists for writing conclusion paragraphs for standard essays that lets students forget the summary and leave readers nodding in agreement. The easiest way to craft this style of conclusion paragraph is to model it after the introduction.

A typical introduction, even at the freshman level in college, is formatted as follows:

1. Start with a hook (often called an "opener" or a "lead" in college).
2. Create a few transition sentences that move the reader along from opener to thesis statement.
3. State the thesis.

Then, once all the body paragraphs have been carefully crafted, students are ready to write the conclusion. But, again, everything has been said. So the trick is not to even think about "the conclusion." Instead, they should scroll up to the very beginning of their essay and remind themselves about how it all started. The following exists as an innovative way to write a great conclusion paragraph.

1. Revisit the hook. (If the writer started with a quote, offer another quote. If the writer started with statistics, offer more statistics. If the writer asked a question, answer the question. The reader will get a sense of hearing something like that before and will anticipate that the end of the essay is on its way.)
2. Restate the thesis. (Restating the thesis is important because it reminds the reader of the major arguments the writer has been trying to prove. Sometimes instructors suggest restating the thesis at the beginning of the conclusion, but then students are setting themselves up to have nothing left to say but to summarize.)
3. Finish with a twist. (This final commentary often does particularly well when a sort of global extension is made. If the student's essay is about current strategies being used to combat the devastation associated with the Pacific trash vortex, then a final statement could be something like the following: "Clearly the devastation related to the Pacific trash vortex is far-reaching and has effects beyond sea life and coastal societies. More significant, though, is the fact that human beings live every day as a more globalized society in which we have more in common than many continue to think. Since the Pacific Ocean is the largest and deepest ocean on the planet, it is even more important that we, collectively, give it our greatest care."

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

When closing the essay, writers should not express that they are drawing to a close. Statements such as “In conclusion,” “It is clear that,” “As you can see,” or “In summation” are unnecessary and can be considered trite.

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

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting the thesis
- Changing the thesis
- Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in conclusions has an unsettling effect on readers. Raising new points makes reader want more information, which the writer could not possibly provide in the limited space of the final paragraph.

Contradicting or changing the thesis statement causes readers to think that they do not actually have conviction about the topic. After all, they have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. When they change sides or open up their point of view in the conclusion, the reader becomes less inclined to believe the original argument.

By apologizing for the opinion or stating what is tough to digest, the writer is in fact admitting that even they know what they have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. They do not want readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

Sources

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5.6: Revising and Editing

The Revision Process

Revision literally means to re-see or re-envision a piece of writing. This process may involve adding, rearranging, removing, and replacing (ARRR) words, sentences, and ideas. Since writing is recursive, revising may require revisiting the prewriting stage.

- **A**dding

  What else does the reader need to know? If the essay doesn't meet the required word or page count, what areas can be expanded? Where would further explanation help key points to be more clear? This is a good time to go back to the prewriting notes and look for ideas which weren't included in the draft.

- **R**earranging

  Even when writers carefully plan their writing, they may need to rearrange sections for their essays to flow better.

- **R**emoving

  Some ideas just don't work or don't contribute enough to the overall goal of the essay. Often when writers delete excess words or paragraphs, the ideas become clearer.

- **R**eplacing

  Vivid details help bring writing to life. Writers need to look for strong examples and quotable passages from outside sources to support their arguments. If particular paragraphs aren't working well, writers need to try rewriting them.

Other Useful Strategies

- **Reverse Outlining**

  In reverse outlining, the student reads through the written text and notes, noting down the topic of each paragraph. This way, the student can review if each paragraph has a clear focus and if each paragraph fits the overall organization of the paper. More on reverse outlining is available at *The Purdue Online Writing Lab* (OWL), "Reverse Outlining: An Exercise for Taking Notes and Revising Your Work."

- **Reading Aloud**

  The act of reading one's essay aloud allows the student to "hear it" in the way a reader will. This act permits the writer to slow down and pay attention to all words in the essay. They get a sense of what a reader experiences, where words are clear and effective, and where they are weak. Poorly structured sentences are hard to read out loud, indicating that this would be a good place to start revising. This technique is a great precursor for receiving feedback from others. It also helps writers take responsibility for their writing.

- **Peer and Instructor Feedback**

  No one becomes a good writer in a vacuum. Sometimes writing is done for ourselves, but more often, writing is done to connect to others, to share thoughts, and to communicate something others need to know. At this stage of the process, it's important for writers to get the measure of how well their writing works for readers that they are wanting to entertain, educate, or persuade. Showing the writing to someone else is essential. This might be done in a writers' circle or just with a friend who is good with words and can be asked for feedback. It's best to show our work to several people to get more than one opinion. Receiving feedback helps writers discover the strengths in their writing as well as areas that may be improved.

  After receiving feedback, whether through track changes in Google Docs, Microsoft Word, on paper, or verbally in a

peer-review session, the writer can discuss the comments with the reviewer. It's important that a writer consider these comments. Every reader comes from a different point of view, and the writer may not agree with everything that gets said by various readers. Sometimes, comments will be contradictory. It is the writer's responsibility to ask further and decide how to use comments received. A community that embraces and nurtures its members through the revision process works to communicate feedback so that everyone can grow and learn.

Successful college students utilize their resources, specifically their instructors and peers, to get feedback. Tutoring is an effective means by which students can receive knowledgeable one-on-one feedback about their writing. It can also be an effective way to help manage time.

Peer mentors provide students with additional one-on-one and group support in writing classrooms or during office hours. The peer mentor has had the previous experience of completing similar writing assignments and students find it helpful when they revise with their expertise in mind.

Activities

1. Take an essay that you have written under time pressure. Create a reverse outline of the different sections of your text. Observe whether this outline makes sense. Try moving around the different parts of your essay. Are there structures that help you to highlight certain ideas or make them more powerful?
2. Find a partner or group of classmates who are willing to meet at least once a week. During your meetings, read your essays aloud and give each other feedback on the content and language of your essays. This should be a group you are committed to working with throughout the semester with the goal of helping each other grow as writers.
3. Make an appointment with your instructor or college tutor to work through prewriting, revising or editing stages of your writing process.

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5.6.1.1: General Revision Points to Consider

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the process of revision
- List three general elements of every document that require revision

Just when you think the production of your document is done, the revision process begins. Runners often refer to “the wall,” where the limits of physical exertion are met and exhaustion is imminent. The writing process requires effort, from overcoming writer’s block to the intense concentration composing a document often involves. It is only natural to have a sense of relief when your document is drafted from beginning to end. This relief is false confidence, though. Your document is not complete, and in its current state it could, in fact, do more harm than good. Errors, omissions, and unclear phrases may lurk within your document, waiting to reflect poorly on you when it reaches your audience. Now is not time to let your guard down, prematurely celebrate, or to mentally move on to the next assignment. Think of the revision process as one that hardens and strengthens your document, even though it may require the sacrifice of some hard-earned writing.

General revision requires attention to content, organization, style, and readability. These four main categories should give you a template from which to begin to explore details in depth. A cursory review of these elements in and of itself is insufficient for even the briefest review. Across this chapter we will explore ways to expand your revision efforts to cover the common areas of weakness and error. You may need to take some time away from your document to approach it again with a fresh perspective. Writers often juggle multiple projects that are at different stages of development. This allows the writer to leave one document and return to another without losing valuable production time. Overall, your goal is similar to what it was during your writing preparation and production: a clear mind.

Evaluate Content

Content is only one aspect of your document. Let’s say you were assigned a report on the sales trends for a specific product in a relatively new market. You could produce a one-page chart comparing last year’s results to current figures and call it a day, but would it clearly and concisely deliver content that is useful and correct? Are you supposed to highlight trends? Are you supposed to spotlight factors that contributed to the increase or decrease? Are you supposed to include projections for next year? Our list of questions could continue, but for now let’s focus on content and its relationship to the directions. Have you included the content that corresponds to the given assignment, left any information out that may be necessary to fulfill the expectations, or have you gone beyond the assignment directions? Content will address the central questions of who, what, where, when, why and how within the range and parameters of the assignment.

Evaluate Organization

Organization is another key aspect of any document. Standard formats that include an introduction, body, and conclusion may be part of your document, but did you decide on a direct or indirect approach? Can you tell? A direct approach will announce the main point or purpose at the beginning, while an indirect approach will present an introduction before the main point. Your document may use any of a wide variety of organizing principles, such as chronological, spatial, compare/contrast. Is your organizing principle clear to the reader?



Figure 5.6.1.1.1

Beyond the overall organization, pay special attention to transitions. Readers often have difficulty following a document if the writer makes the common error of failing to make one point relevant to the next, or to illustrate the relationships between the points. Finally, your conclusion should mirror your introduction and not introduce new material.

Evaluate Style

Style is created through content and organization, but also involves word choice and grammatical structures. Is your document written in an informal or formal tone, or does it present a blend, a mix, or an awkward mismatch? Does it provide a coherent and unifying voice with a professional tone? If you are collaborating on the project with other writers or contributors, pay special attention to unifying the document across the different authors' styles of writing. Even if they were all to write in a professional, formal style, the document may lack a consistent voice. Read it out loud—can you tell who is writing what? If so, that is a clear clue that you need to do more revising in terms of style.

Evaluate Readability

Readability refers to the reader's ability to read and comprehend the document. A variety of tools are available to make an estimate of a document's reading level, often correlated to a school grade level. If this chapter has a reading level of 11.8, it would be appropriate for most readers in the eleventh grade. But just because you are in grade thirteen, eighteen, or twenty-one doesn't mean that your audience, in their everyday use of language, reads at a postsecondary level. As a business writer, your goal is to make your writing clear and concise, not complex and challenging.

You can often use the "Tools" menu of your word processing program to determine the approximate reading level of your document. The program will evaluate the number of characters per word, add in the number of words per sentence, and come up with a rating. It may also note the percentage of passive sentences, and other information that will allow you to evaluate readability. Like any computer-generated rating, it should serve you as one point of evaluation, but not the only point. Your concerted effort to choose words you perceive as appropriate for the audience will serve you better than any computer evaluation of your writing.

key takeaway

The four main categories—content, organization, style, and readability—provide a template for general revision.

Exercise 5.6.1.1.1

1. Select a document, such as an article from a Web site, newspaper, magazine, or a piece of writing you have completed for a course. Evaluate the document according to the four main categories described in this section. Could the document benefit from revision in any of these areas? Discuss your findings with your classmates.

2. Interview a coworker or colleague and specifically ask how much time and attention they dedicate to the revision process of their written work. Compare your results with classmates.

3. Find a particularly good example of writing according to the above criteria. Review it and share it with your classmates.

4. Find a particularly bad example of writing according to the above criteria. Review it and share it with your classmates.

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5.6.1: REVISING AND EDITING

5.6.1.1: General Revision Points to Consider
5.6.1.2: Points for Successful Revision
5.6.1.3: General Editing Points to Consider
5.6.1.4: Editing for clarity and conciseness

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.

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5.6.1.2: Points for Successful Revision

Once a rough draft is created, take some time to step away from the essay to get a newer and better perspective. Then begin revising. Revising means reexamining and rethinking the first draft, adding and deleting ideas extensively; rearranging any of the ideas, sentences, or paragraphs in the first draft; rewriting sentences and paragraphs for more variety, better flow, and more precise word choices. Often times, you may have three or four drafts before you are finally satisfied with a final draft. For easier revision, follow the following tips:

- Take time between the first draft and the later revisions to approach it more objectively.
- Revise on hard copy rather than on the computer screen. Do not delete any drafts! Do label each successive one. Allow yourself and others to annotate (comment on and give suggestions to improve) your draft.
- Read the draft aloud. Better yet, have someone else read it aloud.
- Take advantage of opportunities to get feedback; however, do not become overwhelmed by feedback.
- Do not allow ego to get in the way of a successful paper.
- Revise in stages:
  - Revise for overall meaning and structure. Does the essay develop a central point clearly and logically and are the purpose, tone, and point-of-view suited for the audience of the essay?
  - Revise for paragraph development. Check that your paragraphs are logically ordered, unified, and specific.
  - Revise sentence structure. Make your sentences consistent with your overall tone, varied in type and length, emphatic, and economical.
- Finally, revise for word choices. Aim for an appropriate level of diction, word choices that do not overstate or understate, specific rather than general terms, strong verbs, only necessary modifiers, and original and nonsexist language.
- When you get your essays back, read the essay and heed your instructor's comments. They can help improve your future essays. If you do not understand your grade or the instructor's comments, schedule a conference to discuss them with her. As you revise your future essays, revisit the mistakes made before and be sure you avoid repeating them.

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5.6.1.3: General Editing Points to Consider

Learning Objectives

- List six specific elements of every document to check for revision

When revising your document, it can be helpful to focus on specific points. When you consider each point in turn, you will be able to break down the revision process into manageable steps. When you have examined each point, you can be confident that you have avoided many possible areas for errors. Specific revision requires attention to the following:

- Format
- Facts
- Names
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Grammar

Let's examine these characteristics one by one.

Format

Format is an important part of the revision process. Format involves the design expectations of author and audience. If a letter format normally designates a date at the top, or the sender's address on the left side of the page before the salutation, the information should be in the correct location. Formatting that is messy or fails to conform to the company style will reflect poorly on you before the reader even starts to read it. By presenting a document that is properly formatted according to the expectations of your organization and your readers, you will start off making a good impression.

Facts

Another key part of the revision process is checking your facts. Did you know that news organizations and magazines employ professional fact-checkers? These workers are responsible for examining every article before it gets published and consulting original sources to make sure the information in the article is accurate. This can involve making phone calls to the people who were interviewed for the article—for example, "Mr. Diaz, our report states that you are thirty-nine years old. Our article will be published on the fifteenth. Will that be your correct age on that date?" Fact checking also involves looking facts up in encyclopedias, directories, atlases, and other standard reference works; and, increasingly, in online sources.

While you can't be expected to have the skills of a professional fact-checker, you do need to reread your writing with a critical eye to the information in it. Inaccurate content can expose you and your organization to liability, and will create far more work than a simple revision of a document. So, when you revise a document, ask yourself the following:

- Does my writing contain any statistics or references that need to be verified?
- Where can I get reliable information to verify it?

It is often useful to do independent verification—that is, look up the fact in a different source from the one where you first got it. For example, perhaps a colleague gave you a list of closing averages for the Dow Jones Industrial on certain dates. You still have the list, so you can make sure your document agrees with the numbers your colleague provided. But what if your colleague made a mistake? The Web sites of the *Wall Street Journal* and other major newspapers list closings for "the Dow," so it is reasonably easy for you to look up the numbers and verify them independently.

Names

There is no more embarrassing error in business writing than to misspell someone's name. To the writer, and to some readers,

spelling a name “Michelle” instead of “Michele” may seem like a minor matter, but to Michele herself it will make a big difference. Attribution is one way we often involve a person’s name, and giving credit where credit is due is essential. There are many other reasons for including someone’s name, but regardless of your reasons for choosing to focus on them, you need to make sure the spelling is correct. Incorrect spelling of names is a quick way to undermine your credibility; it can also have a negative impact on your organization’s reputation, and in some cases it may even have legal ramifications.

Spelling

Correct spelling is another element essential for your credibility, and errors will be glaringly obvious to many readers. The negative impact on your reputation as a writer, and its perception that you lack attention to detail or do not value your work, will be hard to overcome. In addition to the negative personal consequences, spelling errors can become factual errors and destroy the value of content. This may lead you to click the “spell check” button in your word processing program, but computer spell-checking is not enough. Spell checkers have improved in the years since they were first invented, but they are not infallible. They can and do make mistakes.

Typically, your incorrect word may in fact be a word, and therefore, according to the program, correct. For example, suppose you wrote, “The major will attend the meeting” when you meant to write “The mayor will attend the meeting.” The program would miss this error because “major” is a word, but your meaning would be twisted beyond recognition.

Punctuation

Punctuation marks are the traffic signals, signs, and indications that allow us to navigate the written word. They serve to warn us in advance when a transition is coming or the complete thought has come to an end. A period indicates the thought is complete, while a comma signals that additional elements or modifiers are coming. Correct signals will help your reader follow the thoughts through sentences and paragraphs, and enable you to communicate with maximum efficiency while reducing the probability of error (Strunk & White, 1979).

Table 12.1 “Punctuation Marks” lists twelve punctuation marks that are commonly used in English in alphabetical order along with an example of each.

Table 12.1 - Punctuation Marks

Symbol		Example
Apostrophe	’	Michele’s report is due tomorrow.
Colon	:	This is what I think: you need to revise your paper.
Comma	,	The report advised us when to sell, what to sell, and where to find buyers.
Dash	—	This is more difficult than it seems—buyers are scarce when credit is tight.
Ellipsis	…	Lincoln spoke of “a new nation…dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”
Exclamation Point	!	How exciting!
Hyphen	-	The question is a many-faceted one.
Parentheses	( )	To answer it (or at least to begin addressing it) we will need more information.
Period	.	The answer is no. Period. Full stop.
Question Mark	?	Can I talk you into changing your mind?
Quotation Marks	“ ”	The manager told him, “I will make sure Renée is available to help you.”
Semicolon	;	Theresa was late to the meeting; her computer had frozen and she was stuck at her desk until a tech rep came to fix it.

It may be daunting to realize that the number of possible punctuation errors is as extensive as the number of symbols and constructions available to the author. Software program may catch many punctuation errors, but again it is the committed

writer that makes the difference. Here we will provide details on how to avoid mistakes with three of the most commonly used punctuation marks: the comma, the semicolon, and the apostrophe.

Commas

The comma is probably the most versatile of all punctuation marks. This means you as a writer can use your judgment in many cases as to whether you need a comma or not. It also means that the possible errors involving commas are many. Commas are necessary some of the time, but careless writers often place a comma in a sentence where it is simply not needed.

Commas are used to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction like “but,” “and,” and “or.”

Example 5.6.1.3.1:

The advertising department is effective, but don’t expect miracles in this business climate.

Commas are not used simply to join two independent clauses. This is known as the comma splice error, and the way to correct it is to insert a conjunction after the comma.

Example 5.6.1.3.2:

The advertising department is effective, the sales department needs to produce more results.

The advertising department is effective, *but* the sales department needs to produce more results.

Commas are used for introductory phrases and to offset clauses that are not essential to the sentence. If the meaning would remain intact without the phrase, it is considered nonessential.

Example 5.6.1.3.3:

After the summary of this year’s sales, the sales department had good reason to celebrate.

The sales department, *last year’s winner of the most productive award*, celebrated their stellar sales success this year.

The sales department celebrated their stellar sales success this year.

Commas are used to offset words that help create unity across a sentence like “however” and “therefore.”

Example 5.6.1.3.4:

The sales department discovered, *however*, that the forecast for next year is challenging.

However, the sales department discovered that the forecast for next year is challenging.

Commas are often used to separate more than one adjective modifying a noun.

Example 5.6.1.3.5:

The sales department discovered the *troublesome, challenging* forecast for next year.

Commas are used to separate addresses, dates, and titles; they are also used in dialogue sequences.

Example 5.6.1.3.6:

John is from Ancud, Chile.

Katy was born on August 2, 2002.

Mackenzie McLean, D. V., is an excellent veterinarian.

Lisa said, “When writing, omit needless words.”

Semicolons

Semicolons have two uses. First, they indicate relationships among groups of items in a series when the individual items are separated by commas. Second, a semicolon can be used to join two independent clauses; this is another way of avoiding the comma splice error mentioned above. Using a semicolon this way is often effective if the meaning of the two independent clauses is linked in some way, such as a cause-effect relationship.

Example 5.6.1.3.7:

Merchandise on order includes women’s wear such as sweaters, skirts, and blouses; men’s wear such as shirts, jackets, and slacks; and outwear such as coats, parkas, and hats.

The sales campaign was successful; without its contributions our bottom line would have been dismal indeed.

Apostrophes

The apostrophe, like the semicolon, has two uses: it replaces letters omitted in a contraction, and it often indicates the possessive.

Because contractions are associated with an informal style, they may not be appropriate for some professional writing. The business writer will—as always—evaluate the expectations and audience of the given assignment.

Example 5.6.1.3.8:

It’s great news that sales were up. *It is* also good news that *we’ve* managed to reduce our advertising costs.

When you indicate possession, pay attention to the placement of the apostrophe. Nouns commonly receive “’s” when they are made possessive. But plurals that end in “s” receive a hanging apostrophe when they are made possessive, and the word “it” forms the possessive (“its”) with no apostrophe at all.

Example 5.6.1.3.9:

Mackenzie’s sheep are ready to be sheared.

The parents’ meeting is scheduled for Thursday.

We are willing to adopt a dog that has already had its shots.

Grammar

Learning to use good, correct standard English grammar is more of a practice than an event, or even a process. Grammar involves

the written construction of meaning from words and involves customs that evolve and adapt to usage over time. Because grammar is always evolving, none of us can sit back and rest assured that we "know" how to write with proper grammar. Instead, it is important to write and revise with close attention to grammar, keeping in mind that grammatical errors can undermine your credibility, reflect poorly on your employer, and cause misunderstandings.

Jean Wyrick has provided a list of common errors in grammar to watch out for, which we have adapted here for easy reference (Wyrick, 2008). In each case, the error is in *italics* and the *[correct form]* is italicized within square bracket.

Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb should agree on the number under consideration. In faulty writing, a singular subject is sometimes mismatched with a plural verb form, or vice versa.

Example 5.6.1.3.10:

Sales have not been consistent and they *doesn't [do not]* reflect your hard work and effort.

The president appreciates your hard work and *wish [wishes]* to thank you.

Verb Tense

Verb tense refers to the point in time where action occurs. The most common tenses are past, present, and future. There is nothing wrong with mixing tenses in a sentence if the action is intended to take place at different times. In faulty or careless writing, however, they are often mismatched illogically.

Example 5.6.1.3.11:

Sharon was under pressure to finish the report, so she *uses [used]* a shortcut to paste in the sales figures.

The sales department holds a status meeting every week, and last week's meeting *will be [was]* at the Garden Inn.

Split Infinitive

The infinitive form of verb is one without a reference to time, and in its standard form it includes the auxiliary word "to," as in "to write is to revise." It has been customary to keep the "to" next to the verb; to place an adverb between them is known as splitting the infinitive. Some modern writers do this all the time (for example, "to boldly go…"), and since all grammar is essentially a set of customs that govern the written word, you will need to understand what the custom is where you work. If you are working with colleagues trained across the last fifty years, they may find split infinitives annoying. For this reason, it's often best to avoid splitting an infinitive wherever you can do so without distorting the meaning of the sentence.

Example 5.6.1.3.12:

The Marketing Department needs assistance *to accurately understand our readers [to understand our readers accurately]*.

David pondered *how to best revise [how best to revise]* the sentence.

Double Negative

A double negative uses two negatives to communicate a single idea, duplicating the negation. In some languages, such as Spanish, when the main action in the sentence is negative, it is correct to express the other elements in the sentence negatively as well. However, in English, this is incorrect. In addition to sounding wrong (you can often hear the error if you read the sentence

out loud), a double negative in English causes an error in logic, because two negatives cancel each other out and yield a positive. In fact, the wording of ballot measures is often criticized for confusing voters with double negatives.

Example 5.6.1.3.13:

John *doesn't need no [any]* assistance with his sales presentation. [Or *John needs no assistance with his sales presentation*.]

Jeri *could not find no [any]* reason to approve the request. [Or *Jeri could find no reason to approve the request*.]

Irregular Verbs

Most verbs represent the past with the addition of the suffix "ed," as in "ask" becomes "asked." Irregular verbs change a vowel or convert to another word when representing the past tense. Consider the irregular verb "to go"; the past tense is "went," not "goed."

Example 5.6.1.3.14:

The need *arised [arose]* to seek additional funding.

Katy *leaped [leapt]* onto the stage to introduce the presentation.

Commas in a Series

A comma is used to separate the items in a series, but in some writing styles the comma is omitted between the final two items of the series, where the conjunction joins the last and next-to-last items. The comma in this position is known as the "serial comma." The serial comma is typically required in academic writing and typically omitted in journalism. Other writers omit the serial comma if the final two items in the series have a closer logical connection than the other items. In business writing, you may use it or omit it according to the prevailing style in your organization or industry. Know your audience and be aware of the rule.

Example 5.6.1.3.15:

Lisa is an amazing wife, mother, teacher, *gardener, and editor*.

Lisa is an amazing wife, mother teacher, *gardener and editor*.

Lisa is an amazing teacher, editor, gardener, *wife and mother*.

Faulty Comparisons

When comparing two objects by degree, there should be no mention of "est," as in "biggest" as all you can really say is that one is bigger than the other. If you are comparing three or more objects, then "est" will accurately communicate which is the "biggest" of them all.

Example 5.6.1.3.16:

Between the twins, Mackenzie is the *fastest [faster]* of the two.

Among our three children, Mackenzie is the *tallest*.

Dangling Modifiers

Modifiers describe a subject in a sentence or indicate how or when the subject carried out the action. If the subject is omitted, the modifier intended for the subject is left dangling or hanging out on its own without a clear relationship to the sentence. Who is doing the seeing in the first sentence?

Example 5.6.1.3.17:

Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, celebrations were in order.

Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, *we decided* that celebrations were in order.

Misplaced Modifiers

Modifiers that are misplaced are not lost, they are simply in the wrong place. Their unfortunate location is often far from the word or words they describe, making it easy for readers to misinterpret the sentence.

Example 5.6.1.3.18:

Trying to avoid the deer, *the tree hit my car*.

My car hit the tree when I tried to avoid a deer in the road.

key takeaway

By revising for format, facts, names, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, you can increase your chances of correcting many common errors in your writing.

Exercise 5.6.1.3.1

1. Select a news article from a news Web site, newspaper, or magazine. Find as many facts in the article as you can that could require fact-checking. Then check as many of these facts as you can, using sources available to you in the library and on the Internet. Did you find any errors in the article? Discuss your findings with your classmates.

2. Find an example of an assertion without attribution and share it with classmates.

3. Find an example of an error in a published document and share it with classmates.

4. Interview a coworker or colleague and specifically ask them to share a story where an error got past them during the revision process and made it to print or publication. How did they handle it? How much time did it take to correct? What did they learn from the experience? Compare your results with classmates.

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5.6.1.4: Editing for clarity and conciseness

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.

II. 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.

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6: TYPES OF ESSAYS

6.1: Narration

6.1.1: Narration

6.1.2: Section Introduction- Telling a Story

6.1.3: Techniques

6.1.4: Tips on Writing the Narrative

6.1.5: Activities

6.1.6: Model Texts by Student Authors

6.1.7: Section Introduction- Reflecting on an Experience

6.1.8: Techniques

6.1.9: Sample Student Essay

6.2: The Causal Analysis Essay

6.2.1: Why Write a Causal Analysis or Cause/Effect Essay?

6.2.2: Cause and Effect

6.2.3: Organizing the Causal Analysis Essay

6.2.4: Tips for Writing the Causal Analysis

6.2.5: Sample Student Essays

6.3: Persuasion

6.3.1: Why Write an Argument Essay?

6.3.2: Elements of Rhetorical Appeals in persuasion

6.3.3: The Basics of Argument

6.3.4: The Fallacies of Argument

6.3.5: Persuasive Writing Tips

6.3.6: How to Write an Argument Essay

6.3.7: Incorporating Facts, Opinions, and Visuals to Persuade

6.3.8: Sample Professional Essays

6.3.9: Sample Student Essays

6.3.10: Model Texts by Student Authors

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6.1: 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."

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6.1.1: Narration

The Purpose of Narrative Writing

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time a person tells a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident, the individual engages in a form of narration. A narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is made up, or imagined; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as desired.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on the 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 the writers' intentions are not to describe real-life events. 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 for writers to understand their purpose from the beginning. Is it important that writers recount history, either their own or someone else's? Or does their interest lie in reshaping the world in their own image—depending on how writers would like to see it or how they imagine it could be? Our answers will go a long way in shaping the stories people tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. Authors want the audience to be moved by their stories—through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly they tell their stories, the more emotionally engaged the audience is likely to be.

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 events are typically organized by time. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story.

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 can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, authors begin by deciding whether to write a factual or fictional story. Next, they engage in prewriting strategies such as freewriting about topics that are of general interest to them.

Once authors have a general idea of their writing, they sketch out the major events of the story in order to develop the plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically, and will climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as authors describe the events and characters in their narrative. They want the readers to emotionally engage with the world that they create.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook the reader into wanting to read more. The writer should try opening the essay with an event that is interesting, to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, the conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon readers the ultimate thesis of the piece. The ending of the story for the main character may be positive or negative. Writers include vivid details in their stories using the five senses so the reader will be able to experience the story.

Code-Switching

Writers use language in a variety of ways. They may use dialogue to convey details that accurately represent the characters and setting of their local story. Or, they may remember the voices of family members. How are they different from other voices? In Hawai'i, there are many languages, including Hawai'i Creole English (Pidgin). Pidgin varies depending on place and time. The spelling of Pidgin words is up to the writer, and it's based on how the words sound. "What" could be spelled "wat" or "wot." Writers may switch between languages (e.g., Pidgin and English) depending on circumstances. This is called code-switching. Accurate representation of dialogue increases the authenticity of a story.

Activities

Most stories have a main character who wants to achieve a goal (e.g., surviving a wipe out while surfing, winning a championship, passing a course, graduating high school). There are obstacles that a main character encounters while trying to achieve a goal (e.g., strong waves, a highly skilled opponent, procrastination, self-doubt). Then the story shows the main character's response to obstacles and whether or not the goal is achieved. If your topic is autobiographical, think of a memory that you don't mind sharing with the class. Regardless if the story is autobiographical or fictional, plan the characters and plot. As you write your short story, the story may turn out differently than you expected, and that's fine. This is a starting point.

1. Character Exercise for Your Narrative Essay
    1. How many characters will you have in your story?
    2. Who are these characters? Describe each of the characters. For each character, list information on their backstory, their qualities, their goals/desires. How will these characters interact with one another?
    3. Will you use first person ("I") or third person ("He/She") to tell this story?
    4. Whose point of view will you tell the story from? Through which character's eyes will the reader experience the story from?
2. Plot Exercise for Your Narrative

        A. Introduction and Rising Action

        1. Who is the main character (protagonist) of this story?

        2. What is the main character's goal/desire?

        3. Who/what is the obstacle your main character experiences when trying to achieve a goal/desire?

        4. What does the main character do when encountering this obstacle?

        B. Climax

        1. Is the main character successful or unsuccessful in achieving his/her goal/desire?

        C. Falling Action

        1. What happens after the climax?

        D. Resolution

        1. What happens at the end of the story? Is this a happy ending? What is the lesson learned?

        E. Setting

        1. Where does the story take place?

Sources

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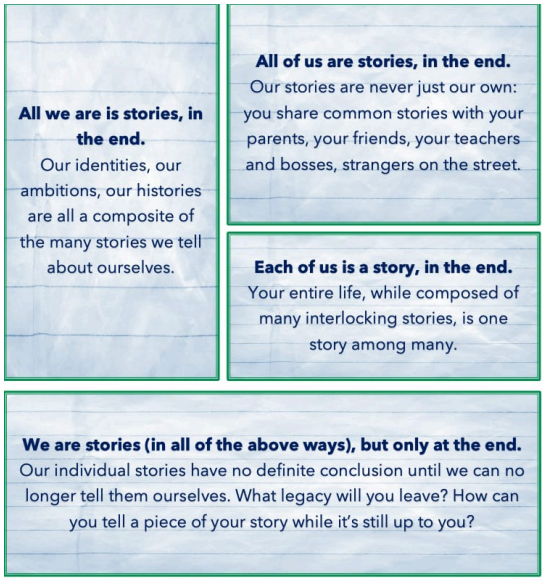
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6.1.2: Section Introduction- Telling a Story

Section Introduction- Telling a Story

"We're all stories, in the end." – Steven Moffat, Doctor Who[27] Whether or not you've seen a single episode of Doctor Who, you can appreciate this quote. I love it for its ambiguities.[28] As I can tell, we can interpret it in at least four ways:



But perhaps that's enough abstraction: **narration** is a rhetorical mode that you likely engage on a daily basis, and one that has held significance in every culture in human history. Even when we're not deliberately telling stories, storytelling often underlies our writing and thinking:

- Historians synthesize and interpret events of the past; a history book is one of many narratives of our cultures and civilizations.
- Chemists analyze observable data to determine cause-and-effect behaviors of natural and synthetic materials; a lab report is a sort of narrative about elements (characters) and reactions (plot).
- Musical composers evoke the emotional experience of story through instrumentation, motion, motifs, resolutions, and so on; a song is a narrative that may not even need words.

What makes for an interesting, well-told story *in writing*? In addition to description, your deliberate choices in narration can create impactful, beautiful, and entertaining stories.



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Chapter Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Definition
characterization	the process by which an author builds characters; can be accomplished directly or indirectly.
dialogue	a communication between two or more people. Can include any mode of communication, including speech, texting, e-mail, Facebook post, body language, etc.
dynamic character	a character who noticeably changes within the scope of a narrative, typically as a result of the plot events and/or other characters. Contrast with static character.
epiphany	a character's sudden realization of a personal or universal truth. See dynamic character.
Flat character	a character who is minimally detailed, only briefly sketched or named. Generally less central to the events and relationships portrayed in a narrative. Contrast with round character.
mood	the emotional dimension which a reader experiences while encountering a text. Compare with tone.
multimedia / multigenre	a term describing a text that combines more than one media and/or more than one genre (e.g., an essay with embedded images; a portfolio with essays, poetry, and comic strips; a mixtape with song reviews).
narration	a rhetorical mode involving the construction and relation of stories. Typically integrates description as a technique.
narrative pacing	the speed with which a story progresses through plot events. Can be influenced by reflective and descriptive writing.
narrative scope	the boundaries of a narrative in time, space, perspective, and focus.
narrative sequence	the order of events included in a narrative.
plot	the events included within the scope of a narrative.
point-of-view	the perspective from which a story is told, determining both grammar (pronouns) and perspective (speaker's awareness of events, thoughts, and circumstances).
round character	a character who is thoroughly characterized and dimensional, detailed with attentive description of their traits and behaviors. Contrast with flat character.
static character	a character who remains the same throughout the narrative. Contrast with dynamic character.
tone	the emotional register of the text. Compare with mood.

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6.1.3: Techniques

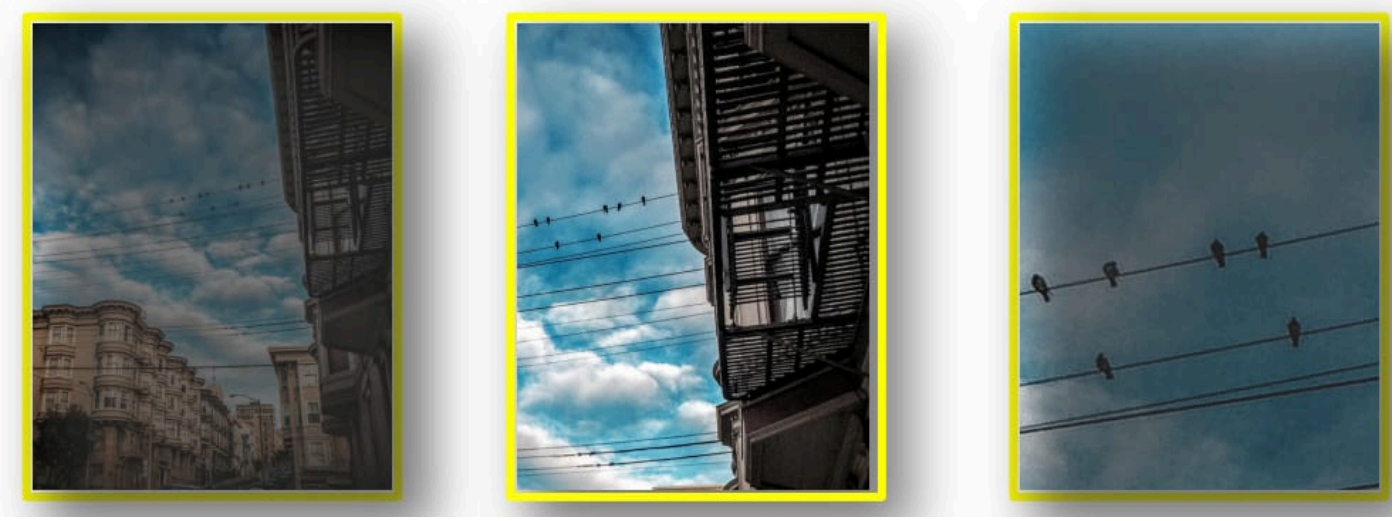
Techniques

Plot Shapes and Form

Plot is one of the basic elements of every story: put simply, plot refers to the actual events that take place within the bounds of your narrative. Using our rhetorical situation vocabulary, we can identify "plot" as the primary **subject** of a descriptive personal narrative. Three related elements to consider are **scope**, **sequence**, and **pacing**.

Scope

The term **scope** refers to the boundaries of your plot. Where and when does it begin and end? What is its focus? What background information and details does your story require? I often think about narrative scope as the edges of a photograph: a photo, whether of a vast landscape or a microscopic organism, has boundaries. Those boundaries inform the viewer's perception. In this example, the scope of the left photo allows for a story about a neighborhood in San Francisco. In the middle, it is a story about the fire escape, the clouds. On the right, the scope of the story directs our attention to the birds. In this way, narrative scope impacts the content you include **and** your reader's perception of that content in context.



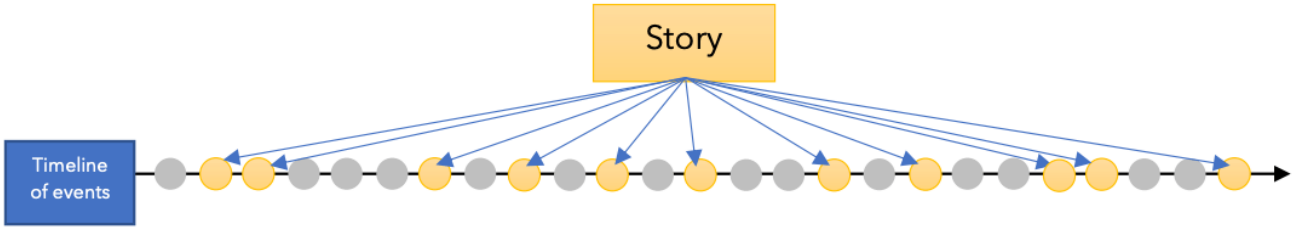
"SF Neighborhood" by SBT4NOW is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

The way we determine scope varies based on rhetorical situation, but I can say generally that many developing writers struggle with a scope that is too broad: writers often find it challenging to zero in on the events that drive a story and prune out extraneous information.

Consider, as an example, how you might respond if your friend asked what you did last weekend. If you began with, "I woke up on Saturday morning, rolled over, checked my phone, fell back asleep, woke up, pulled my feet out from under the covers, put my feet on the floor, stood up, stretched..." then your friend might have stopped listening by the time you get to the really good stuff. Your scope is too broad, so you're including details that distract or bore your reader. Instead of listing every detail in order like this:



... you should consider narrowing your scope, focusing instead on the important, interesting, and unique plot points (events) like this:



You might think of this as the difference between a series of snapshots and a roll of film: instead of twenty-four frames per second video, your entire story might only be a few photographs aligned together.

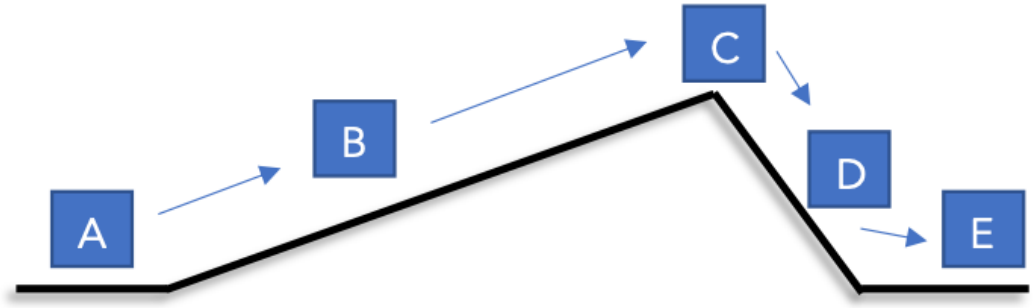
It may seem counterintuitive, but we can often say more by digging deep into a few ideas or events, instead of trying to relate every idea or event.

The most impactful stories are often those that represent something, so your scope should focus on the details that fit into the bigger picture. To return to the previous example, you could tell me more about your weekend by sharing a specific detail than every detail. "Brushing my teeth Saturday morning, I didn't realize that I would probably have a scar from wrestling that bear on Sunday" reveals more than "I woke up on Saturday morning, rolled over, checked my phone, fell back asleep, woke up, pulled my feet out from under the covers, put my feet on the floor, stood up, stretched...." Not only have you foregrounded the more interesting event, but you have also foreshadowed that you had a harrowing, adventurous, and unexpected weekend.

Sequence and Pacing

The **sequence** and **pacing** of your plot—the order of the events and the amount of time you give to each event, respectively—will determine your reader's experience. There are an infinite number of ways you might structure your story, and the shape of your story is worth deep consideration. Although the traditional forms for narrative sequence are not your only options, let's take a look at a few tried-and-true shapes your plot might take.

You might recognize Freytag's Pyramid[29] from other classes you've taken:



A. **Exposition**: Here, you're setting the scene, introducing characters, and preparing the reader for the journey.

B. **Rising action**: In this part, things start to happen. You (or your characters) encounter conflict, set out on a journey, meet people, etc.

C. **Climax**: This is the peak of the action, the main showdown, the central event toward which your story has been building.

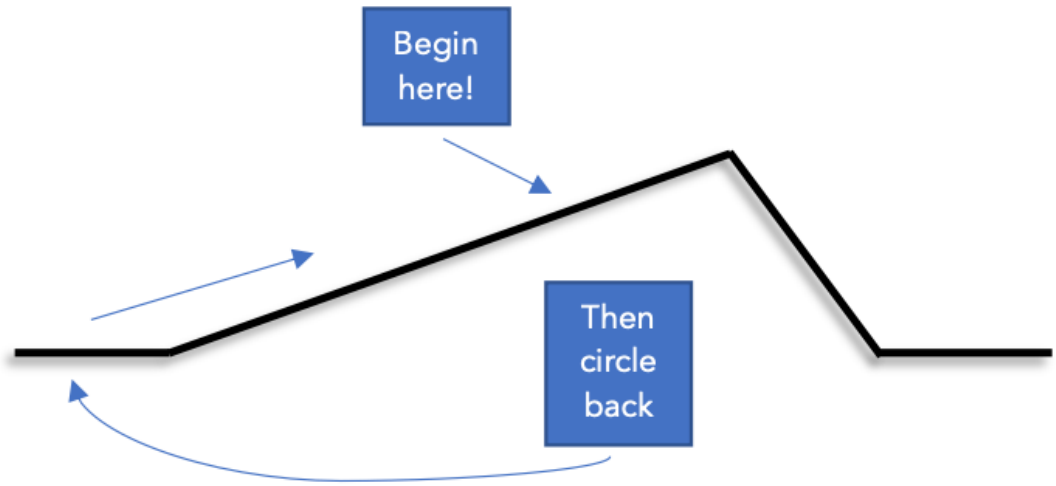
D. **Falling action**: Now things start to wind down. You (or your characters) come away from the climactic experience changed—at the very least, you are wiser for having had that experience.

E. **Resolution**: Also known as dénouement, this is where all the loose ends get tied up. The central conflict has been resolved, and everything is back to normal, but perhaps a bit different.

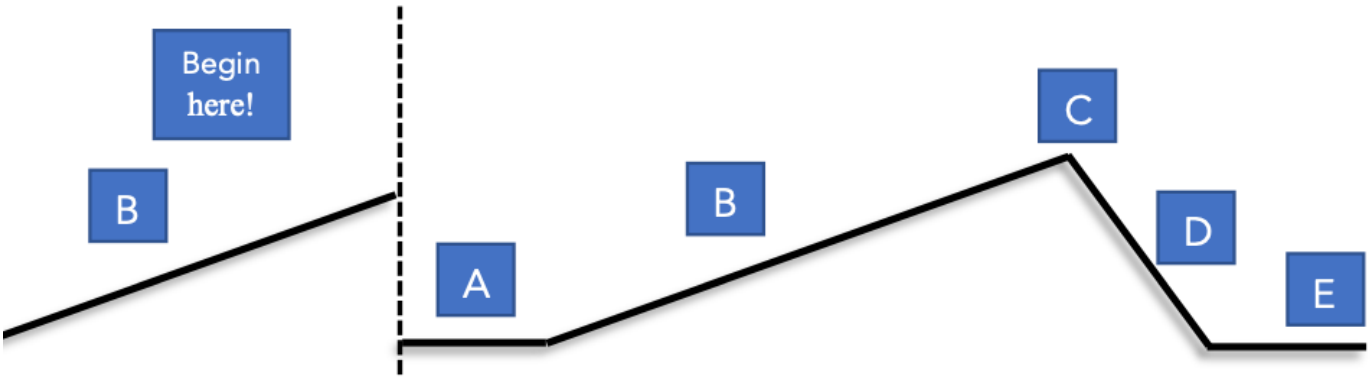
This narrative shape is certainly a familiar one. Many films, TV shows, plays, novels, and short stories follow this track. But it's not without its flaws. You should discuss with your classmates and instructors what shortcomings you see in this classic plot shape. What assumptions does it rely on? How might it limit a storyteller? Sometimes, I tell my students to "Start the story where the story starts"—often, steps A and B in the diagram above just delay the most descriptive, active, or meaningful parts of the story. If nothing else, we should note that it is not necessarily the best way to tell your story, and definitely not the only way.

Another classic technique for narrative sequence is known as in **medias res**—literally, "in the middle of things." As you map out your plot in pre-writing or experiment with during the drafting and revision process, you might find this technique a more active and exciting way to begin a story.

In the earlier example, the plot is chronological, linear, and continuous: the story would move smoothly from beginning to end with no interruptions. *In medias res* instead suggests that you start your story with action rather than exposition, focusing on an exciting, imagistic, or important scene. Then, you can circle back to an earlier part of the story to fill in the blanks for your reader. Using the previously discussed plot shape, you might visualize it like this:



or...



You can experiment with your sequence in a variety of other ways, which might include also making changes to your scope: instead of a continuous story, you might have a series of fragments with specific scope (like photographs instead of video), as is exemplified by “The Pot Calling the Kettle Black....” Instead of chronological order, you might bounce around in time or space, like in “Parental Guidance,” or in reverse, like “21.” Some of my favorite narratives reject traditional narrative sequence.

How will your choices of narrative scope, sequence, and pacing impact your reader's experience?

I include *pacing* with *sequence* because a change to one often influences the other. Put simply, pacing refers to the speed and fluidity with which a reader moves through your story. You can play with pacing by moving more quickly through events, or even by experimenting with sentence and paragraph length. Consider how the "flow" of the following examples differs:

A. The train screeched to a halt. A flock of pigeons took flight as the conductor announced, "We'll be stuck here for a few minutes."

B. Lost in my thoughts, I shuddered as the train ground to a full stop in the middle of an intersection. I was surprised, jarred by the unannounced and abrupt jerking of the car. I sought clues for our stop outside the window. All I saw were pigeons as startled and clueless as I.

I recommend the student essay "Under the Knife," which does excellent work with pacing, in addition to making a strong creative choice with narrative scope.

The position from which your story is told will help shape your reader's experience, the language your narrator and characters use, and even the plot itself. You might recognize this from *Dear White People* Volume 1 or *Arrested Development* Season 4, both Netflix TV series. Typically, each episode in these seasons explores similar plot events, but from a different character's perspective. Because of their unique vantage points, characters can tell different stories about the same realities.



"Different perspective" by Carlos ZGZ is in the Public Domain, CC0

This is, of course, true for our lives more generally. In addition to our differences in knowledge and experiences, we also interpret and understand events differently. In our writing, narrative position is informed by point-of-view and the emotional valences I

refer to here as tone and mood.

point-of-view (POV): the perspective from which a story is told.

- This is a grammatical phenomenon—i.e., it decides pronoun use—but, more importantly, it impacts tone, mood, scope, voice, and plot.[30]

Although point-of-view will influence tone and mood, we can also consider what feelings we want to convey and inspire independently as part of our narrative position.

tone: the emotional register of the story's language.

- What emotional state does the narrator of the story (not the author, but the speaker) seem to be in? What emotions are you trying to imbue in your writing?

mood: the emotional register a reader experiences.[31]

- What emotions do you want your reader to experience? Are they the same feelings you experienced at the time?

A Non-Comprehensive Breakdown of POV

			Examples:
1st person	Narrator uses 1st person pronouns (I/me/mine or us/we/ours)	Can include internal monologue (motives, thoughts, feelings) of the narrator. Limited certainty of motives, thoughts, or feelings of other characters	I tripped on the last stair, preoccupied by what my sister had said, and felt my stomach drop.
2nd person	Narrator uses 2nd person pronouns (you/your)	Speaks to the reader, as if the reader is the protagonist OR uses apostrophe to speak to an absent or unidentified person	Your breath catches as you feel the phantom step. O, staircase, how you keep me awake at night.
3rd person limited	Narrator uses 3rd person pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/they/theirs)	Sometimes called "close" third person. Observes and narrates but sticks near one or two characters, in contrast with 3rd person omniscient.	He was visibly frustrated by his sister's nonchalance and wasn't watching his step.
3rd person omniscient	Narrator uses 3rd person pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/they/theirs)	Observes and narrates from an all-knowing perspective. Can include internal monologue (motives, thoughts, feelings) of all characters.	Beneath the surface, his sister felt regretful. *Why did I tell him that?* she wondered.
stream-of-consciousness	Narrator uses inconsistent pronouns, or no pronouns at all	Approximates the digressive, wandering, and ungrammatical thought processes of the narrator.	But now, a thousand empty◈*where*?◈and she, with head shake, will be fine◈AHH!

Typically, you will tell your story from the first-person point-of-view, but personal narratives can also be told from a different perspective; I recommend "Comatose Dreams" to illustrate this at work. As you're developing and revising your writing, try to inhabit different authorial positions: What would change if you used the third person POV instead of first person? What different meanings would your reader find if you told this story with a different tone—bitter instead of nostalgic, proud rather than embarrassed, sarcastic rather than genuine?

Furthermore, there are many rhetorical situations that call for different POVs. (For instance, you may have noticed that this book uses the second-person very frequently.) So, as you evaluate which POV will be most effective for your current rhetorical situation, bear in mind that the same choice might inform your future writing.

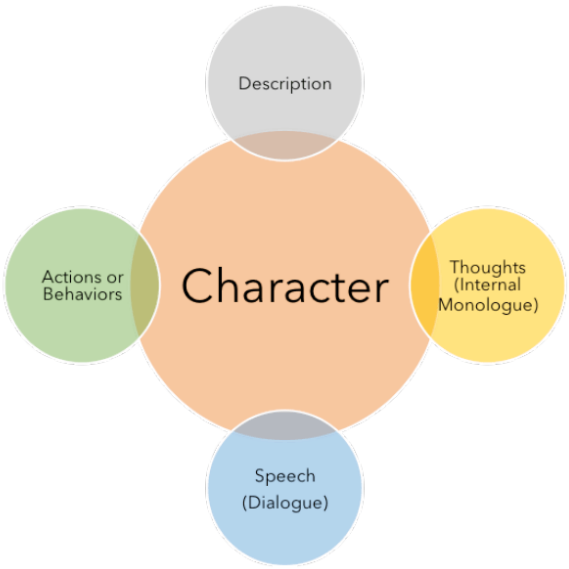
Whether your story is fiction or nonfiction, you should spend some time thinking about **characterization**: the development of characters through actions, descriptions, and dialogue. Your audience will be more engaged with and sympathetic toward your narrative if they can vividly imagine the characters as real people.

Like description, characterization relies on specificity. Consider the following contrast in character descriptions:

A. My mom is great. She is an average-sized brunette with brown eyes. She is very loving and supportive, and I know I can rely on her. She taught me everything I know.

B. In addition to some of my father's idiosyncrasies, however, he is also one of the most kind-hearted and loving people in my life. One of his signature actions is the 'cry-smile,' in which he simultaneously cries and smiles any time he experiences a strong positive emotion (which is almost daily).[32]

How does the "cry-smile" detail enhance the characterization of the speaker's parent?



To break it down to process, characterization can be accomplished in two ways:

a) Directly, through specific description of the character—What kind of clothes do they wear? What do they look, smell, sound like?—or,

b) Indirectly, through the behaviors, speech, and thoughts of the character— What kind of language, dialect, or register do they use? What is the tone, inflection, and timbre of their voice? How does their manner of speaking reflect their attitude toward the listener? How do their actions reflect their traits? What's on their mind that they won't share with the world?

Thinking through these questions will help you get a better understanding of each character (often including yourself!). You do not need to include all the details, but they should inform your description, dialogue, and narration.

Round characters...	are very detailed, requiring attentive description of their traits and behaviors.	Your most important characters should be round: the added detail will help your reader better visualize, understand, and care about them.
Flat characters...	are minimally detailed, only briefly sketched or named.	Less important characters should take up less space and will therefore have less detailed characterization.
Static characters...	remain the same throughout the narrative.	Even though all of us are always changing, some people will behave and appear the same throughout the course of your story. Static characters can serve as a reference point for dynamic characters to show the latter's growth.
Dynamic characters...	noticeably change within the narrative, typically as a result of the events.	Most likely, you will be a dynamic character in your personal narrative because such stories are centered around an impactful experience, relationship, or place. Dynamic characters learn and grow over time, either gradually or with an epiphany.

Dialogue[33]

dialogue: communication between two or more characters.



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Think of the different conversations you've had today, with family, friends, or even classmates. Within each of those conversations, there were likely pre-established relationships that determined how you talked to each other: each is its own rhetorical situation. A dialogue with your friends, for example, may be far different from one with your family. These relationships can influence tone of voice, word choice (such as using slang, jargon, or lingo), what details we share, and even what language we speak.

As we've seen above, good dialogue often demonstrates the traits of a character or the relationship of characters. From reading or listening to how people talk to one another, we often infer the relationships they have. We can tell if they're having an argument or conflict, if one is experiencing some internal conflict or trauma, if they're friendly acquaintances or cold strangers, even how their emotional or professional attributes align or create opposition.

Often, dialogue does more than just one thing, which makes it a challenging tool to master. When dialogue isn't doing more

than one thing, it can feel flat or expositional, like a bad movie or TV show where everyone is saying their feelings or explaining what just happened. For example, there is a difference between “No thanks, I’m not hungry” and “I’ve told you, I’m not hungry.” The latter shows frustration, and hints at a previous conversation. Exposition can have a place in dialogue, but we should use it deliberately, with an awareness of how natural or unnatural it may sound. We should be aware how dialogue impacts the pacing of the narrative. Dialogue can be musical and create tempo, with either quick back and forth, or long drawn out pauses between two characters. Rhythm of a dialogue can also tell us about the characters’ relationship and emotions.

We can put some of these thoughts to the test using the exercises in the Activities section of this chapter to practice writing dialogue.

Narration, as you already know, can occur in a variety of media: TV shows, music, drama, and even Snapchat Stories practice narration in different ways. Your instructor may ask you to write a traditional personal narrative (using only prose), but if you are given the opportunity, you might also consider what other media or genres might inform your narration. Some awesome narratives use a **multimedia** or **multigenre** approach, synthesizing multiple different forms, like audio and video, or nonfiction, poetry, and photography.

In addition to the limitations and opportunities presented by your rhetorical situation, choosing a medium also depends on the opportunities and limitations of different forms. To determine which tool or tools you want to use for your story, you should consider which medium (or combination of media) will help you best accomplish your purpose. Here’s a non-comprehensive list of storytelling tools you might incorporate in place of or in addition to traditional prose:

- Images
- Poetry
- Video
- Audio recording
- “Found” texts (fragments of other authors’ works reframed to tell a different story)
- Illustrations
- Comics, manga, or other graphic storytelling
- Journal entries or series of letters
- Plays, screenplays, or other works of drama
- Blogs and social media postings

Although each of these media is a vehicle for delivering information, it is important to acknowledge that each different medium will have a different impact on the audience; in other words, the medium can change the message itself.

There are a number of digital tools available that you might consider for your storytelling medium, as well.[34]

Video: Storytelling with Robyn Vazquez[35]



Video of Storytelling with Robyn Vazquez is available via PSU Media Space.

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6.1.4: Tips on Writing the Narrative

- Make sure it is on an important event in your life.
- Make sure you pick an event that caused you to learn an important life lesson.
- You should pick an event that caused you to change and grow in some way.
- Although you certainly do not have to write on something negative, most great steps or leaps in learning have resulted from negative events.
- That is not the only good thing that comes from negative events.
- Some of your best writing will come from them too.
- Once you have written your rough draft, you will print it out, read it to look for places to enhance, sharpen, and focus the story. Revise.
- Use the feedback from your peers or tutors to revise again. Make sure you are giving your readers the best "telling" of your story.

Topic Ideas

- An emergency that brought out the best or worst in you
- An incident that made you believe in fate
- Your best or worst day at school or work
- A major decision
- An encounter with a machine
- An important learning experience
- A narrow escape
- Your first date, first day on the job, or first anything
- A memorable childhood experience
- An event that precipitated a change in your opinion on a significant issue
- A painful moment
- A significant family event
- An experience in which a certain emotion (pride, anger, regret, or some other) was dominant
- A surprising coincidence
- An act of heroism
- An unpleasant confrontation
- A cherished family story

Chapter Questions for Comprehension

Answer the following questions based on your reading of the chapter. Be sure to use complete sentences.

1. What are four elements (or characteristics) of the narrative essay?
2. Why is it important to use vivid descriptions?
3. How does active voice make stories more engaging?

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6.1.5: Activities

Idea Generation: What Stories Can I Tell?

You may already have an idea of an important experience in your life about which you could tell a story. Although this might be a significant experience, it is most definitely not the only one worth telling. (Remember: first idea ≠ best idea.)

Just as with description, good narration isn't about shocking content but rather about effective and innovative writing. In order to broaden your options before you begin developing your story, complete the organizer on the following pages.

Then, choose three of the list items from this page that you think are especially unique or have had a serious impact on your life experience. On a separate sheet of paper, free-write about each of your three list items for no less than five minutes per item.

List five places that are significant to you (real, fictional, or imaginary)	List ten people who have influenced your life in some way (positive or negative, acquainted or not, real or fictional)	
1)	1)	1)
8)	12)	16)
9)	13)	17)
10)	14)	18)
11)	15)	2)

List ten ways that you identify yourself (roles, adjectives, or names)		List three obstacles you've overcome to be where you are today
	1)	
1)	23)	1)
19)	24)	
		2)
20)	25)	
21)	26)	3)
22)	2)	

List three difficult moments – tough decisions, traumatic or challenging experiences, or troubling circumstances		
1)	2)	3)

This exercise will help you develop a variety of options for your story, considered especially in the context of your entire life trajectory.

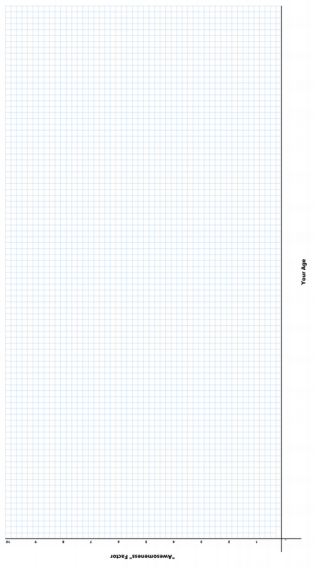
First, brainstorm at least ten moments or experiences that you consider influential— moments that in some way impacted your identity, your friendships, your worldview— for the better or for the worse. Record them in the table below.

Then, rate those experiences on a degree of "awesomeness," "pleasurability," or something else along those lines, on a scale of 0 – 10, with 10 being the hands down best moment of your life and 0 being the worst.

Next, plot those events on the graph paper on the back of this page. Each point is an event; the x-axis is your age, and the y-axis is the factor of positivity. Connect the points with a line.

Finally, circle three of the events/experiences on your graph. On a clean sheet of paper, free-write about each of those three for at least four minutes.[36]

Your age	Event, moment, or experience	Awesomeness Factor (0-10)



Experimenting with Voice and Dialogue[37]

Complete the following three exercises to think through the language your characters use and the relationships they demonstrate through dialogue. If you've started your assignment, you can use these exercises to generate content.

The Secret

1) Choose any two professions for two imaginary characters.

2) Give the two characters a secret that they share with one another. As you might imagine, neither of them would reveal that secret aloud, but they might discuss it. (To really challenge yourself, you might also come up with a reason that their secret must be a secret: Is it socially unacceptable to talk about? Are they liable to get in trouble if people find out? Will they ruin a surprise?)

3) Write an exchange between those characters about the secret using only their words (i.e., no "he said" or "she said," but rather only the language they use). Allow the secret to be revealed to the reader in how the characters speak, what they say, and how they say it. Pay attention to the subtext of what's being said and how it's being said. How would these characters discuss their secret without revealing it to eavesdroppers? (Consider Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" as a model.)

4) Draw a line beneath your dialogue. Now, imagine that only one of the characters has a secret. Write a new dialogue in which one character is trying to keep that secret from the other. Again, consider how the speakers are communicating: what language do they use? What sort of tone? What does that reveal about their relationship?

The Overheard

1) Go to a public space and eavesdrop on a conversation. (Try not to be too creepy—be considerate and respectful of the people.) You don't need to take avid notes, but observe natural inflections, pauses, and gestures. What do these characteristics imply about the relationship between the speakers?

2) Jot down a fragment of striking, interesting, or weird dialogue.

3) Now, use that fragment of dialogue to imagine a digital exchange: consider that fragment as a Facebook status, a text message, or a tweet. Then, write at least ten comments or replies to that fragment.

4) Reflect on the imaginary digital conversation you just created. What led you to make the choices you made? How does digital dialogue differ from real-life dialogue?

Beyond Words

As you may have noticed in the previous exercises, dialogue is about more than just what the words say: our verbal communication is supplemented by inflection, tone, body language, and pace, among other things. With a partner, exchange the following lines. Without changing the words, try to change the meaning using your tone, inflection, body language, etc.

A	B
"I don't want to talk about it."	"Leave me alone."
"Can we talk about it?"	"What do you want from me?"
"I want it."	"You can't have it."
"Have you seen her today?"	"Why?"

After each round, debrief with your partner; jot down a few notes together to describe how your variations changed the meaning of each word. Then, consider how you might capture and relay these different deliveries using written language— what some writers call "dialogue tags." Dialogue tags try to reproduce the nuance of our spoken and unspoken languages (e.g., "he muttered," "she shouted in frustration," "they insinuated, crossing their arms").



"Body Language" by Paolo Fefe' is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0

Using Images to Tell a Story

Even though this textbook focuses on writing as a means to tell stories, you can also construct thoughtful and unique narratives using solely images, or using images to supplement your writing. A single photograph can tell a story, but a series will create a more cohesive narrative. To experiment with this medium, try the following activity.

1) Using your cell phone or a digital camera, take at least one photograph (of yourself, events, and/or your surroundings) each hour for one day.

2) Compile the photos and arrange them in chronological order. Choose any five photos that tell a story about part or all of your day.

- How did you determine which photos to remove? What does this suggest about your narrative scope?
- Where might you want to add photos or text? Why?

To consider models of this kind of narrative, check out Al Jazeera's "In Pictures" series. In 2014, a friend of mine recorded a one-second video every day for a year, creating a similar kind of narrative.

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6.1.6: Model Texts by Student Authors

Model Texts by Student Authors

Under the Knife[38]

The white fluorescent lights mirrored off the waxed and buffed vinyl flooring. Doctors and nurses beelined through small congregations of others conversing. Clocks were posted at every corner of every wall and the sum of the quiet ticking grew to an audible drone. From the vinyl floors to the desks where decade old Dell computers sat, a sickly gray sucked all the life from the room. The only source of color was the rainbow circle crocheted blanket that came customary for minors about to undergo surgery. It was supposed to be a token of warmth and happiness, a blanket you could find life in; however, all I found in the blanket was an unwanted pity.

Three months ago doctors diagnosed me with severe scoliosis. They told me I would need to pursue orthopedic surgery to realign my spine. For years I endured through back pain and discomfort, never attributing it to the disease. In part, I felt as if it was my fault, that me letting the symptoms go unattended for so long led it to become so extreme. Those months between the diagnosis and the surgery felt like mere seconds. Every day I would recite to myself that everything would be okay and that I had nothing to worry about. However, then minutes away from sedation, I felt like this bed I was in—only three feet off the ground—would put me six feet under.

The doctors informed me beforehand of the potential complications that could arise from surgery. Partial paralysis, infection, death, these words echoed throughout the chasms of my mind. Anxiety overwhelmed me; I was a dying animal surrounded by ravenous vultures, drool dripping awaiting their next meal. My palms were a disgusting swamp of sweat that gripped hard onto the white sheets that covered me. A feeling of numbness lurked into my extremities and slowly infected its way throughout my body

The vinyl mattress cover I was on felt like a porcelain toilet seat during a cold winter morning. It did not help my discomfort that I had nothing on but a sea blue gown that covered only the front and ankle high socks that seemed like bathroom scrubbers. A heart rate monitor clamp was tightly affixed onto my index finger that had already lost circulation minutes ago. The monitor was the snitch giving away my growing anxiety; my heart rate began to increase as I awaited surgery. Attached to the bed frame was a remote that could adjust almost every aspect of the bed. I kept the bed at an almost right angle: I wanted to be aware of my surroundings.

My orthopediatrician and surgeon, Dr. Halsey, paced in from the hallway and gave away a forced smile to ease me into comfort. The doctor shot out his hand and I hesitantly stuck out mine for the handshake. I've always hated handshakes; my hands are incredibly sweaty and I did not want to disgust him with my soggy tofu hands. He asked me how my day was so far, and I responded with a concise "Alright." Truth was, my day so far was pretty lackluster and tiring. I had woken up before the birds had even begun to chirp, I ate nothing for breakfast, and I was terrified out of my mind. This Orthopedic Surgeon, this man, this human, was fully in charge of the surgery. Dr. Halsey and other surgeons deal with one of the most delicate and fragile things in the world—people's lives. The amount of pressure and nerves he must face on an everyday basis is incredible. His calm and reserved nature made me believe that he was confident in himself, and that put me more at ease.

An overweight nurse wheeled in an IV with a bag of solution hooked to the side. "Which arm do you prefer for your IV?" she inquired.

Needles used to terrify me. They were tiny bullets that pierced through your skin like mosquitos looking for dinner, but by now I had grown accustomed to them. Like getting stung by a bee for the first time, my first time getting blood taken was a grueling adventure. "Left, I guess," I let out with a long anxiety-filled sigh.

The rubber band was thick and dark blue, the same color as the latex gloves she wore. I could feel my arm pulse in excitement as they tightly wrapped the rubber band right above my elbow.

"Oh, wow! Look at that vein pop right out!" The nurse exclaimed as she inspected the bulging vein.

I tried to distract myself from the nurse so I wouldn't hesitate as the IV was going in. I stared intently at the speckled ceiling tiles.

They were the same ones used in schools. As my eyes began to relax, the dots on the ceiling started to transform into different shapes and animals. There was a squirrel, a seal, and a do—I felt pain shock through my body as the IV needle had infiltrated into my arm.

Dr. Halsey had one arm planted to the bottom end of the bed frame and the other holding the clipboard that was attached to the frame. “We’re going to pump two solutions through you. The first will be the saline, and the second will be the sedation and anesthesia.” The nurse leaned over and punched in buttons connected to the IV. After a loud beep, I felt a cooling sensation run down my arm. I felt like a criminal, prosecuted for murder, and now was one chemical away from finishing the cocktail execution. My eyes darted across the room; I was searching for hope I could cling to.

My mother was sitting on a chair on the other side of the room, eyes slowly and silently sweating. She clutched my father’s giant calloused hands as he browsed the internet on his phone. While I would say that I am more similar to my mother than my father, I think we both dealt with our anxiety in similar ways. Just like my father, I too needed a visual distraction to avoid my anxiety. “I love you,” my mother called out.

All I did was a slight nod in affirmation. I was too fully engulfed by my own thoughts to even try and let out a single syllable. What is my purpose in life? Have I been successful in making others proud? Questions like these crept up in my mind like an unwanted visitor.

“Here comes the next solution,” Dr. Halsey announced while pointing his pen at the IV bags. “10...,” he began his countdown.

I needed answers to the questions that had invaded my mind. So far in life, I haven’t done anything praiseworthy or even noteworthy. I am the bottom of the barrel, a dime a dozen, someone who will probably never influence the future to come. However, in those final seconds, I realized that I did not really care.

“7...,” Dr. Halsey continued the countdown.

I’ve enjoyed my life. I’ve had my fun and shared many experiences with my closest friends. If I’m not remembered in a few years after I die, then so be it. I’m proud of my small accomplishments so far.

“4...” Although I am not the most decorated of students, I can say that at least I tried my hardest. All that really mattered was that I was happy. I had hit tranquility; my mind had halted. I was out even before Dr. Halsey finished the countdown. I was at ease.

Teacher Takeaways

“I like how the scope of the narrative is specifically limited to the hours leading up to the surgery. That shifts the focus on the author’s anticipation and anxiety, rather than the surgery itself. This essay also successfully employs slow, deliberate pacing in each section, reflecting that sense of anticipation and anxiety. However, at some points this slow pacing results in minute descriptions of details that don’t clearly advance the narrative, making the essay feel bloated at times and diminishing the effectiveness of those sections where the pacing is more appropriate.”

– Professor Dunham

Breathing Easy[39]

Most people’s midlife crises happen when they’re well into adulthood; mine happened when I was twelve. For most of my childhood and into my early teen years, I was actively involved in community theater. In the fall of 2010, I was in the throes of puberty as well as in the middle of rehearsals for a production of *Pinocchio*, in which I played the glamorous and highly coveted role of an unnamed puppet. On this particular day, however, I was not onstage rehearsing with all the other unnamed puppets

as I should've been; instead, I was locked backstage in a single-stall bathroom, dressed in my harlequin costume and crying my eyes out on the freezing tile floor, the gaudy red and black makeup dripping down my face until I looked like the villain from a low-budget horror movie.

The timing of this breakdown was not ideal. I don't remember exactly what happened in the middle of rehearsal that triggered this moment of hysteria, but I know it had been building for a long time, and for whatever reason, that was the day the dam finally broke. At the time, I had pinpointed the start of my crisis to a moment several months earlier when I started questioning my sexuality. Looking back now, though, I can see that this aspect of my identity had been there since childhood, when as a seven-year-old I couldn't decide if I would rather marry Aladdin or Princess Jasmine.

Up until the age of 16, I lived in Amarillo, Texas, a flat, brown city in the middle of a huge red state. Even though my parents had never been blatantly homophobic in front of me, I grew up in a conservative religious community that was fiercely cisheteronormative. My eighth-grade health teacher kicked off our unit on sex education with a contemptuous, "We aren't going to bother learning about safe sex for homosexuals. We're only going to talk about normal relationships." Another time, when I told a friend about a secret I had (unrelated to my sexuality), she responded with, "That's not too bad. At least you're not gay," her lips curling in disdain as if simply saying the sinful word aloud left a bad taste in her mouth.

I laid in a crumpled mess on that bathroom floor, crying until my head throbbed and the linoleum beneath me became slick with tears and dollar-store face paint. By the time my crying slowed and I finally pulled myself up off the floor, my entire body felt weighed down by the secret I now knew I had to keep, and despite being a perfectionist at heart, I couldn't find it within myself to care that I'd missed almost all of rehearsal. I looked at my tear-streaked face in the mirror, makeup smeared all over my burning cheeks, and silently admitted to myself what I had subconsciously known for a long time: that I wasn't straight, even though I didn't know exactly what I was yet. At the time, even thinking the words "I might be gay" to myself felt like a death sentence. I promised myself then and there that I would never tell anyone; that seemed to be the only option.

For several years, I managed to keep my promise to myself. Whereas before I had spent almost all of my free time with my friends, after my episode in the bathroom, I became isolated, making up excuses anytime a friend invited me out for fear of accidentally getting too comfortable and letting my secret slip. I spent most of middle school and the beginning of high school so far back in the closet I could barely breathe or see any light. I felt like the puppet I'd played in that production of Pinocchio—tied down by fear and shame, controlled by other people and their expectations of me rather than having the ability to be honest about who I was.

Just as I ended up breaking down in that theater bathroom stall when I was twelve, though, I eventually broke down again. My freshman year of high school was one of the worst years of my life. Struggling with mental illness and missing large portions of school as I went in and out of psychiatric hospitals was hard enough, but on top of all of that, I was also lying about a core part of my identity to everyone I knew. After a particularly rough night, I sat down and wrote a letter to my parents explaining that I was pansexual (or attracted to all genders and gender identities). "I've tried to stop being this way, but I can't," I wrote, my normally-neat handwriting reduced to a shaky chicken scratch as I struggled to control the trembling of my hands. "I hope you still love me." With my heart pounding violently in my chest, I signed the letter and left it in the kitchen for them to find before locking myself in my room and pretending to go to sleep so I wouldn't have to deal with their initial response.

By some amazing twist of fate, my parents did not have the horrible reaction I'd been dreading for the past two years. They knocked on my door a few minutes after I'd left the letter for them, and when I nervously let them in, they hugged me and told me that they loved me no matter what; my dad even said, "Kid, you couldn't have picked a better family to be gay in." For the first time in years, I felt like I could breathe again. My fear of rejection was still there—after all, I still had to come out to most of my friends and extended family—but it seemed so much more manageable knowing I had my parents on my side.

It took me several years to fully come out and get to a point where I felt comfortable in my own identity. A lot of people, even those who had known and loved me since I was a baby, told me that they couldn't be friends with me or my family anymore because of my "sinful lifestyle." As painful as it was each time I was shunned by someone I thought was my friend, I eventually gained enough confidence in myself and my identity to stop caring as much when people tried to tear me down for something I know is outside of my control.

Now, as a fully out-of-the-closet queer person, I still face discrimination from certain people in my life and from society as a whole. However, I've learned that it's a lot easier to deal with judgement from external forces when you surround yourself with people who love and support you, and most importantly, when you have love for yourself, which I'm glad to say I now do. Even though it was terrifying at first, I'm glad I broke the promise I made to myself in that backstage bathroom, because no matter what struggles I might face, at least I know I'm able to be open about who I am.

Teacher Takeaways

"This essay begins in compelling fashion, in a dramatic, vividly descriptive scene that proves central to the narrative. The use of dialogue is also strong here, especially in the letter the narrator writes to their parents and the father's response to that letter. The author also experiments with narrative sequence. It's a good move, but it does introduce some chronological confusion, making it difficult to place events on a timeline in relation to one another. This is a challenge with non-traditional narrative sequencing, but it can be resolved with strategic editing."

– Professor Dunham

Before I got sober I never paid attention to my dreams. I don't even remember if I had dreams. In the end I was spiritually broken, hopeless, scared and desperate. My life was dedicated to blotting out my miserable existence using copious amounts of booze and drugs. The substances stopped working. Every night was intoxicated tear soaked erratic fits of despair until I passed out. Only to wake up the next morning and begin the vicious cycle all over. Bending and writhing my way out of a five year heroin and alcohol addiction was just as scary. I was in jail. I had no idea how to live. I had no purpose in life. Then the dreams came back. Some of them were terrifying. Some dreams had inspiration. There is one dream I will never forget.

I am standing in a room full of people. They are all sitting looking up at me. I am holding a hand drum. My hands are shaking and I am extremely nervous. An old woman enters the room and walks up to me. The old woman is about half my height. She is barefoot and wearing a long green wool dress. She is holding a walking stick and is draped in animal furs. She has long flowing hair that falls over the animal furs. The old woman looks at all the people in the room. Then she looks at me and says, "It's okay, they are waiting, sing." My heart is racing. I strike the hand drum with all my courage. I feel the heartbeat of the drum. It's my heartbeat. I begin to sing, honoring the four directions. After each verse I pause and the old woman pushes me forward "It's okay," she says, "Sing." I am singing louder now. The third verse is powerful. I am striking the drum with all my strength. Many people singing with me. My spirit is strong. During the fourth verse sparks are flying from the contact between the beater stick and my drum. I am striking the drum with all our strength. We are all singing together. The room is shaking with spirit. The old woman looks over at me and smiles.

I woke up. My heart was racing. I took a deep breath of recirculated air. I could taste the institution. I looked over and saw my cellmate sleeping. I remembered where I was. I knew what I had to do. I had to get sober and stay sober. I had to find my spirit. I had to sing.

At six months of sobriety I was out in the real world. I was living on the Oregon Coast and I was attending local AA meetings. I was still lost but had the dream about singing with the drum in the back of my mind. One day an oldtimer walked into the meeting and sat down. He introduced himself, "My name is Gary, and I am an alcoholic from Colorado." We all respond, "Welcome Gary." Gary intrigued me. He was wearing old jeans, a sweatshirt and a faded old native pride hat with an eagle feather embroider on the front. Beneath the hat he wore round eyeglasses which sat on top of his large nose, below his nose was a bushy mustache. He resembled an Indian version of Groucho Marx. Something felt familiar about his spirit. After the meeting Gary walked up and introduced himself to me. I invited him to our native recovery circle we have on Wednesday nights.

Gary came to our circle that Wednesday. We made plans to hang out after the meeting. Gary is Oglala Lakota. He is a pipe carrier for the people. We decide to hold a pipe ceremony in order to establish connectedness and unite with one heart and mind. To pray and get to know each other. We went down to the beach and lit a fire. It was a clear, warm night. The stars were bright. The fire was crackling and the shadows of the flames were bouncing of the clear night sky. I took my shoes off and felt the cool soft sand beneath my feet and between my toes. The ocean was rumbling in the distance. Gary started digging around in his bag. The firelight bounced off his glasses giving a twinkle in his eye as he gave me a little smile. He pulled out a hand drum. My heart stopped. He began to sing a song. I knew that song. He was honoring the four directions. My eyes began to water and a wave of emotion flooded over me. I looked up to the stars with gratitude. I asked Gary if he would teach me and he shrugged.

I began to hang around Gary a lot. I would just listen. He let me practice with his drum. He would talk and I would listen. Sometimes he would sing and I would sing along. We continued to go to our native recovery circle. It was growing in attendance. Gary would open the meeting by honoring the four directions with the song and we would smudge down. I would listen and sometimes sing along.

I had a year of sobriety when I got my first drum making supplies. I called Gary and he came over to help me make it. Gary showed me how to prep the hide. How to stretch the hide over the wooden hoop and how to lace it up in the back. I began to find purpose in the simple act of learning how to create stuff. I brought my drum to our native recovery circle. Around forty people attend our circle now. Many of them young and new still struggling with addiction. We lit the sage to open the meeting. The smoke began to rise into the sky. I inhaled the smoky scent deep and could feel the serenity and cleansing property of the sage medicine. I looked around at all the people. They were all looking at me and waiting. Then I looked at Gary. Gary smiled and said, "It's okay, they are all waiting, sing."

We now have another recovery circle here in Portland on Friday nights. Gary is gone. He had to move to Nashville, Tennessee. Many people come to our circle to find healing from drug and alcohol abuse. We light the sage and smudge down while I honor the four directions with the same song. I carry many of the traditional prayer songs today. Most of them given to me by Gary.

At one meeting a young man struggling with alcoholism approaches me and tells me he needs to sing and wants to learn the songs. The next week we open the meeting and light the sage. The young man is standing next to me holding his own drum. His own heartbeat. He looks at all the people. They are all looking at him. He looks at me. I smile and say, "It's okay, they are waiting, sing."

Teacher Takeaways

"I love this essay. It's clear that the student is personally invested in the subject matter—that they've chosen something that is important to their identity and worldview—and they use repetition to highlight the experience of learning and growing. If this author planned to revise further, I would encourage them to experiment with sentence structure: the author uses what we call 'simple sentences' predominantly, which leads to a rhythmic but sometimes monotonous cadence. For instance, instead of 'Gary is gone. He had to move to Nashville, Tennessee,' the student could try 'Because he had to move to Nashville, Tennessee, Gary is gone now.' (Neither sentence is inherently better, but variety in sentence structure keeps the reader more engaged.)"

– Professor Dawson

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6.1.7: Section Introduction- Reflecting on an Experience

Section Introduction- Reflecting on an Experience

One of my greatest pleasures as a writing instructor is learning about my students' life journeys through their storytelling. Because it is impossible for us to truly know anything beyond our own lived experience,[41] sharing our stories is the most powerful form of teaching. It allows us a chance to learn about others' lives and worldviews.

Often, our rhetorical purpose in storytelling is to entertain. Storytelling is a way to pass time, to make connections, and to share experiences. Just as often, though, stories are didactic: one of the rhetorical purposes (either overtly or covertly) is to teach. Since human learning often relies on experience, and relating an experience constitutes storytelling, narrative can be an indirect teaching opportunity. Articulating lessons drawn from an experience, though, requires **reflection**.



Reflection is a rhetorical gesture that helps you and your audience construct meaning from the story you've told. It demonstrates why your story matters, to you and to the audience more generally: how did the experience change you? What did it teach you? What relevance does it hold for your audience? Writers often consider reflection as a means of "looking back in order to look forward." This means that storytelling is not just a mode of preservation, nostalgia, or regret, but instead a mechanism for learning about ourselves and the world.

Chapter vocabulary

Vocabulary	Definition
reflection	a rhetorical gesture by which an author looks back, through the diegetic gap, to demonstrate knowledge or understanding gained from the subject on which they are reflecting. May also include consideration of the impact of that past subject on the author's future—"Looking back in order to look forward."
diegetic gap	from "diegesis," the temporal distance between a first-person narrator narrating and the same person acting in the plot events. I.e., the space between author-as-author and author-ascharacter.

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6.1.8: Techniques

Techniques

“Looking back in order to look forward,” [42]or

“I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger” [43]

As you draft your narrative, keep in mind that your story or stories should allow you to draw some insight that has helped you or may help your reader in some way: reflection can help you relate a lesson, explore an important part of your identity, or process through a complicated set of memories. Your writing should equip both you and your audience with a perspective or knowledge that challenges, nuances, or shapes the way you and they interact with the world. This reflection need not be momentous or dramatic, but will deepen the impression of your narrative.

Reflection relies on what I call the **diegetic gap**. Diegesis is a term from the field of narratology referring to narration—the story as it is portrayed. In turn, this gap identifies that time has passed between the plot events and your act of writing. Simply put, the diegetic gap is the distance between you-the-author and you-the-character:

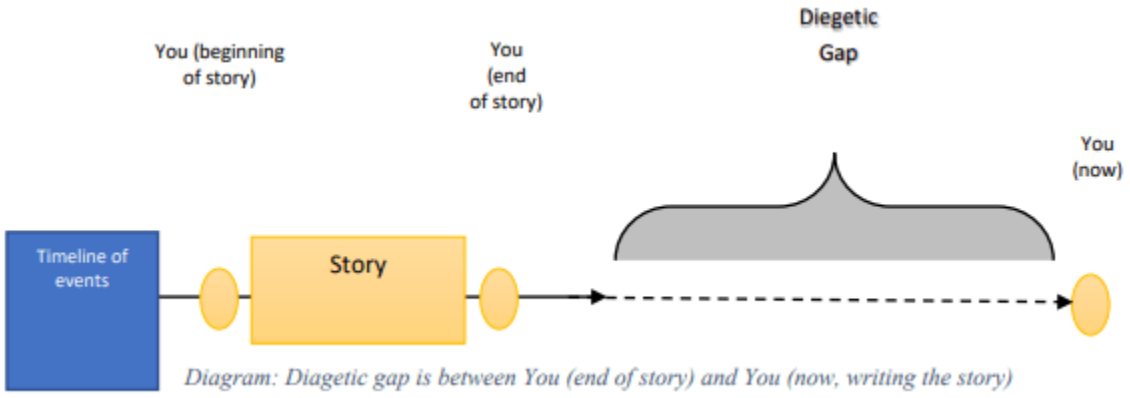


Diagram: Diagetic gap is between You (end of story) and You (now, writing the story)

Because we are constantly becoming ourselves, shaped by our relationships and experiences, “you” are a different person at all three points. By looking back at your story, you can cultivate meaning in ways you could not during the events or immediately following them. Distance from an event changes the way we see previous events: time to process, combined with new experiences and knowledge, encourages us to interpret the past differently.

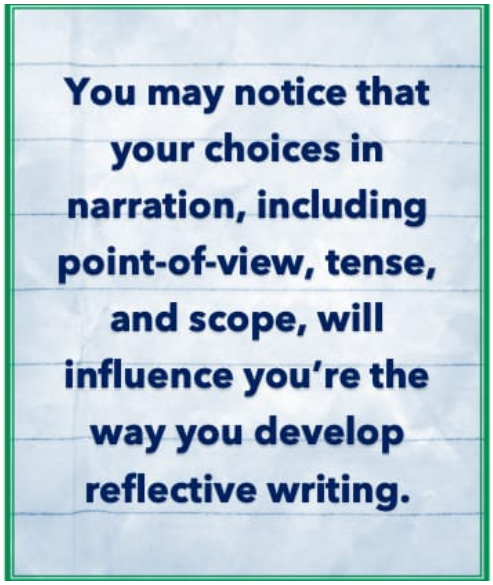
As you’ll see in the upcoming activities , looking back through this gap is a gesture akin to the phrase “When I look back now, I realize that…”[44]

Wrap-up vs. Weave

Students often have a hard time integrating reflective writing throughout their narratives. In some cases, it is effective to use reflection to “wrap up” the story; it might not make sense to talk about a lesson learned before the story has played out. However, you should try to avoid the “tacked on” paragraph at the end of your story: if your reflective writing takes over at the end of the story, it should still feel like a part of the narrative rather than an afterthought. In other words, you should only reserve your reflective writing for the last paragraph or two if the story has naturally and fluidly brought us across the diegetic gap to present day.

Instead of a wrap-up, though, I often challenge my students to weave their reflection in with the story itself. You can see

this at work in “Slowing Down” and “Parental Guidance” in some places. However, to see woven reflection applied even more deliberately, take a look at the model text “Blood & Chocolate Milk.” This author explicitly weaves narration and reflection; while your weave doesn’t need to be this obvious, consider how the author’s choices in this essay enhance both the narrative and your understanding of their family dynamic.



Spelling it Out vs. Implying Meaning

Finally, you should be deliberate about how overt you should make your reflection. If you are trying to connect with your reader, sharing your story so they might better know you, the world you live in, or even themselves, you need to walk the fine line between subtlety and over-explanation. You need to be clear enough that your reader can generalize and relate. Consider the essay “Comatose Dreams” in the previous section: it does exceptional work with implication, but some readers have trouble knowing what they should take away from the story to apply to their own lives.

It is also possible, though, to be too explicit. Take, for example, Charles Perrault’s 1697 publication of a classic folk story, “Little Red Riding Hood.”[45] As with many fairy tales, this story is overtly didactic, stating the following moral after Little Red Riding Hood’s demise:

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say “wolf,” but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all.[46]

I encourage you to discuss the misogynist leanings of this moral with your class. For our purposes here, though, let’s consider what Perrault’s “wrap-up” does, rhetorically. With a target audience of, presumably, children, Perrault assumes that the moral needs to be spelled out. This paragraph does the “heavy lifting” of interpreting the story as an allegory; it explains what the reader is supposed to take away from the fairy tale so they don’t have to figure it out on their own. On the other side of that coin, though, it limits interpretive possibilities. Perrault makes the intent of the story unambiguous, making it less likely that readers can synthesize their own meaning.

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6.1.9: Sample Student Essay

Student Name

Professor Name

Course Name

Date

Where the Danger Is

The weather was cold and gray as usual at this time of year. The trees were all leafless, with fall now just a memory. Christmas was just a few weeks away, and all the kids were looking forward to staying home from school for a few weeks and to the “big payoff” on Christmas morning. Not having to go to school was good, but usually by the time vacation was over, going to school was a big relief. Back to the friends to compare “loot” from Christmas and, to reestablish those fragile ties that hold kids together. At school, students were praised for doing good work, not belittled for each and every mistake. No one there was fighting, and being too loud was against the rules. Right now, the world outside of home was more safe and structured, not chaotic, scary and loud. Even when bad things did happen, it was always far away and nothing to be too concerned about. With Dad often having too much to drink, and Mom just mad at everyone all the time, being home was not usually a very pleasant experience.

Playing outside in the woods or at a friend’s house was the norm for three of us kids. We knew everyone that lived on our road, and except for the cranky old people who lived at the bottom of the hill, everyone was nice to us. In a small rural community, the only thing to be feared at that time of year was crashing on a sled or frost bite from staying out too long. Unless something like that happened, the only rule was to be home before dark.

But that weekend morning was different. We were all home, and the day was starting off rather quietly. None of the kids were arguing, no dogs were barking, and Mom and Dad were actually talking, not shouting or sniping at each other. Dad was sitting at his spot at the dining room table, and Mom was in the kitchen starting breakfast. Usually sitting along the table with Dad at the head was like being at a tennis match, watching the action and listening to the arguments between him at the end and Mom over at the stove.

When the telephone rang, Dad didn’t pick it up, even though he was sitting next to it. Mom walked over behind him and answered the call.

“Hello? Hi, Bobbie. What? What are you talking about? How did this happen? Oh, my God, I don’t believe it! When did they find her? Oh, poor Connie, how will she handle this?” Mom’s voice kept getting higher and higher in pitch, and the tears were starting to flow. This sort of response was totally out of character for her. We all just sat there trying to figure out what sort of gossip our next-door neighbor would have that would cause such a reaction. Dad didn’t say anything, but somehow knew that whatever had happened was completely out of the ordinary. Events occur during each lifetime that forever alter the perception of the world being a safe place to play in. Feeling secure means being at home, no matter the atmosphere, with the door locked up tight.

When Mom finally got herself under control, she said in a low voice, “Margaret was found murdered this morning over on Lauffer Mine Road.” Suddenly, our safe little community became a place of uncertainty and confusion where one of the neighbor’s children was a victim of a killer. The thought that a murderer might be on the loose in our area was one without precedent. The most serious crimes until this moment had been kids corning and soaping the windows on Halloween night. The idea of something like this happening to one of the neighborhood children was almost unbelievable.

As the day wore on, this tragedy lost some of its shock value and became a part of our reality. Mom was on the phone quite a bit, talking in hushed tones with the neighbors. The gossip mill was in full swing. Who did it? And why? Was it a stranger, or maybe someone we all knew? State police cars cruised up and down all day, looking everywhere, even around our house. All three of us stayed pretty close to home that day. No one was playing outside or calling us to come down the road to play. Dad was quite glad not to have to get on us too much to leave Mom alone, or stop fighting among ourselves and be quiet. For just a short period of time, we were where we desired to be.

Going to bed that night and turning out all the lights was a terribly frightening experience, even for a big fourth-grader. Every noise outside could be the killer walking through our yard. Every time the dogs barked, we looked outside to see if anyone was

there. What if the killer was up in the woods behind our house, or hiding in the garage? Being frightened of someone lurking outside was a new experience. Up until then, I never checked to see if the front door was a locked before we went to bed. But the events of that day brought home the reality that my chaotic home was as safe as Dad and Mom could make it. Home really was a haven, and real danger could be as close as the other side of that locked door.

Grader's Comments:

- Purposeful
- Excellent focus
- Clear dominant impression
- The narrative's significance is clearly revealed in the opening, middle, and ending
- Excellent use of paragraph structure 93
- Anecdotes reveal the subjects' character
- Naming of exact physical features could be stronger
- Detailing and imagery could be stronger
- You have a clear focus of events, a strong significance for this narrative, and the work leaves the reader with a dominant impression.

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. What is one specific element of the narrative essay that you find exceptional in this essay?
2. What is one area where the story could have used dialogue or description rather than internalized thinking?"

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6.2: THE CAUSAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

- Topic hierarchy

6.2.1: Why Write a Causal Analysis or Cause/Effect Essay?

6.2.2: Cause and Effect

6.2.3: Organizing the Causal Analysis Essay

6.2.4: Tips for Writing the Causal Analysis

6.2.5: Sample Student Essays

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6.2.1: Why Write a Causal Analysis or Cause/Effect Essay?

Causal analysis, or cause and effect, is used in both everyday and professional life, so being able to recognize and incorporate cause/effect data is important as it is used in multiple applications including problem solving. When studying accidents or plane crashes, investigators attempt to determine the sequence of events that led to the crash. What caused it? When deciding to spend all of that taxpayer money to build the train system in the valley, supporters first gather data showing the current effects of all of the traffic on the city. Then they provide the probable effects of the train system on the valley based upon similar results from other cities. These are just a couple of ways that causal analysis is utilized in society, so it is important to be able to understand it.

With the causal analysis essay, students are introduced to source-based writing. If 90% of the papers students will write in college are in third person, 98% of the papers will be source-based. With the causal analysis, students will be expected to identify credible sources for their papers. They will read and assimilate the information, then incorporate it in their work as evidence and support.

Choosing a topic

Many students find the causal analysis essay hard to write. They struggle with a few aspects. First, they struggle to identify an appropriate topic. The topic needs to cover a true cause/effect relationship. Here are some examples:

- Effects of overuse of cell phones
- Effects of air pollution on inner-city children
- Causes of childhood diabetes
- Causes of bullying

These topics identify clear cause/effect relationships. In other words, x most definitely causes y, or y is a direct result of x. These topics are focused enough to provide sufficient information to complete a three to four page essay with in-depth analysis of the topic and support from outside sources.

Students make a few mistakes when choosing a topic. One mistake students make is to pick a topic that is too broad; for example, students choose topics like the causes of climate change or the effects of the Great Depression. Books have been written about topics like this. These topics provide too much information to cover in a short paper. Instead of an in-depth analysis, the essay is shallow and rushed. Students need to avoid broad topics like these.

The second mistake students make is confusing causes and reasons. A cause has a direct effect. It explains how it occurred. For example, let's say that you put a glass of water in a freezer that is cold enough to freeze water; what will the outcome be? You get ice. There are laws of physics that operate in this world, and water must obey them. That is how the world works. However, a reason explains why it occurred. The focus of a reason is why something happens. Let's say that you don't study for a test the night before you take it, what will the outcome be? We don't know. This time the outcome is not automatic. While not studying is a bad idea, it does not mean you will fail the test. It is not an inevitable outcome. The reason you may fail the test is because you chose not to study, but you might be confident about this particular information and feel it is unnecessary to study. Thus, students need to pick topics where the relationship between the cause and effect can be clearly established.

Finally, the third mistake students make is confusing causation and correlation. Things can happen at the same time without there being a direct cause/effect relationship. Let's say that there is a five-year study that covered an increase in inflation in the United States. At the same time, the study noted that sales in flat-screen televisions had increased. Does that mean that the increase in inflation caused an increase in TV sales? Probably not. There may be a relationship between the two, but one does not directly cause the other.

Thus, choosing a topic that shows a clear causal relationship is extremely important.

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6.2.2: 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.”

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6.2.3: Organizing the Causal Analysis Essay

The causal analysis essay can be split into four basic sections: introduction, body, conclusion, and Works Cited page. There are three basic formats for writing a cause/effect:

1. Single effect with multiple causes–air pollution is the effect, and students would identify several causes;
2. Single cause with multiple effects–bullying is the cause, and students would establish several effects it has on children;
3. Causal Chain–This is a more complex format. Causal chains show a series of causes and effects. For example, dust storms between Tucson and Phoenix can be deadly causing a chain reaction of accidents. The dust is the initial catalyst. It causes car A to stop. Car B crashes into Car A. Car C crashes into Car B., etc. Climate change is a good example of a causal chain topic. Population increase is causing an increase in traffic and greenhouse gases. It is also causing an increase in deforestation for housing, roads and farming. Deforestation means less plants to take up the CO2 and release O2 into the environment. Each item causes an effect. That effect causes another effect. All of this contributes to climate change.

Introduction

The introduction introduces the reader to the topic. We've all heard that first impressions are important. This is very true in writing as well. The goal is to engage the readers, hook them so they want to read on. One way is to write a narrative. Topics like bullying or divorce hit home. Beginning with a real case study highlights the issue for readers. This becomes an example that you can refer to throughout the paper. The final sentence in the introduction is usually the thesis statement.

Another way to introduce the topic is to ask a question or set of questions then provide background and context for the topic or issue. For example, if you are writing an essay about schizophrenia, opening questions might be "What are the main causes of schizophrenia? Who is susceptible?" The student would then begin a brief discussion defining schizophrenia and explaining its significance. Once again, the final sentence of the introduction would be a thesis statement introducing the main points that will be covered in the paper.

Body Paragraphs

The body of the essay is separated into paragraphs. Each paragraph covers a single cause or effect. For example, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, the two main causes of schizophrenia are genetic and environmental. Thus, if you were writing about the causes of schizophrenia, then you would have a body paragraph on genetic causes of schizophrenia and a body paragraph on the environmental causes. A second example is climate change where separate paragraphs explain each cause/effect relationship: population increases, increases in air pollution due to traffic exhaust and manufacturing, increases in food production and agriculture, deforestation. All are causes for climate change, and all are intricately linked.

A body paragraph should include the following:

- Topic sentence that identifies the topic for the paragraph,
- Several sentences that describes the causal relationship,
- Evidence from outside sources that corroborates your claim that the causal relationship exists,
- MLA formatted in-text citations indicating which source listed on the Works Cited page has provided the evidence,
- Quotation marks placed around any information taken verbatim (word for word) from the source,
- Summary sentence(s) that draws conclusions from the evidence,
- Remember: information from outside sources should be placed in the middle of the paragraph and not at the beginning or the end of the paragraph;
- Be sure and use transitions or bridge sentences between paragraphs.

Conclusion

- Draw final conclusions from the key points and evidence provided in the paper;
- Tie in the introduction. If you began with a story, draw final conclusions from that story;
- If you began with a question(s), refer back to the question(s) and be sure to provide the answer(s).

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6.2.4: Tips for Writing the Causal Analysis

Many times topics are really categories in which multiple issues are present. One popular example is immigration. However, immigration as a topic for an essay is too large, as books on immigration policy, history, cause and effect have been written.

Consider what issues exist under the big umbrella of immigration? What other cause/effect relationships can you think of regarding immigration?

- border security
- children born in U.S to undocumented immigrants (often called “dreamers”)
- uneven or outdated laws and classifications (economic, family, refugee, student, fiancé)

Topic Ideas

- Homelessness
- Social media: causes of overuse; effects on relationships
- Bullying/cyberbullying
- Addiction(s)
- College student stress
- Rising college tuition

Chapter Questions for Comprehension

Answer the following prompts regarding the causal analysis essay referring to the previous information presented here. Be sure to use complete sentences.

1. Explain the three mistakes students can make in writing the causal analysis essay.
2. How might you need to analyze causes of a problem or situation in your lives outside of school? Provide two examples.
3. What are the three organizational patterns used to organize cause?

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6.2.5: Sample Student Essays

Sally Summers

Prof. Polliard

English 101

16 April 2016

The Rise of Music Streaming

There have been many staples to define the music industry's timeline; Vinyl LP, the 8-track tape, CDs, Digital MP3s, and now music streaming. A quote from a digital blog dives into music streaming: "With a music streaming service, instead of purchasing a track or album, you pay a flat monthly fee to play unlimited tracks that you don't actually own" (Mitroff). There are many vinyl and physical media enthusiasts, but for the day to day music listener, a streaming service, with access to thousands of albums and no need to download or store them, makes a lot more sense. The Digital Market as a whole has shown incredible promise recently. "In 2014, digital revenue grew nearly 7 percent to $6.85 billion, while physical sales—of which CDs make up the vast majority—fell 8 percent to $6.82 billion" (Vincent). Being the first time that digital media has overtaken its physical counterpart, the industry has all but accelerated into outlets of digital, such as streaming music. With the fall of physical media comes the rise of music streaming, on many different platforms and with creative spins that put a new spark in the music industry.

Numbers don't lie and people seem to want faster and easier ways to listen to the music they love, streaming via a service makes that want tangible at little cost. Going to the store to buy a new album? Why? You could have streamed it to any media device the second it was released and not have spent any more than the subscription to that music streaming service. Growth shows promise especially in a subscription based business, "An estimated 41 million people paid for music subscription services in 2014, five times the level of eight million people in 2010" ("An Industry"). This shows the rapid acceleration in this industry, at the cost of physical media. Subscriptions starting at $5.99 per month (for students on Spotify) make these services easily reached by many. The average music listening person will only need one copy of an album, not a vinyl, CD, and digital copy. Streaming is growing fast, however "Downloads still account for 52% of digital revenue" (Vincent).

Spotify is one of the most popularly used services, "Spotify debuted in the U.S. in 2011 and has 30 million paying subscribers worldwide as of last month (Carman) which is growing very rapidly. There are multiple competitors to Spotify such as Apple Music, Rhapsody and Rdio, Tidal, Google Play Music, and Xbox Music. Each one with it's own specific perks and benefits over the competition, for the most part they accomplish a very similar goal described as streaming high quality music to you anywhere, any time and at a relatively low cost. With the obvious benefits of physical media, CD's and Vinyl have not become obsolete just yet, "with the sector's share of industry revenues declining from 60 percent in 2011 to 46 percent in 2014" ("An Industry"). Many users still enjoy having the copy tangible that won't disappear when you stop paying the subscription fee.

With massive amounts of users switching to digital media comes a cost of pirated and shared versions of albums and songs. The industry as a whole has been hit massively because of this, "...overall revenue falling just 0.4 percent to $14.97 billion for the year 2014. (For historical comparisons, this is down from a peak of $40 billion in 1999)" (Vincent). The industry continues to attempt to squash and eliminate pirated copies and users who share them. Torrenting and file sharing sites make downloading an album extremely easy and mostly undetectable. Which means that a lot of people are doing this, "One report from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry estimates that 20 million Americans continue to pirate music, as well as about a fifth of the world's population" (Carman). This shows how even though streaming has amplified the digital market pirating is still a problem. There are ways services like Spotify encrypt and protect it's songs so users can't share them, but downloading a song from Apple Music (iTunes) makes it readily available to upload and share.

With all of the advancements made digitally and the wild demand for instant music, streaming services continue to meet the needs of its listeners. New advancements call for plenty of problem solving like the elimination of pirating—even then that's a problem the film industry has dealt with for decades. Huge numbers and growth prove that this is the directions digital music is taking, "Revenues from music subscription services—including free-to-consumer and paid-for tiers grew by 39 percent in 2014..." ("An Industry"). Pushing off from physical media as an industry might not be so bad, and diehard fans won't let the vinyl die.

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Vincent, James. “Digital Music Revenue Overtakes CD Sales for the First Time Globally.” The Verge, 15 Apr. 2015.

Grader’s Comments:

- Apostrophe errors, especially “it’s” and “its”
- Comma splices and fragments—be careful when you integrate source material quotations
- Word choices could be improved.
- Avoid “you”
- Conclusion ties back to intro effectively
- Strong use of statistics for support
- Consider stronger word choices

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations, and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. Which type of organization did the writer use to develop this causal analysis essay?
2. Evaluate the source material listed on the Works Cited. How credible are the sources used? Why or why not?
3. What causes are attributed to increased popularity of music streaming? What effects?

Claudia Payne

Professor Leto

English 101

18 June 2016

War of the Worlds

Anytime of the day, Americans can turn on the Television (T.V.), radio, Internet, cell phone and find a number of news stations and watch live coverage from anywhere in the world. Live coverage is current. People from all over the world upload pictures and videos on the Internet of natural disasters. The whole world can view these videos immediately. Yet, most people watch with a keen eye and understand that most of what is said is full of propaganda and other people’s agendas. With the help of great resources such as the T.V., radio, Internet and cell phone, Americans today are not as likely to panic as easily as they once were. Halloween Eve, 73 years ago, a bright, young man, by the name of Orson Welles created an all-out panic over America with the radio drama, “War of the Worlds” which was a live production on his Mercury Theater on the Air show. This replay of the famous 1898 novel written by H.G. Wells, which in short was about Martians from Mars invading the planet, created so much madness. In a matter of minutes, phone lines were jammed with people trying to get information. Thousands of people were fleeing their homes, crowding the streets, heading to church to be saved while others loaded their guns and locked themselves inside their homes, preparing for a fight. The main reasons that the “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast caused so much panic across America was because of the show’s format, the timing of the warning announcements, and people’s previous experience with emergency broadcasts. Combine all of this with the lack of resources available to the public to validate the truth, and panic was created.

The Mercury Theatre on the Air used intermixed media, realistic sound effects and had intriguing interviews during the “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast. The broadcast was interchanging from an orchestra playing to news bulletins that became increasingly alarming. The first interruption of the program began with reports of explosions on the planet Mars. The next update was about a flaming object, possibly a meteorite touching down on a farm in the Grover’s Mill neighborhood in New Jersey. The tone changed with further announcements indicating that there was no meteor, but Martians from Mars unleashing their wrath on spectators and killing them with heat rays. There were interviews with police, military troops, and public officials. Generals, captains, lieutenants, and commanders were interviewed. Even an unnamed man, sounding much like the President began to address the nation. There

was also an announcement from the Secretary of the Interior. The intense accounting of events along with the screams of men, women and children added to the drama. Sounds of guns, muffled voices, airplane motors, sounds of heat rays, boat whistles, and fog horns were all used by Orson Wells and his cast to set the mood that played into the panic that night (Estrin 178). People were advised the broadcast was a drama, yet it all seemed so real.

Another great influence that contributed to the depth of the panic was timing and placement of announcements stating the radio play was fiction. Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) announced on three separate occasions during the 60 minute broadcast that it was the shows reenactment of the "War of the Worlds" by H.G. Wells ("War"). However, the real-life, action packed drama still caused one woman to disregard the notification, and she wound up spending all of her savings on a train ticket to go some 60 miles before understanding that what she heard was only a play (Estrin 15). The use of the Emergency Broadcast System's announcements, "we interrupt this program" were adding to the drama and realistic feel. The show started off indicating this was a fictional story, and there wasn't another mention until 40 minutes later. The last announcement was given by Orson Welles himself at the end of the script ("War"). The Mercury Theatre on the Air had a huge competitor on the NBC Network, The Charlie McCarthy Show, and most people tuned to this program regularly. What added to the mood was that during a dull moment on the rival's show, approximately ten minutes in, listeners tuned to the "War of the Worlds" reenactment. The late tuning to the show caused nearly 50% of the listeners to miss the opening disclosure there by giving more authenticity to the story, which added to the panic (Frank, Reuven). The drama being played out in this way really set the tone; it also gained the realistic feel because it reminded people of previous events in time.

The audiences' past experiences with radio broadcasts helped heighten the panic that ensued this evening. It was not long before this Halloween Eve that America was listening to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats." These broadcasts brought the voice of authority and politics to the radio. This built the foundation and gave stability for Americans to believe that what they hear is real. Welles knew the feel he wanted when preparing with his cast for the show. America will never forget the chilling voice of announcer Herbert Morrison, giving minute-by-minute reports of the horrible crash of the Hindenburg airship in May 1937. The "War of the Worlds" broadcast had a similar tone. Welles gathered his crew together and played the recording of Morrison revealing step-by-step accounts of this horrible tragedy that left 35 people dead (Rankin 294). The radio airwaves were constantly covering groundbreaking news events during the months leading up to the "War of the Worlds" broadcast. Author Reuven Frank wrote about the non-stop coverage of Hitler's occupation of Austria that was flooding the Networks in March of 1938, and in May of that year, it was round the clock talk of the Munich Crisis and Germany beginning to invade Czechoslovakia. With all the talk of Germany invading these countries, it is no wonder that Americans were uneasy and could easily panic if given word of an invasion of any kind, even those of Martians from Mars.

Back in the 1930s and 1940s, having the radio was a great source for information. Most people relied on the radio for important updates during emergencies. Not many people had telephones and even less had televisions (T.V.). During this time T.V. was in the beginning trial stages. If more resources were available, like the ones that are available today, things could be verified much more readily. Word of a Martian invasion would not be as alarming, and people could validate the information with the resources available. Orson Welles created the feeling of doubt for people with the after effects of this broadcast. Once people found out that the radio broadcast was fiction and a "War of the Worlds" reenactment, they were upset and began to criticize Orson Welles. Some people say that Orson Welles knew the broadcast would create drama. Some say that he wanted to teach people a lesson to not always believe everything that is heard on the radio. Orson Welles possibly created more doubt than what he may have initially intended. Many people today do not believe anything they hear on the radio or read on the Internet. People do not listen as closely and do not have trust in news reports as they once did. Having doubt to this extent can cause tremendous damage if a real tragedy were to unfold. People may ignore important bulletins for a real tragedy and not take them seriously. If there was an announcement of a shooter on the loose and people did not believe it, what would happen? People could get hurt and possibly killed by not believing these updates.

The truth is that most people take for granted what they hear or see in the news. Some believe Orson Welles was the one to create this skepticism over 70 years ago this Halloween Eve (Frank, Rich).

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“War of the Worlds.” Columbia Broadcasting Systems. 30 Oct. 1938. http://www.sacred-texts.com/ufo/mars/wow.htm.

Grader’s Comments:

- Fascinating topic
- Opening paragraph a bit wieldy
- Excellent examples of human nature
- Maybe add a few lines of description of historical events that are no longer well known
- Conclusion does a nice job tying the present day to the past

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations, and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. What is the thesis statement?
2. What type of causal analysis essay is this? Single cause with multiple effects or single effects with multiple causes?
3. List the main points that are covered in the paper (would be the causes of a single effect or the effects of a single cause)
4. Examine the in-text citations and the Works Cited page.
    a. What types of sources are used in the essay?
    b. Can you easily find each source in the Works Cited page?
5. Do these sources seem appropriate to the type of paper she is writing? How reliable are these sources?

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6.3: Persuasion

Writers of persuasive essays take a stand on a controversial issue and give well-researched arguments to support this position. This section will help students define the persuasive essay as well as understand its purpose and structure.

What is an Argument?

In today's society, arguments are all around us, in our every waking moment throughout the day, whether in online ads or in the messages one reads on one's favorite box of cereal. The ability to think critically in terms of deciding what to believe is highly important due to the fact that individuals are bombarded by arguments, on the internet and elsewhere, on a daily basis. Deciding what arguments to accept or reject not only makes for a good essay, but has implications for success in life and for one's future career.

Understanding the nature of argument is essential to writing a good persuasive essay. So, what is argument? It is not the act of proving who is right or wrong. Television and social media convey argument as a means of proving one's point for the sake of arguing. This is not argument. Ancient rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates understood argument in terms of truth-seeking, and conceptualized it as a means of preventing war. In this vein, good writers engage in truth-seeking to find out what is valid so that they may communicate truths to others. Sometimes in this process of truth-seeking, the writers themselves may change their minds on a given topic. Leaders such as Queen Lili'uokalani and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrate argument as a means of engaging in truth-seeking. See A Letter of Protest (Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawai'i, 1898) and Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., AU, University of Alabama, April 16, 1963).

Structure of a Persuasive Essay

Before students begin creating persuasive essays, they should engage in preliminary research. Persuasive essays often include quotes or paraphrases from experts or statistics from academic studies. These essays must also demonstrate the writer's ability to think critically and to avoid logical errors.

Note: Persuasive essays often require research, so students should see the Research and Plagiarism chapter of this text before drafting the essay.

After writers have conducted some preliminary research to enter the conversation, they will be ready to begin writing. Drafting should include at least four aspects:

- Introduction and thesis
- Strong arguments and evidence in support of thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- A compelling and satisfying conclusion

Creating an Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general issue. The role of this paragraph is to do the following:

- Create interest.
- Introduce a controversial topic.
- Include a thesis statement that clearly presents the writer's position on the chosen issue, and the major points to be discussed. Instructors will give students further guidelines on where the thesis should appear, but it is usually located at the very end of the introduction.

Strong Arguments and Evidence in Support of the Thesis

The body of the persuasive essay presents the reasons for the writer's position on the issue. Writers should provide at least three

solid reasons for their position.

When developing arguments and evidence, a writer would be wise to do the following:

- Provide at least one paragraph for each reason that is presented (though some reasons may require more than one paragraph). Clearly state each reason in a topic sentence.
- Provide sufficient evidence for each reason. Much of the evidence will come from research, though writers can effectively integrate their own knowledge as evidence.
- Explain ideas thoroughly and carefully, connecting one's sources together smoothly and logically.
- Provide follow-up discussion or explanation for the researched information one has provided.
- Remember that arguments are usually "won" or "lost" on the quantity and quality of the evidence.

Ways to Persuade

There are three primary ways to appeal to the emotion and response of readers: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos

Ethos is the appeal to what is right, fair and trustworthy. For example, if Aaron is arguing for more access to parks in Hawai'i for individuals who are disabled, he could do so by pointing out that many citizens who happen to have some sort of disability pay taxes that support these parks and yet are denied access simply due to design. The unfairness of this situation would appeal to the readers' sense of what is right or fair.

Logos

Logos appeals to the reader's logic and reason. If Aaron is arguing for the need to make college tuition more affordable or even free, such as is the case in Norway, Sweden, and Germany, among other countries, and he uses statistics about the number of students who would not be able to obtain a college degree without some country-wide assistance, he is appealing to his reader's logic.

Pathos

An argument with pathos appeals to the reader's emotions. In his essay in favor of students joining a sports team in high school, he could highlight his own experience of overcoming fears and physical challenges while running in high school. Such an approach would pull the heartstrings of his readers who are touched by his success due to the self-discipline, social connections, and physical strength he developed through running on a team.

Addressing Opposing Ideas and the Author's Position

Any good argument anticipates the opposing arguments and attempts to answer or refute its main points. In refuting the opposing point, writers do the following:

1. Address at least one major opposing point. Writers briefly summarize viewpoints on the other side of the argument.
2. Provide reasons and evidence showing the weaknesses in this opposing idea. They may address more than one opposing viewpoint.

Conclusion: Call to Action

The conclusion should provide insight into the significance of the issue. Most important is the fact that such a conclusion would do well not to use the word "should" as in the following. "In order for the United States to increase college attendance, encourage young people to seek out higher education and advanced knowledge to be used within the professional world, and truly support the process of learning, making college tuition more affordable or even free is key."

If writers have proven their stance within the body paragraphs using examples and quoted, paraphrased, or summarized

information from professionals within the given community, a “should” isn’t needed because the reader has already been convinced.

Activities

1. Take a look at advertisements for products. How are advertisers trying to persuade you to purchase their product?
    - What facts (logos) does the advertiser provide?
    - What emotions do you feel after viewing the advertisement?
    - What occurred in the advertisement to cause these emotions (pathos)?
    - What occurred in the advertisement that appealed to your sense of morals and ethics (ethos)?
    - Overall, was the advertisement effective to persuade you to purchase their product? Why or why not?

Further Resources

- Read more about writing a thesis statement in the handout by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Thesis Statements, The Writing Center.
- Watch the following video to learn more about persuasive appeals: Ethos, Pathos, Logos
- Read more about counterarguments and the language used to signal the counterargument and refutation in this handout by Harvard College Writing Center: Counterargument, Writing Resources.
- See sample persuasive essays in “Chapter 15: Introduction to Sample Essays,” Writing for Success.
- Other sample persuasive essays are “Online Monitoring: A Threat to Employee Privacy in the Wired Workplace“; (Hacker), and “Performance Enhancement through Biotechnology Has No Place in Sports“; (Hacker). These essays are excellent references because they contain notes in the margins that explain the components of the essays and MLA format.
- Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). “Transitional Devices,” The Purdue OWL.

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6.3.1: Why Write an Argument Essay?

When you hear the word “argument,” what do you think of? Maybe you think of a shouting match or a fist fight? Well, when instructors use the word “argument,” they’re typically thinking about something else. What they’re actually referring to is a position supported by the analysis that preceded its conception, not necessarily defending against antagonism.

More to the point, they’re talking about defending a certain point of view through writing or speech. Usually called a “claim” or a “thesis,” this point of view is concerned with an issue that doesn’t have a clear right or wrong answer (e.g., four and two make six). Also, this argument should not only be concerned with personal opinion (e.g., I really like carrots). Instead, an argument might tackle issues like abortion, capital punishment, stem cell research, or gun control. However, what distinguishes an argument from a descriptive essay or “report” is that **the argument must take a stance**; if you’re merely summarizing “both sides” of an issue or pointing out the “pros and cons,” you’re not really writing an argument. For example, “Stricter gun control laws will likely result in a decrease in gun-related violence” is an argument. Note that people can and will disagree with this argument, which is precisely why so many instructors find this type of assignment so useful—it makes you think.

Academic arguments usually “articulate an opinion.” This opinion is always carefully **defended with good reasoning and supported by plenty of research**. Research? Yes, research. Indeed, part of learning to write effective arguments is finding reliable sources (or other documents) that lend credibility to your position. It’s not enough to say “capital punishment is wrong because that’s the way I feel.”

Most of the papers students write in college are arguments. This should not be surprising. We are surrounded by them. Every time we watch television, surf the Internet or read a magazine, we are bombarded with ads. Ads are persuasive arguments trying to get consumers to buy or do something.

Here is an ad that uses an interesting twist to make its argument:



Figure 6.3.1.1 - *Kleenex Tissue Ad 1990- “Teach Them Not To Share”*

- Irony is “the use of words to convey one meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning” (“Irony”).
- What is ironic about this ad?
- What is the main argument of the Kleenex ad?

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6.3.2: Elements of Rhetorical Appeals in persuasion

When writing or analyzing arguments, we begin by examining how the argument appeals to the reader. There are three types of appeals utilized in arguments: logos or logical, pathos or emotional, and ethos or ethical appeals.

Aristotle's Triangle: Three Types of Appeals

Logos or the logical appeal relies upon well-developed, well-organized and well-reasoned arguments supported by evidence from reliable, authoritative sources. When writing argumentative essays and papers, we rely heavily upon the logical appeal to make our case. The evidence utilized in the logical appeal is usually research-based evidence: statistics, clinical studies, any empirical evidence collected carefully and methodically. This is also why arguments are written in third person. We let the evidence drive our arguments, so readers do not think our work is based upon our biased viewpoint.

Pathos or emotional appeal recognizes that humans are emotional beings. The key to using the emotional appeal successfully in papers is to provide an opportunity for an emotional response and not to try and orchestrate an emotional response. An example of the wrong use of an emotional appeal are infomercials for organizations like the ASPCA or UNICEF. While there is no doubt their work and message is important, they try to manipulate the audience with the use of emotional music, manipulative photographs, with an emotional narrative running beneath the music and images. While this may be okay for non-profit organizations, it does not work in college papers. Do not try to manipulate your audience this way. Also, do not try to use emotionally charged language. Stay in third person and avoid sounding biased, accusatory or self-righteous. As a writer, the people you are trying to persuade are the people who either disagree with you or are not sure. By sounding accusatory or self-righteous, you will put the opposition on the defensive, and you have already lost your argument.

The proper use of emotions is through narrative case studies. Case studies provide the opportunity to appeal to readers' emotions. The key is not to tell the readers what to feel or to try and manipulate the readers to feel a specific emotion. Instead, writers tell the story and allow the readers to decide how they want to respond. Readers can become emotionally involved with the topic or not. It is up to them. This works well for social issues like hunger and homelessness, bullying, child abuse, or illegal immigration. The blending of specific case studies with empirical evidence creates a deeply meaningful approach to argument. If I am talking about homeless children in America, by providing the statistics on the large number of children affected by this issue along with stories of the struggles of specific children, this drives the point home. We have a name and face to go with those numbers making the argument very human.

Ethos or the ethical appeal relates to the writer's persona being projected through the work. By using an unbiased tone and unbiased language, we project an image of trustworthiness and credibility. That is also why we use credible sources. We, as writers of college papers, do not have any credibility yet with our audience. By using authoritative, reliable sources, we borrow their credibility to help persuade readers to adopt our point of view. We are effectively saying, it is not just me that thinks this way. Here is a testimonial from Dr. So and So and his research that supports it. The research, surveys or clinical studies provides the evidence that supports the argument.

- Looking back at the Kleenex ad, what types of appeals did the ad use?

Beyond the use of these appeals, there are some other elements to consider when analyzing or writing arguments: audience, purpose, a well-defined issue, compelling evidence, refutation, and persona.

Audience

What audience does the writer have in mind? Who is the target audience the writer is trying to persuade? As a writer, your audience is the first consideration. This determines the language you will use, the sources you will cite, and the approach you will take. For example, if I were writing an antiabortion paper, I would address a panel of scientists much differently than a church congregation. Some of my sources would change, and my language use would probably change. For scientists, I would sound more clinical. For the church congregation, I would sound more emotional. My evidence would change, too. For scientists, I would use clinical evidence. For a church congregation, I would use sacred text. What if my target audience were children instead of adults? Once again, some of my sources would change and my approach would be different.

Purpose/Thesis

Why are you writing it? What are you trying to prove? The purpose is the thesis statement. As a writer, you need to know why you are writing the paper. It cannot be just to fulfill a requirement. It is imperative that your position is clear. What exactly are you arguing? It should be very apparent which side you are on and why.

Provide the reasoning behind your position. Remember, do not state it overtly like this: The **purpose of this essay is to prove** that potential dog owners must research breeds in order to choose dogs that best suit their lifestyles and opt to spay or neuter them if the overcrowded dog population is ever going to be solved.

This is considered weak. That said, you do have a good thesis statement if you drop the initial part: **Potential dog owners must research breeds in order to choose dogs that best suit their lifestyles and then spay or neuter them if the overcrowded dog population is ever going to be solved.**

Here is an example from a student paper: **Although the American flag is worthy of great esteem, the government cannot take away the right to desecrate the flag without taking away all that it stands for–freedom.**

Using language strengthens your argument. The following examples from the Community College Consortium's Rhetoric and Composition textbook help further illustrate this point:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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6.3.3: The Basics of Argument

A Well-Defined Issue

What exactly is being argued in the paper? What is included or not included?

As a writer, it is your job to set parameters around your argument. Be sure to clearly explain the main argument of the paper. For example, if you were writing an anti-abortion paper, you might set the parameters around third trimester. This defines exactly what will be included and what will not be included. In this example, the paper is against third trimester abortions only, not abortion in general.

Compelling Evidence

What kinds of evidence are utilized in the paper? Is the evidence sound? Does it come from authoritative sources? Be sure to use reliable sources. Do not just Google the topic and grab the random information that may pop up. Google Advanced and Google Scholar help you filter some of the information, but be sure to evaluate the sources you choose. In addition, use journal articles when possible because they are usually written by authorities in a specific field. They will provide multiple sources for their information because they must cite their sources. Remember to include a variety of evidence, including facts, data, examples and subject matter expert opinion.

Much of this evidence is now accessed on the Internet. However, when using Internet sources, pay attention to the URL. What is the domain name? Is it a .edu, .net, .com, .org, .gov, .mil? How does this influence the information being provided? Also, be sure to examine further by answering the questions: Who is the author? What is the author's background?

A part of what makes your argument compelling is the variety of sources that you use and the credibility of those sources. You cannot win an argument with random information. Do not rely heavily upon a single source to carry your paper. A variety of sources shows that you have done your diligence as a writer and increases your credibility.

Refutation

Does the author anticipate the opposition's main arguments? Is the author prepared with counterarguments and compelling evidence that can persuade the opposition to adopt a different view?

Refutation or rebuttal is incredibly important to your argument. You cannot write a one-sided argument.

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

As stated earlier, it is the opposition that you are trying to convince. So, how well you handle this section of your paper will determine its effectiveness as an argument.

Persona

What is the author's attitude toward the topic? Is it hostile, sarcastic, irate, or reasonable? What kind of language and tone are being used? We touched on this when we talked about the ethical appeal. Your tone needs to be calm and reasonable. Your

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

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6.3.4: The Fallacies of Argument

Okay; your paper is filled with quality research. You're feeling good about your paper. But when you get the paper back your instructor has left a comment like, "This is an argument fallacy." So now you're left wondering what is "false" about the argument; and what is this "argument fallacy"?

Argumentative fallacies are sometimes called "logical fallacies." Usually these fallacies are created when the reasoning behind the argument lacks validity. A lack of validity weakens your argument, and then leads to a failure to provide a sufficient claim. This is a common error in argumentative papers.

These fallacies can be caused by your negligence or lack of rigor and attention while making a certain argument. In other words, a very general argument, not followed through rigorously, can end up in an "argumentative fallacy." So, never generalize; don't just say and leave—pursue your point to its logical termination.

The following section from LEO: Literacy Education Online explains some of the fallacies that can easily occur in your writing.



Figure 6.3.4.1 - *LEO: Literacy Education Online*

Logical Fallacies

When you attempt to employ logic to support claims in your papers, your reasoning is sometimes weakened because you are presenting fallacious arguments. It is important for you to be able to identify and eliminate fallacies in your writing. This section will explain and give examples of typical fallacies as divided into five major categories:

1. feelings
2. distraction from the argument
3. misinformation
4. generalization
5. irrelevant connections

The argumentation methods comprising these five categories can be used as rhetorical devices, but they must not be confused with logical thinking. Tutors can help their students to make such a distinction.

FEELINGS

Quite often, writers appeal to their audiences' feelings to attract attention to and elicit agreement with their ideas. Although this can be effective, manipulating audience feelings is not employing logic, and it does not make a writer's argument stronger. Logical thinking never involves feelings.

Appeal to Force: The writer threatens the audience, explicitly or implicitly, with negative consequences if the claim is not believed.

If you do not believe in God, you will go to hell.

Appeal to Pity: The writer begs for the approval of the claim; the audience may agree because they feel sorry for the arguer.

I cannot get a job because the public education system failed me; I have to steal to survive. It is society's fault, not mine.

Appeal to Gallery: The writer uses emotive language that will produce a desired effect on a group or "gallery" of readers. By appealing to the fears or interests of the audience, the writer hopes to gain approval.

Same-sex marriage must be prohibited, or the family structure as we know it will collapse.

Appeal to Authority: The writer cites authorities to show the validity of the claim, but the authority is not an expert in the field, the authority's view is taken out of context, or other experts of that field disagree with the authority quoted.

I think that businesses should not have to limit the amount of pollutants they release into the atmosphere because Rush Limbaugh says that there is no real evidence for industrial pollutants causing the Greenhouse Effect.



Figure 6.3.4.2 *- Photo credit: Mark Klotz via VisualHunt.com/CC BY-NC*

Old is Better: The writer relies on traditional wisdom to support the argument. This is a logical pitfall because the argument does not consider that new ideas could apply.

People have believed that fish is "brain food" for decades, so I don't believe the FDA when they claim that eating fish does not enhance the intellect.

New is Better: The writer claims that a new discovery has better effects or is more applicable to a given situation simply because it is new. However, being newer does not make an idea more correct.

Word processed papers are clearer and more error-free than typed papers because they make use of new technology.

DISTRACTION FROM THE ARGUMENT

This type of fallacy often happens when writers do not have strong support for their claims. Distraction is also used if the opposition's view is strong and logical; then, writers have a tendency to attack the context instead of the argument.

Attacking the Speaker: The writer reduces the credibility of the opposition by attacking them personally for who they are and not for what they say. The validity of logical reasoning does not depend on the morality of the speaker.

Oprah Winfrey's diet advice is useless; she has had problems with maintaining her weight for most of her life, bouncing back and forth between being overweight and slender.

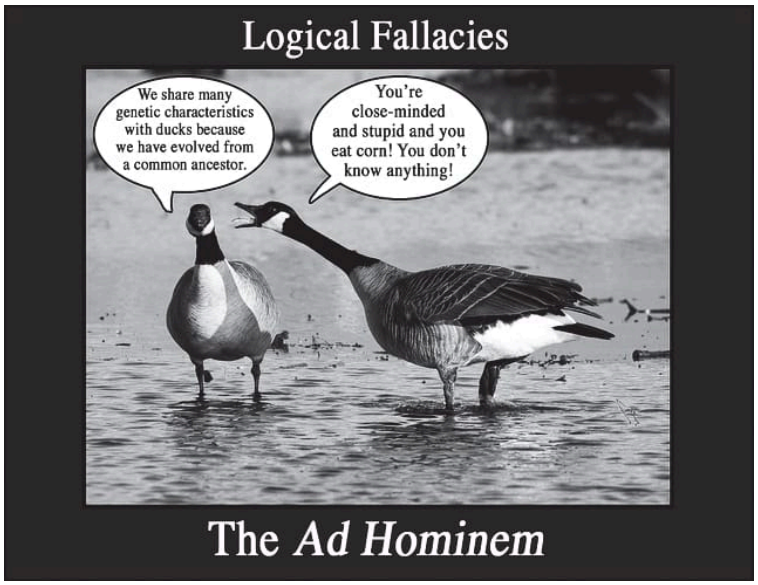


Figure 6.3.4.3 - *Photo credit: Mark Klotz via VisualHunt.com/CC BY-NC*

Irrelevant Material: The writer introduces irrelevant material to distract the audience from the subject at hand. Then, s/he draws conclusions based on the unrelated material presented.

Education is important for the future of the American people and our country. So, you should choose to study at St. Cloud State University.

Shifted Burden of Proof: The writer challenges those with an opposing view to defend their arguments; this puts the writer in a position in which s/he can deny the opposition's assertions.

The author writes that animals shouldn't be killed because they can feel pain, but he doesn't prove that they can. For his argument to persuade me, he has to give me positive empirical evidence of animals' ability to feel pain.

Straw Man: The writer does not attack the argument that the opposition sets forth. The arguer may attack one of the opposition's points as if it were the whole argument, distort what the opposition is attempting to express, or exaggerate the opposition's argument to the point of satirizing it.

Al Gore's support of the discussion of sexual orientation issues on Ellen is dangerous: he advocates the exposure of children to sexually explicit materials, which is wrong.

MISINFORMATION

Sometimes, writers present questionable or ambiguous reasons to sustain their arguments. A logical demonstration of a belief, however, must be conclusive and convincing to be effective; any doubtful premises leads the audience to believe that the conclusion is weak.

From Ignorance: The writer's argument is simply that the point has not been proven otherwise. The fact that the counterclaim has not been proven does not make a claim correct.

I believe in God because no one can prove that a god doesn't exist.

False Cause: The writer points out as the cause of an event something that is not the actual cause, or the writer has insufficient evidence for making a causal link. If the identified cause is not the real cause, nothing assures that the point of discussion is true.

Bush was "determined to knock down Saddam Hussein" because of his "nuclear bomb potential."

Note

Hussein did not have any nuclear weapons.

Questionable Premises: The writer's reasons for holding a belief are not as obvious to the audience as they are to the writer, and the writer does not back up the claim with enough support. This fallacy also occurs when the writer introduces an unsupported value judgment.

All judges are fair-minded individuals; therefore, Judge Ito is fair in his decisions.

Ambiguity of Terms/Equivocation: The writer uses two different senses of the same word in an argument, and this ambiguity allows a mistaken conclusion to be drawn by the writer.

It is immoral to kill an innocent human being. Fetuses are innocent human beings. Therefore, it is immoral to kill fetuses.

Note

In the first sentence, the writer uses "human being" in the sense of a morally considerable being. In the second, the writer could be using the term "human being" to make the less controversial claim that a fetus is a genetically human creature.

Simplifying: When restating the oppositions view, the writer mistakenly ignores information which is relevant to the conclusion reached by the opposition.

Freud argued that women have penis envy because they want to be men.

Presuppositions: The writer presupposes some information that supports his/her claim; the writer does not confirm the assumed material.

All students who study on this campus want more computers available for their use, so computer fees should be raised 50% to cover the costs of the expansion.

Hiding Information/Half Truth: The writer, consciously or unconsciously, establishes conclusions without stating all of the facts relevant to the situation.

The Geo Metro is a superior car because it averages 43 miles per gallon.

Note

The writer neglects to mention that this figure was derived in tests where the car was driven with 30 mile per hour tailwinds.

GENERALIZATION

Some writers stereotype and generalize their ideas to make a powerful statement. To construct effective logical arguments, writers must avoid generalizations; once an exception to a generalization is found, the argument that the generalization supports is discredited.

Popularity: The writer bases the argument on the belief that if an idea is held by a large group of people, it is true.

Millions of people are Marxists, so Marxist economic and political theories are correct.

Exception: The writer applies a general rule to a case where the rule is inapplicable.

A year is 365 days long, so I celebrate my birthday every 365 days.

Particular Experiences: The writer makes a rule out of particular experiences to support the claim. As soon as an exception to the derived rule is found, the rule fails to support the argument.

All Greek food causes illness; when I traveled through Greece, I got food poisoning.

Property in the Whole: The writer makes a claim based on the belief that a whole always possesses the characteristics of its parts, which is often untrue. Although this belief is sometimes acceptable, it is not universally applicable, so the appropriateness of using this idea must be determined on a case by case basis.

Since many of the students at St. Cloud State University get A's, St. Cloud State must be a top-rated school.

Property in the Parts: Often, a writer who makes the above fallacy will also commit this one. The writer erroneously assumes that because a whole has a particular property, the parts forming the whole have the same property.

IBM is a reputable organization, so all of its employees must be reputable.

False Alternative: The writer only presents some of the alternatives for solving a problem when more possibilities exist because the writer assumes that the list of alternatives created is exhaustive.

In the United States, one can vote for either Democrats or Republicans.

IRRELEVANT CONNECTIONS

Some writers' arguments fail not because of the information given, but because of the type of connections established between the parts of the argument. If the logical structures are not valid, the argument will fail, even if all of the premises are true and correct.

Consecutive Relation: The writer assumes that because two events occur consecutively or concurrently, they are causally related.

I believe in supernatural beings because every time I drive past the cemetery where my grandmother is buried, a light on my dashboard flashes. Her spirit causes this because it never happens otherwise.

Slippery Slope: The writer bases the claim on the assumption that if a particular event occurs, so will other undesirable events. However, there are no reasons to believe that the subsequent events will occur. This fallacy is usually caused by fear.

If we put limits on the right to bear arms, soon all of our Constitutionally-given rights will be taken away.

Two Wrongs Make a Right: The writer defends an action on the grounds that someone else has done something similar.

Residents of St. Cloud should not have to recycle plastics because those who live in Waite Park are not required to.

Wrong Analogy: The writer reasons by analogy, using a similar, known situation as the basis for the argument. Extended analogies tend to lose their direct connection with the actual topic of discussion, leading to erroneous conclusions.

Having a television rating system is like being in prison. Both infringe on one's rights.

Circular Reasoning: The writer defends the claim by using the conclusion as one of the premises to support the conclusion.

God exists because the Bible says so. The Bible is a reliable source because it is the word of God.

Affirmation of the Consequent: The writer uses an "If...then" statement in the argument's reasoning. Then, the writer confirms the then part of the statement and derives the "If" part, thereby committing a serious logical flaw.

If one is 16 years old or older, one can drive an automobile in Wisconsin. I saw your niece driving through Wausau yesterday. She must be at least 16.

Denial of the Antecedent: Again, the writer employs an "If...then" statement, but in this case, the writer denies the "If" part so that the negation of the then part can be concluded. However, just because the "If" part does not happen, it does not follow that the "then" part will not happen. The "then" part could result for some other reason.

If the ozone layer is destroyed, many people will get cancer and suffer from other illnesses. The ozone layer is being protected, not destroyed. So, many people will be spared the pain of cancer and other illnesses.

Sources

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6.3.5: Persuasive Writing Tips

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

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6.3.6: How to Write an Argument Essay

First, you need to determine what kind of argument you are writing. Are you writing a position paper? Sample topics would include illegal immigration, wolf protection programs, paying college athletes. Or, are you writing a solution paper, solving a problem? Sample topics include bullying, homelessness, pollution. Next, identify what you already know about this topic. Write a brief outline establishing what you want to argue on this topic. Establish the purpose of your argument. Establishing this before you start researching the topic will make it easier for you to determine what you need to cite in your paper. Next choose an appropriate format.

Organizing the Argument Essay

The two most common organization methods for the argument essay are as follows:

1. Block
2. Rebuttal Throughout - only works with pro/con topics

Block

I. Introduction & Thesis Statement
II. Background information - this section is necessary for solution arguments but sometimes unnecessary for position arguments.
   A. Define key words and terms that will help to define the parameters of your argument
   B. Provide background information. If I want to solve global warming, I first need to explain what it is and how it works, so I can show readers how my solution will fix it.
   C. Establish the severity of the problem. In real life, solutions cost money. If you want taxpayers to pay for it, you need to clearly establish that the problem is severe and must be addressed.
III. First claim: For death penalty because it will stop overcrowding
   A. Give statistics on overcrowding
   B. Give statistics on future problems if no solution is provided
   C. Explain how the process will help
   D. Explain how if appeal process is limited this will further help the situation
   E. Transition
IV. 2nd claim: For death penalty because it will stop repeat offenders
   A. Give statistics on repeat offenders who commit murder
   B. Give statistics if this is not stopped
   C. Explain how process would work if implemented
   D. Explain how this would also stop overcrowding because repeat offenders would not be imprisoned
   E. Transition
V. 3rd claim: for death penalty because it costs less money
   A. Give statistics on the cost of housing
   B. Compare that to the cost of a limited appeal process
   C. Explain how this will work if implemented
   D. Explain how this too relates to previous info
   E. Transition
VI. Rebuttal: Rebuttal of antideath penalty arguments
   A. List a few of the opposition's counterarguments (three)
   B. Take each one, one at a time, and supply statistics to prove it wrong, example would be to prove that innocent people won't be executed
   C. #2 Rebuttal: No other democracy uses it, their side, your side with statistics to prove them wrong
   D. #3 Rebuttal: Death penalty cheapens value of life: their side, your side with statistics to back it up.
   E. Transition
VII. Conclusion

Rebuttal Throughout

I. Introduction and thesis
II. First Rebuttal -Death penalty is barbaric
    A. Opposition's side
    B. Your rebuttal argument
    C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
    D. Explanation of how this will help society
    E. Transition
II. 2nd rebuttal - death penalty no other democracy
    A. Opposition's side
    B. Your rebuttal argument
    C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
    D. Explanation of how this will help society
    E. Transition
IV. 3rd rebuttal - killing innocent people
    A. Opposition's side
    B. Your rebuttal argument
    C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
    D. Explanation of how this will help society
    E. Transition
V. Conclusion

From Prewriting to Rough Draft

The argument is often the most difficult of essays for students to begin. We are many times as unsure of our positions as we are of our reasons for our positions on controversial topics. "Because that's what I believe" is only the starting point. Explaining why you believe in your position is the task of the argument. In exploring a topic for a strong argument, solid reasons and sound evidence are keys to convincing your audience of your position. The following steps should help you work through the process of moving from belief to argument.

Step One

Choose a topic that you can argue either a position or a solution. For example, to argue a position would be to argue for or against something, like the death penalty. To argue a solution is to argue how to solve something, like how to solve the air pollution problem in Phoenix.

Example: The Effects of Political Correctness on Higher Education

Step Two

On a blank sheet of paper, write your topic down and at least five reasons in support of and five reasons against your topic. Or, if you are writing a solution paper, look at least five different solutions for the problem.

Step Three

See how the pros and cons relate. Decide which you want to write about. Do you want to focus on the pros or the cons? Pick the one you feel offers the most possibilities for exploration. Or, choose the solution that seems the most logical, the most doable.

Step Four

Freewrite. Look at Chapter 1 and follow the prewriting process.

Step Five

Transform your chosen topic into a “Guiding Question” and write it down. What is the main question that your essay will answer?

Example: What are three main effects of Political Correctness on Higher Education.

Step Six

Find a variety of initial sources to help you answer your guiding question. You must use these sources in your work either in a quote, paraphrase and/or summary.

- Use database sources and web pages. Be sure and turn in copies of your resources with your final paper. Print and annotate them. And keep them handy: many instructors will not accept any paper without the sources turned in as well.
- Create a Works Cited page from your sources.

Step Seven

Now that you have gathered your information and collected new information, create an outline of your paper.

Step Eight

Answer your “Guiding Question” directly with your thesis statement.

Example: Why are literary works being banned when their overall theme is positive? Because of over-zealous proponents of Political Correctness, once celebrated literary works like Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* are being banned despite their important universal themes.

Step Nine

Check your outline. Place your thesis at the top of the outline followed by the causes and/or effects: I. II. III. Under each main point, place two main specific points that will support the general topic sentence and the thesis. Use capital letters for the specific points.

Step Ten

Write the rough draft.

Step Eleven

Revise the rough draft using the tips in Chapter 4. If your instructor schedules a peer review, be present. You may also visit your college’s writing center and work with a tutor. Revise again and edit your draft until you have a solid, well developed and unique argument.

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6.3.7: Incorporating Facts, Opinions, and Visuals to Persuade

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.

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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.

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6.3.8: Sample Professional Essays

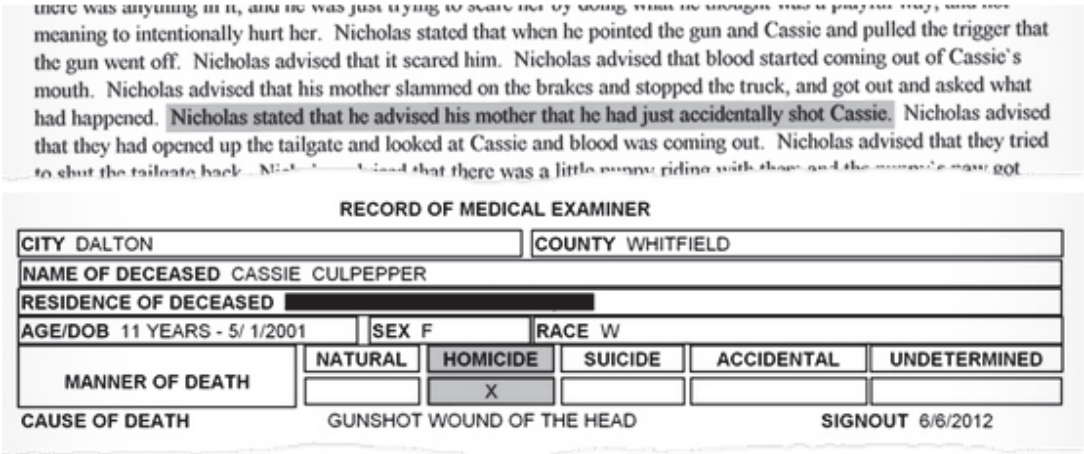
Children and Guns: The Hidden Toll

by Michael Luo and Mike McIntire

First published in The New York Times, Children and Guns: The Hidden Toll is an in-depth review of deaths and accidents involving children and guns and the gun lobby surrounding the tracking and reporting of these deaths. Michael Luo has worked at The New York Times since 2003. He leads a team of metro reporters focused on investigations and long-form narratives. In 2016, his reporters were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in three categories: investigative reporting, local reporting and feature writing. Team member Mike McIntire is an award-winning investigative reporter and editor. He teaches investigative reporting at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.

The .45-caliber pistol that killed Lucas Heagren, 3, on Memorial Day last year at his Ohio home had been temporarily hidden under the couch by his father. But Lucas found it and shot himself through the right eye. "It's bad," his mother told the 911 dispatcher. "It's really bad."

A few days later in Georgia, Cassie Culpepper, 11, was riding in the back of a pickup with her 12-year-old brother and two other children. Her brother started playing with a pistol his father had lent him to scare coyotes. Believing he had removed all the bullets, he pointed the pistol at his sister and squeezed the trigger. It fired, and blood poured from Cassie's mouth.



there was anything in it, and he was just trying to scare her by doing what he thought was a playful way, and not meaning to intentionally hurt her. Nicholas stated that when he pointed the gun and Cassie and pulled the trigger that the gun went off. Nicholas advised that it scared him. Nicholas advised that blood started coming out of Cassie's mouth. Nicholas advised that his mother slammed on the brakes and stopped the truck, and got out and asked what had happened. Nicholas stated that he advised his mother that he had just accidentally shot Cassie. Nicholas advised that they had opened up the tailgate and looked at Cassie and blood was coming out. Nicholas advised that they tried to shut the tailgate back. Nicholas advised that there was a little puppy riding with them and the puppy's paw got

RECORD OF MEDICAL EXAMINER

CITY DALTON			COUNTY WHITFIELD		
NAME OF DECEASED CASSIE CULPEPPER					
RESIDENCE OF DECEASED [redacted]					
AGE/DOB 11 YEARS - 5/ 1/2001	SEX F		RACE W		
MANNER OF DEATH	NATURAL	HOMICIDE	SUICIDE	ACCIDENTAL	UNDETERMINED
		X			
CAUSE OF DEATH	GUNSHOT WOUND OF THE HEAD		SIGNOUT 6/6/2012		

The police investigation report in the Cassie Culpepper case indicates that her brother, Nicholas, shot her accidentally. But the state medical examiner classified her death as a homicide, a common practice for unintentional firearm deaths in which one person shoots another.

Just a few weeks earlier, in Houston, a group of youths found a Glock pistol in an apartment closet while searching for snack money. A 15-year-old boy was handling the gun when it went off. Alex Whitfield, who had just turned 11, was struck. A relative found the bullet in his ashes from the funeral home.

Cases like these are among the most gut-wrenching of gun deaths. Children shot accidentally — usually by other children — are collateral casualties of the accessibility of guns in America, their deaths all the more devastating for being eminently preventable.

They die in the households of police officers and drug dealers, in broken homes and closeknit families, on rural farms and in city apartments. Some adults whose guns were used had tried to store them safely; others were grossly negligent. Still others pulled the trigger themselves, accidentally fracturing their own families while cleaning a pistol or hunting.

And there are far more of these innocent victims than official records show.

A New York Times review of hundreds of child firearm deaths found that accidental shootings occurred roughly twice as often as the records indicate, because of idiosyncrasies in how such deaths are classified by the authorities. The killings of Lucas, Cassie

and Alex, for instance, were not recorded as accidents. Nor were more than half of the 259 accidental firearm deaths of children under age 15 identified by The Times in eight states where records were available.

As a result, scores of accidental killings are not reflected in the official statistics that have framed the debate over how to protect children from guns.

The National Rifle Association cited the lower official numbers this year in a fact sheet opposing “safe storage” laws, saying children were more likely to be killed by falls, poisoning or environmental factors — an incorrect assertion if the actual number of accidental firearm deaths is significantly higher.

In all, fewer than 20 states have enacted laws to hold adults criminally liable if they fail to store guns safely, enabling children to access them.

Legislative and other efforts to promote the development of childproof weapons using “smart gun” technology have similarly stalled. Technical issues have been an obstacle, but so have N.R.A. arguments that the problem is relatively insignificant and the technology unneeded.

Because of maneuvering in Congress by the gun lobby and its allies, firearms have also been exempted from regulation by the Consumer Product Safety Commission since its inception.

Even with a proper count, intentional shooting deaths of children — including gang shootings and murder-suicides by family members — far exceed accidental gun deaths. But accidents, more than the other firearm-related deaths, come with endless hypotheticals about what could have been done differently.

The rifle association’s lobbying arm recently posted on its Web site a claim that adult criminals who mishandle firearms — as opposed to law-abiding gun owners — are responsible for most fatal accidents involving children. But The Times’s review found that a vast majority of cases revolved around children’s access to firearms, with the shooting either self-inflicted or done by another child.

A common theme in the cases examined by The Times, in fact, was the almost magnetic attraction of firearms among boys. In all but a handful of instances, the shooter was male. Boys also accounted for more than 80 percent of the victims.

Time and again, boys could not resist handling a gun, disregarding repeated warnings by adults and, sometimes, their own sense that they were doing something wrong.

When Joshua Skorczewski, 11, took an unloaded 20-gauge shotgun out of the family gun cabinet in western Minnesota on July 28, 2008, it was because he was excited about going to a gun safety class that night and wanted to practice.

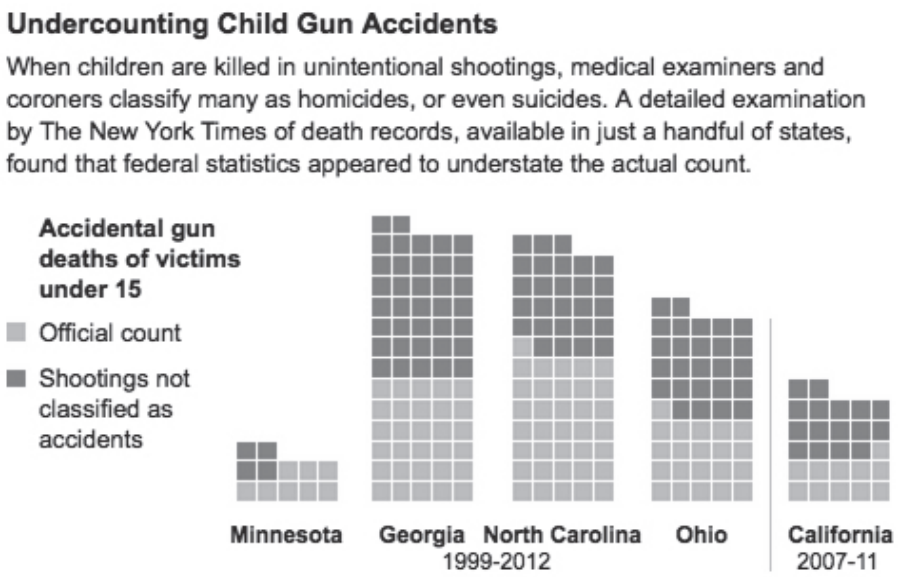
But for reasons that he later struggled to explain to the police, Joshua loaded a single shell into the gun and pulled the hammer back. He decided he should put the gun back, but his finger slipped. It fired, killing his 12-year-old sister, Natasha, who was standing in the kitchen with him. When his mother called from work to check on them, a shaken Joshua told her he had just called 911: “Mom, I shot Tasha.”

Christina Wenzel, the mother of Alex Whitfield, had tried to make sure he did not visit anyone’s house if guns were present. What she did not know, when Alex went to his father’s apartment last April, was that a family member had stored three loaded guns there.

“I always thought I had Alex protected from being killed by another child by a gun that was not secured,” Ms. Wenzel said. “Unfortunately, I was mistaken.”

Undercounting Deaths

Compiling a complete census of accidental gun deaths of children is difficult, because most states do not consider death certificate data a matter of public record. In a handful of states, however, the information is publicly available. Using these death records as a guide, along with hundreds of medical examiner and coroner reports and police investigative files, The Times sought to identify every accidental firearm death of a child age 14 and under in Georgia, Minnesota, North Carolina and Ohio dating to 1999, and in California to 2007. Records were also obtained from several county medical examiners’ offices in Florida, Illinois and Texas.



The goal, in the end, was an in-depth portrait of accidental firearm deaths of children, one that would shed light on how such killings occur and might be prevented. In all, The Times cataloged 259 gun accidents that killed children ages 14 and younger. The youngest was just 9 months old, shot in his crib.

In four of the five states — California, Georgia, North Carolina and Ohio — The Times identified roughly twice as many accidental killings as were tallied in the corresponding federal data. In the fifth, Minnesota, there were 50 percent more accidental gun deaths. (The Times excluded some fatal shootings, like pellet gun accidents, that are normally included in the federal statistics.)

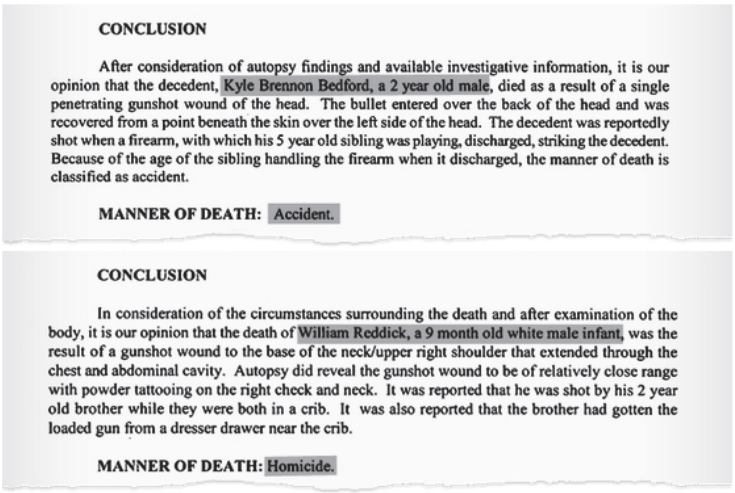
The undercount stems from the peculiarities by which medical examiners and coroners make their “manner of death” rulings. These pronouncements, along with other information entered on death certificates, are the basis for the nation’s mortality statistics, which are assembled by the National Center for Health Statistics, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Choosing among five options — homicide, accidental, suicide, natural or undetermined — most medical examiners and coroners simply call any death in which one person shoots another a homicide.

“A homicide just means they died at the hands of another,” said Dr. Randy L. Hanzlick, the chief medical examiner for Fulton County, Ga. “It doesn’t really connote there’s an intent to kill.”

These rulings can be wildly inconsistent.

In Bexar County, Tex., for example, the medical examiner’s office issued a finding of homicide in the death of William Reddick, a 9-month-old who was accidentally killed on May 17, 1999, when his 2- year-old brother opened a dresser drawer while in the crib with him, grabbed a pistol and pulled the trigger.

But the next year, when Kyle Bedford, 2, was killed by his 5-year-old brother, who had found a gun on a closet shelf, the same office classified the death as an accident.



CONCLUSION

After consideration of autopsy findings and available investigative information, it is our opinion that the decedent, Kyle Brennon Bedford, a 2 year old male, died as a result of a single penetrating gunshot wound of the head. The bullet entered over the back of the head and was recovered from a point beneath the skin over the left side of the head. The decedent was reportedly shot when a firearm, with which his 5 year old sibling was playing, discharged, striking the decedent. Because of the age of the sibling handling the firearm when it discharged, the manner of death is classified as accident.

MANNER OF DEATH: Accident.

CONCLUSION

In consideration of the circumstances surrounding the death and after examination of the body, it is our opinion that the death of William Reddick, a 9 month old white male infant, was the result of a gunshot wound to the base of the neck/upper right shoulder that extended through the chest and abdominal cavity. Autopsy did reveal the gunshot wound to be of relatively close range with powder tattooing on the right check and neck. It was reported that he was shot by his 2 year old brother while they were both in a crib. It was also reported that the brother had gotten the loaded gun from a dresser drawer near the crib.

MANNER OF DEATH: Homicide.

The circumstances behind the accidental shooting deaths of Kyle Bedford and William Reddick were similar. But the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office ruled one was a homicide and the other was an accident, highlighting just how inconsistent these pronouncements can be.

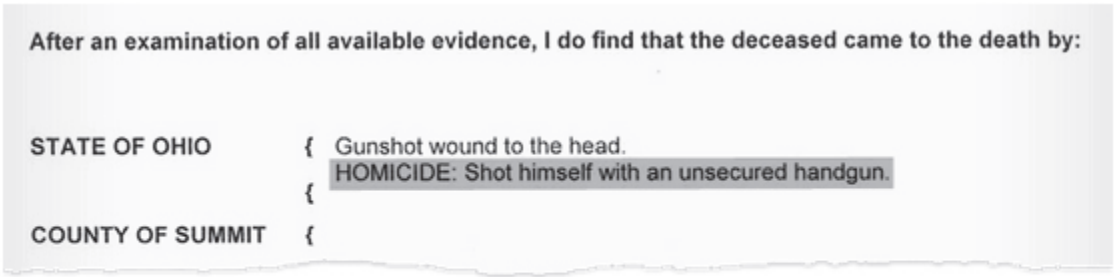
Even self-inflicted shootings that are clearly accidental, like that of Lucas Heagren in Ohio, can wind up classified as homicides.

Lucas's father, Joshua Heagren, had tried to teach the 3-year-old to respect firearms. The boy had gotten a .22 rifle for Christmas, and his father showed him how to fire it. But he also warned him to handle it only when an adult was present.

"He never even attempted to touch guns when Josh wasn't around," Lucas's mother, Kaitlin Campbell, testified at Mr. Heagren's trial, where he was convicted of negligent homicide and endangering children. "He knew."

On the day of the accident, Mr. Heagren had been planning to go out shooting, so he took his pistol from the bedroom, where he normally kept it in a holster between the mattress and the box spring, according to his court testimony. When Ms. Campbell and Lucas returned from buying an inflatable swimming pool, Mr. Heagren slid his gun under the couch before heading outside to set up the pool.

At some point, with his mother distracted by her phone a few steps away, Lucas discovered the gun, grabbed the butt and squeezed the trigger with his thumbs, according to the authorities.



After an examination of all available evidence, I do find that the deceased came to the death by:

STATE OF OHIO { Gunshot wound to the head.
HOMICIDE: Shot himself with an unsecured handgun.
{
COUNTY OF SUMMIT {

Even cases in which children accidentally shoot themselves can wind up being classified as homicides, as shown in this Summit County Medical Examiner's report on the death of Lucas Heagren.

"Our thought process was, parents have a duty to keep their child safe," said Dr. Lisa Kohler, the Summit County medical examiner, whose office classified the case as a homicide. "Leaving a loaded weapon in an area where the child can easily access it is neglect in our mind. Therefore parents have failed to keep a child safe, and therefore it's a homicide."

Dr. Kohler said that because of the neglect issue, her office would almost never classify a firearm-related death as accidental, but added, "Different jurisdictions are going to handle things differently."

Bob Anderson, the chief of the mortality statistics branch at the National Center for Health Statistics, explained that the federal data on firearm deaths are "only as good as the information that comes in."

“I try to tell people when they look at the accidental data, particularly for children, you have to recognize it’s an underestimate,” he said.

A few public health researchers have noted the undercount in the past, based on their own academic studies. (One study found the opposite phenomenon — an overcount — among fatal gun accidents involving adults because of a different quirk in the data.) To get more accurate information about firearm deaths, researchers have pushed for the expansion of the National Violent Death Reporting System.

The effort first started in the 1990s at the C.D.C. but was shut down shortly afterward when Congress, at the urging of the N.R.A., blocked firearms-related research at the centers. The project was revived in 2002 after researchers decided to expand its scope beyond guns, but it is up and running in only 18 states. President Obama has called for increased financing for the program, part of a package of gun-related proposals made after the school shooting in Newtown, Conn., last December.

Another important aspect of firearm accidents is that a vast majority of victims do not die. Tracking these injuries nationally, however, is arguably just as problematic as tallying fatalities, according to public health researchers. In fact, national figures often cited from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Web site are an estimate, projected from a sampling taken from hospital emergency departments. Nevertheless, in 2011, the most recent year with available data, the agency estimated that there were 847 unintentional nonfatal firearm injuries among children 14 and under.

More concrete are actual counts of emergency department visits, which are available in a small number of states. In North Carolina, for instance, there were more than 120 such visits for nonfatal gun accidents among children 17 and under in 2010, the most recent year for which data is available.

A Failed Lock

On a hot and humid August afternoon last year in Hinesville, Ga., Matthew Underhill, a staff sergeant in the Army, was mowing the lawn while his wife, Tessa, was in the house watching television with their 5-year-old son, Matthew. Their other son, Tristan, 2, was scampering down a hallway toward the bedrooms.

It had been a good day for Tristan. He had used the potty for the first time. He and his mother had danced a little jig. Down the hall, Tristan entered the bedroom where his father had been staying because of quarrels with his wife. She had chided her husband in the past for forgetting to safely store his .45-caliber handgun. But he had recently put a lock on his door to keep out his wife and children. He thought he had locked the door before going out to cut the grass.

The lock, though, had failed to catch. Tristan found the loaded gun under the pillow on his father’s bed. He pointed it at his own forehead and pulled the trigger. Hearing the gunshot, Sergeant Underhill sprinted inside to find Tristan face down on the bed, the gun beneath him. When he called 911, the sergeant was screaming so hysterically that the dispatcher initially mistook him for a woman.

“My 2-year-old just shot himself in the head,” he said breathlessly. “He’s dead.”

Tristan’s death underscored several themes running through the cases examined by The Times.

While about 60 percent of the accidental firearm deaths identified by The Times involved handguns as opposed to long guns, that number was much higher — more than 85 percent — when the victims were very young, under the age of 6. In fact, the average handgun victim was several years younger than long gun victims: between 7 and 8, compared with almost 11.

Over all, the largest number of deaths came at the upper end of the age range, with ages 13 and 14 being most common — not necessarily surprising, given that parents generally allow adolescents greater access to guns. But the third-most common age was 3 (tied with 12), a particularly vulnerable age, when children are curious and old enough to manipulate a firearm but ignorant of the dangers.

About a quarter of the victims shot themselves, with younger children again especially susceptible. More than half of the self-inflicted shootings involved children 5 or under; the most common age was 3.

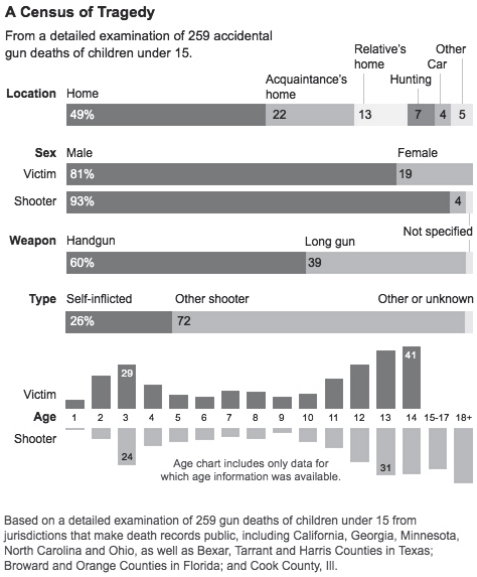
About half of the accidents took place inside the child’s home. A third, however, occurred at the house of a friend or a relative, pointing to a potential vulnerability if safe-storage laws apply only to households with children, as in North Carolina.

In opposing safe-storage laws, some gun rights advocates have argued that a majority of accidental shootings of children are

committed by adults with criminal backgrounds. The Times's review found that was not the case — children were most often the shooters — and that the families involved came from all walks of life.

On Dec. 1, 2006, Beth Dwyer was getting her two boys, ages 5 and 8, ready for school. Her husband, Daron, the minister of music at the family's church in Gastonia, N.C., was not home because he had enrolled in a seminary several hours away. The night before, Ms. Dwyer had taken the family's .25-caliber handgun from the top drawer of a dresser and placed it next to her on the bed. In the morning, she forgot to put it away.

Her 8-year-old found the gun. He initially tried to cock it and pulled the trigger, pointing the gun at the bathroom floor, but nothing happened, according to the medical examiner's report. Evidently thinking the gun was empty, he tried again, pointing the gun at his brother, Matthew, who was crouched on the bathroom counter, having just finished brushing his teeth. This time, with a live round in the chamber, the gun went off, and Matthew toppled to the floor, shot through the forehead.



Even in accidental shootings where criminals were in some way involved, they usually were not the ones pulling the trigger. Rather, they — like many law-abiding adults in these cases — simply left a gun unsecured.

As a felon, Anthony Wise was not supposed to have a firearm. But he was able to buy a .38 Special revolver on the street for $30. He had it in his ex-girlfriend's apartment in Venice, Ill., on Jan. 29, 2007, when he left it next to a computer in the living room and went to another room. Within minutes, a 4-year-old boy, one of several small children in the apartment, picked up the gun and pointed it at his 2-year-old cousin, Timberlyn Terrell. The gun fired. The boy later told an investigator what happened next.

"Blood came out of her forehead," the boy said, according to a transcript of the interview. He then said he did not want to talk about it anymore and asked for "my mama."

Timberlyn died. Mr. Wise was convicted of felony firearm possession, but his 10-year federal prison sentence was based in part on the judge's determination that he had also endangered a child with his negligence.

"Wise would have been a felon in possession even had he possessed the gun in a more responsible way — say, if he had kept it unloaded in a locked cabinet, or if he had kept it unloaded with a trigger lock," an appellate judge wrote in rejecting his bid for leniency. "More than likely, though, responsible possession would not have endangered the lives of children."

Safety vs. Self-Defense

The impact of the undercount of accidental gun deaths emerges in stark relief in the statehouse battles over gun-storage laws.

In state after state and often with considerable success, gun rights groups have cited the federal numbers as proof that the problem is nearly inconsequential and that storage laws are unnecessary. Gun Owners of America says on its Web site that children are "130 percent more likely to die from choking on their dinner" than from accidental shootings.

In February 2012, the rifle association issued a member alert about a proposed safe-storage law in Washington State, arguing that shootings are “at the bottom of the list of causes of accidental harm to children.” The group accused State Senator Adam Kline, who introduced the measure, of being interested only in “making life miserable for law-abiding gun owners.” The legislation never made it out of committee.

Under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention figures, in fact, gun accidents were the ninth-leading cause of unintentional deaths among children ages 1 to 14 in 2010. (The agency reported 62 such killings that year.) If the actual numbers are, in fact, roughly double, however, gun accidents would rise into the top five or six.

Gun rights groups have certainly called on gun owners to safely store their firearms. The National Shooting Sports Foundation says that it has distributed 36 million free firearm safety kits and that manufacturers have shipped 60 million locks with guns sold since 1998. But the groups argue that requiring gun owners to lock up their weapons could make it harder to use them for self-protection.

The rifle association and its allies also often note that studies on the impact of safe-storage laws have found mixed results. But those studies are based on the flawed government statistics.

“When we’re evaluating child access laws, we’re using total trash data,” said Catherine Barber, a researcher at the Injury Control Research Center of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Getting a definitive count of the number of states with a safe-storage law is difficult, but The Times identified only 18, using information from the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and researchers who have studied the laws. And in most of those states, charges can be brought only if the child uses the weapon in a threatening manner, injures someone with it or displays it in public.

Even so, in one state, North Carolina, where the law is narrowly drawn to apply only to adults with minors living at home, the authorities charged about 150 people between June 2006 and June 2011, an analysis of court records shows.

Jodi Sandoval of Ohio discovered the limits of her state’s laws after her 14-year-old son, Noah McGuire, was accidentally killed on July 5, 2012, in a suburb of Columbus.

Noah had slept over at the home of his close friend Levi Reed, who lived with his grandparents. In the morning, with no adults around, the boys went looking for a lighter to set off some fireworks. Instead, they found a .45-caliber handgun behind a television in a bedroom, one of three guns that Levi’s grandfather later told the police he had kept there for protection.

Though his grandfather had always admonished him never to handle the weapons, Levi, 14, removed the magazine, pointed the gun at his friend and pulled the trigger. He did not realize that a round had remained in the chamber.

Levi was recently sentenced in juvenile court to 12 months of probation for reckless homicide, a felony. Ms. Sandoval strongly opposed the prosecution, telling the court at Levi’s sentencing that the adults who failed to properly secure the gun were the ones who should be punished. But there is no safe-storage law in Ohio.

“There are no accidents,” Ms. Sandoval said. “There are simply irresponsible, stubborn, cowardly adults unwilling to stand up against the gun lobby and those who support it.”

A safe-storage bill was introduced in the Ohio legislature in February, prompted by a shooting that killed three students at a high school in suburban Cleveland. But the measure, which would prohibit storing a firearm in a residence in a place readily accessible to a child, has encountered skepticism from the Republicans who control the legislature.

“The tenor was, somebody breaks in, do I have time enough to get to my gun?” said State Representative Bill Patmon, a Democrat who introduced the bill.

A similar measure introduced in Louisiana this year also went nowhere.

The N.R.A. has long argued that better education is the key to preventing gun accidents, citing its Eddie Eagle GunSafe program, which teaches children as young as 3 that if they see a gun, they should “stop, don’t touch, leave the area and tell an adult.” The association, which did not respond to a request for comment, says its program has reached more than 26 million children in all 50 states and should be credited for the deep decline in accidental gun deaths shown in federal statistics dating to the mid-1980s.

Beyond the unreliability of the federal data, public health experts have disputed the N.R.A.’s claims, pointing to other potential

explanations for the decline, including improvements in emergency medical care, along with data showing fewer households with firearms. They also highlight research indicating that admonishing children to stay away from guns is often ineffective.

“I have no problem with that message, and I would hope every child in America could follow it,” said Dr. Arthur Kellermann, a co-author of a study published in 2001 in the journal Pediatrics. “I just know that they won’t.”

As part of Dr. Kellermann’s study, researchers watched through a one-way mirror as pairs of boys ages 8 to 12 were left alone in an examination room at a clinic in Atlanta. Unknown to the children, an inoperative .38-caliber handgun was concealed in a cabinet drawer.

Playing and exploring over the next 15 minutes, one boy after another — three-quarters of the 64 children — found the gun. Two-thirds handled it, and one-third actually pulled the trigger. Just one child went to tell an adult about the gun, and he was teased by his peers for it. More than 90 percent of the boys said they had had some gun safety instruction.

Other research has found that simply having a firearm in the household is correlated with an increased risk of accidental shooting death. In one study, published in 2003 in the journal Accident Analysis and Prevention, the risk was more than three times as high for one gun, and almost four times as high for more than one.

As a solution, many behavioral researchers advocate greater emphasis on child-proofing firearms, along with safe-storage laws. But requiring, or even encouraging, efforts to introduce “smart gun” technology remains unpopular with the gun lobby, which has worked to undermine such research and attempts to regulate firearms as a dangerous consumer product.

In 2000, after President Bill Clinton proposed spending $10 million to help develop a gun that could be fired only by its owner, the rifle association ran derisory radio ads. One, called “Mad Scientist,” featured a Clinton impersonator and a bumbling scientist “deep in the White House laboratory,” trying in vain to get the new technology to work.

A commercially successful smart gun has, in fact, proved difficult to develop. Hurdles include creating fail-safe user-recognition technology, integrating delicate electronic components that can withstand shock from repeated firings, and allaying concerns of manufacturers fearful of liability if a supposedly safe gun was to fail.

Technologies exist, but a lack of research financing has hobbled their progress to the market, as have questions about whether consumers would actually want them. The opposition from gun rights advocates has certainly not helped. Some gun control advocates, meanwhile, fear that such technologies would lead to greater acceptance of firearms in the home.

In the mid-2000s, an Australian defense technology company called Metal Storm teamed with the gun maker Taurus International Manufacturing and the New Jersey Institute of Technology to develop a gun in the United States that would have fired only when gripped by its owner. New Jersey became the first state to require that handguns use smart-gun technology within three years after it is deemed safe and commercially available.

But Taurus backed out within a few months, citing competing priorities, and the project fell apart. Charles Vehlow, Metal Storm’s chief executive at the time, said that while he did not know exactly what pressures Taurus faced, there was a general wariness of smart-gun efforts among manufacturers and pro-gun groups.

“There was no question that the N.R.A. was very sensitive and was aware of what we were doing,” he said.

The Colt’s Manufacturing Company and Smith & Wesson experienced a backlash against their own smart-gun programs, which were abandoned amid financial problems caused, in part, by boycotts from gun groups and others in the industry. So unpopular was the whole smart-gun concept that Colt’s Manufacturing later could not even find a buyer for its patents, said Carlton Chen, a former lawyer for the company.

“I think people looked at Colt’s, they looked at the boycott and they looked at Smith & Wesson, and they thought, ‘Do we really want to go it alone?’ ” Mr. Chen said. “Gun companies have to be fairly careful about what they do.”

Gun rights lobbyists have also helped keep firearms and ammunition beyond the reach of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which has the power to regulate other products that are dangerous to children. The N.R.A. argues that the commission would provide a back door for gun control advocates to restrict the manufacture of firearms. Proponents of regulation say guns pose too great a hazard to exclude them from scrutiny.

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A Complex Relationship

A few months ago, Daron Dwyer took his 14-year-old son shooting for the first time, six years after he accidentally killed his brother with the gun he found in his parents' North Carolina bedroom.

Mr. Dwyer had removed all the guns from the house, sending them to his father. But about a year ago, his son started asking if he could learn to shoot. Mr. Dwyer said he would think about it.

It was a question that Mr. Dwyer, who now works as a fitness director at a Y.M.C.A., knew would come. Relatives would often go shooting together during family gatherings. His son was fascinated by all things military. Guns were simply a part of life where they were from. "In my context, there's a part of a young man's growing-up experience that includes exposure to firearms," Mr. Dwyer said. "That's one of the responsibilities, like learning how to drive a car."

Mr. Dwyer also saw an opportunity for forgiveness. "It's kind of a tangible expression of the reality of 'I do not hold this against you,' " he said.

So, alone in the Tennessee woods with his son this past spring, Mr. Dwyer watched him fire a .22 rifle a few times, and a 12-gauge shotgun. In the shattering of the stillness of the forest clearing, both sensed the import of the moment.

"I'm a quietly emotional person usually," Mr. Dwyer said. "And so I didn't burst into tears or anything, but inside that's exactly what it was, mostly in the sense of me wanting him to realize this whole thing of forgiveness, to really feel the impact of the weight lifted, which I think he did."

Mr. Dwyer's feelings on guns today are complicated. He still firmly believes in "the right for people to defend themselves." At the same time, he said: "It is also right to protect children from danger. Those are things you have to hold in tension."

Under North Carolina law, his wife could have been charged for failing to keep the gun that killed their younger son stored safely. But she was not. Mr. Dwyer described her mistake as a momentary mental lapse, not blatant negligence. And he said that while he agreed with the law in principle, he also had sympathy for the objections to it.

"For defense at night," he said, "I don't think you should have to have a lock on it because you're going to have to access it quickly."

The deep hold that guns have on American culture also emerges in interviews with several other parents who lost children to firearms accidents.

In the summer of 2009, Joshua Skorczewski finally completed the gun safety classes he had been planning to attend a year before, the night he accidentally killed his sister in Minnesota. His parents thought that it would be good for him to be schooled on safety, that the training would be helpful, "so he would not be afraid of guns," said his mother, Wendy Skorczewski.

Ms. Skorczewski had once planned to go through the classes too, but later decided against it. "I don't want nothing to do with them anymore," she said.

For two years after Joshua went through the training, the family's rifles and shotguns remained locked away. Joshua and his father returned to bowhunting, but it was not until 2011 that they took out the shotguns again to hunt pheasants.

Ms. Skorczewski explained that in her part of the country, hunting is "in your blood." She knew she could not ask her husband to get rid of his guns. He needs the escape that hunting provides, she said: "You got to have something to do in your life other than work."

Tessa Underhill, whose son Tristan was killed last year in Georgia, has also struggled over where to draw the line. As a former corrections officer and Army veteran, she is no stranger to firearms. She used to enjoy going out shooting. Now she is finished with guns, refusing to allow them in her house.

"My child living is more important to me than somebody stealing my flat screen," she said.

She knows, however, that her husband, whom she is in the process of divorcing, still has a rifle. Her other son, Matthew, now 6, is therefore still exposed to firearms. When asked if she would want Matthew to go shooting with his father one day or be a gun owner himself, she paused.

“That’s a hard question,” she said. “I know that’s something men do, that fathers and sons do.” “

“You need to know how to use one,” she added. “Do I want him to have a gun case full of guns? If he keeps them unloaded and is safe about it.”

Griff Palmer contributed reporting

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations, and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. At the beginning of the article, the authors use three examples of gun accidents involving children. What purpose do these stories serve?
2. What is the main reason tracking gun accidents accurately is a problem? What is a secondary reason?
3. What are two examples of safe-storage laws being considered and **why** are they opposed by **which** groups?
4. What are some of the authors’ most compelling statistics?
5. Is this a biased article? Explain your answer.

Death and Justice

by Edward I. Koch

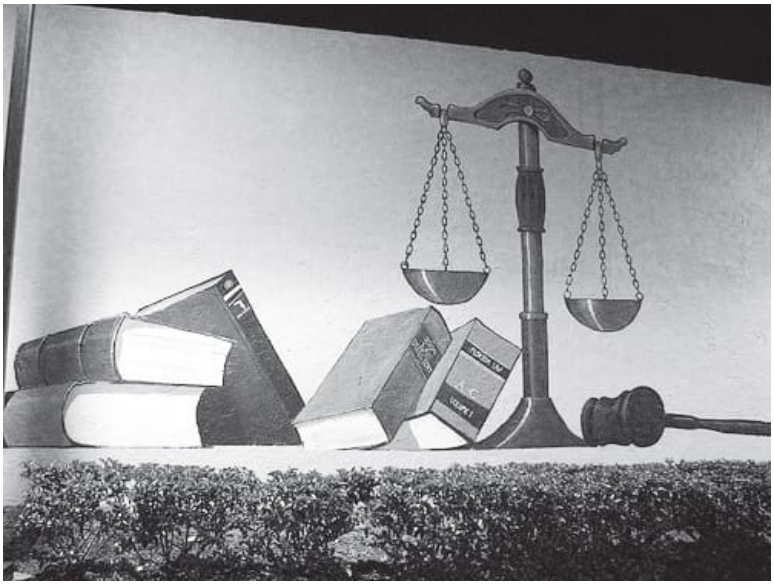


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Following a stint in the U.S. House of Representatives, controversial and outspoken Edward I. Koch (1924-) served as mayor of New York City from 1977 to 1989. He was elected after campaigning on an anti-crime and anti-spending platform. Koch, who now presides over a popular TV courtroom show, has written two autobiographical books, Mayor (1984) and Politics (1985). He also co-authored the book His Eminence and Hizzoner (1989) with the equally controversial John Cardinal O’Connor. The following essay was published in the New Republic in 1985.

Last December [1984] a man named Robert Lee Willie, who had been convicted of raping and murdering an 18-year-old woman, was executed in the Louisiana state prison. In a statement issued several minutes before his death, Mr. Willie said: “Killing people

is wrong...It makes no difference whether it's citizens, countries, or governments. Killing is wrong." Two weeks later in South Carolina, an admitted killer named Joseph Carl Shaw was put to death for murdering two teenagers. In an appeal to the governor for clemency, Mr. Shaw wrote: "Killing is wrong when I did it. Killing is wrong when you do it. I hope you have the courage and moral strength to stop the killing."

It is a curiosity of modern life that we find ourselves being lectured on morality by cold-blooded killers. Mr. Willie previously had been convicted of aggravated rape, aggravated kidnapping, and the murders of a Louisiana deputy and a man from Missouri. Mr. Shaw committed another murder a week before the two for which he was executed, and admitted mutilating the body of the 14-year-old girl he killed. I can't help wondering what prompted these murderers to speak out against killing as they entered the death-house door. Did their newfound reverence for life stem from the realization that they were about to lose their own?

Life is indeed precious, and I believe the death penalty helps to affirm this fact. Had the death penalty been a real possibility in the minds of these murderers, they might well have stayed their hand. They might have shown moral awareness before their victims died, and not after. Consider the tragic death of Rosa Velez, who happened to be home when a man named Luis Vera burglarized her apartment in Brooklyn. "Yeah, I show her," Vera admitted. "She knew me, and I knew I wouldn't go to the chair."

During my 22 years in public service, I have heard the pros and cons of capital punishment expressed with special intensity. As a district leader, councilman, congressman, and mayor, I have represented constituencies generally thought of as liberal. Because I support the death penalty for heinous crimes of murder, I have sometimes been the subject of emotional and outraged attacks by voters who find my position reprehensible or worse. I have listened to their ideas. I have weighed their objections carefully. I still support the death penalty. The reasons I maintained my position can be best understood by examining the arguments most frequently heard in opposition.

1. The death penalty is "barbaric." Sometimes opponents of capital punishment horrify us with tales of lingering death on the gallows, of faulty electric chairs, or of agony in the gas chamber. Partly in response to such protests, several states such as North Carolina and Texas switched to execution by lethal injection. The condemned person is put to death painlessly, without ropes, voltage, bullets, or gas. Did this answer the objections of death penalty opponents? Of course not. On June 22, 1984, the New York Times published an editorial that sarcastically attacked the new "hygienic" method of death by injection, and stated that "execution can never be made humane through science." So it's not the method that really troubles opponents. It's the death itself they consider barbaric.

Admittedly, capital punishment is not a pleasant topic. However, one does not have to like the death penalty in order to support it any more than one must like radical surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy in order to find necessary these attempts at curing cancer. Ultimately we may learn how to cure cancer with a simple pill. Unfortunately, that day has not yet arrived. Today we are faced with the choice of letting the cancer spread or trying to cure it with the methods available, methods that one day will almost certainly be considered barbaric. But to give up and do nothing would be far more barbaric and would certainly delay the discovery of an eventual cure. The analogy between cancer and murder is imperfect, because murder is not the "disease" we are trying to cure. The disease is injustice. We may not like the death penalty, but it must be available to punish crimes of coldblooded murder, cases in which any other form of punishment would be inadequate and, therefore, unjust. If we create a society in which injustice is not tolerated, incidents of murder – the most flagrant form of injustice – will diminish.

2. No other major democracy uses the death penalty. No other major democracy – in fact, few other countries of any description – are plagued by a murder rate such as that in the United States. Fewer and fewer Americans can remember the days when unlocked doors were the norm and murder was a rare and terrible offense. In American the murder rate climbed 122 percent between 1963 and 1980. During that same period, the murder rate in New York City increased by almost 400 percent, and the statistics are even worse in many other cities. A study at M.I.T. showed that based on 1970 homicide rates a person who lived in a large American city ran a greater risk of being murdered than an American soldier in World War II ran of being killed in combat. It is not surprising that the laws of each country differ according to differing conditions and traditions. If other countries had our murder problem, the cry for capital punishment would be just as loud as it is here. And I daresay that any other major democracy where 75 percent of the people supported the death penalty would soon enact it into law.

3. An innocent person might be executed by mistake. Consider the work of Adam Bedau, one of the most implacable foes of capital punishment in this country. According to Mr. Bedau, it is "false sentimentality to argue that the death penalty should be abolished because of the abstract possibility that an innocent person might be executed." He cites a study of the 7,000 executions in this country from 1893 to 1971, and concludes that the record fails to show that such cases occur. The main point, however, is this. If government functioned only when the possibility of error didn't exist, government wouldn't function at all. Human life deserves special protection, and one of the best ways to guarantee that protection is to assure that convicted murderers do not kill again. Only the death penalty can accomplish this end. In a recent case in New Jersey, a man named Richard Biegenwald was freed from prison after serving 18 years for murder; since his release he has been convicted of committing four

murders. A prisoner named Lemuel Smith, while serving four life sentences for murder (plus two life sentences for kidnapping and robbery) in New York's Green Haven Prison, lured a woman corrections officer into the chaplain's office and strangled her. He then mutilated and dismembered her body. An additional life sentence for Smith is meaningless. Because New York has no death penalty statue, Smith has effectively been given a license to kill.

But the problem of multiple murder is not confined to the nation's penitentiaries. In 1981, 91 police officers were killed in the line of duty in this country. Seven percent of those arrested in the cases that have been solved had a previous arrest for murder. In New York City in 1976 and 1977, 85 persons arrested for homicide had a previous arrest for murder. Six of these individuals had two previous arrests for murder, and one had four previous murder arrests. During those two years the New York police were arresting for murder persons with a previous arrest for murder on the average of one every 8.5 days. This is not surprising when we learn that in 1975, for example, the median time served in Massachusetts for homicide was less than two and a half years. In 1976 a study sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund found that the average time served in the United States for first degree murder is ten years. The median time served may be considerably lower.

4. Capital punishment cheapens the value of human life. On the contrary, it can be easily demonstrated that the death penalty strengthens the value of human life. If the penalty for rape were lowered, clearly it would signal a lessened regard for the victims' suffering, humiliation, and personal integrity. It would cheapen their horrific experience, and expose them to an increased danger of recurrence. When we lower the penalty for murder, it signals a lessened regard for the value of the victim's life. Some critics of capital punishment, such as columnist Jimmy Breslin, have suggested that a life sentence is actually a harsher penalty for murder than death. This is sophistic nonsense. A few killers may decide not to appeal a death sentence, but the overwhelming majority make every effort to stay alive. It is by exacting the highest penalty for the taking of human life that we affirm the highest value of human life.

5. The death penalty is applied in a discriminatory manner. This factor no longer seems to be the problem it once was. The appeals process for a condemned prisoner is lengthy and painstaking. Every effort is made to see that the verdict and sentence were fairly arrived at. However, assertions of discrimination are not an argument for ending the death penalty but for extending it. It is not justice to exclude everyone from the penalty of the law if a few are found to be so favored. Justice requires that the law be applied equally to all.

6. Thou shalt not kill. The Bible is our greatest source of moral inspiration. Opponents of the death penalty frequently cite the sixth of the Ten Commandments in an attempt to prove that capital punishment is divinely proscribed. In the original Hebrew, however, the Sixth Commandment reads, "Thou Shalt Not Commit Murder," and the Torah specifies capital punishment for a variety of offenses. The biblical viewpoint has been upheld by philosophers throughout history. The greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century – Kant, Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Mill – agreed that natural law properly authorizes the sovereign to take life in order to vindicate justice. Only Jeremy Bentham was ambivalent. Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin endorsed it. Abraham Lincoln authorized executions for deserters in wartime. Alexis de Tocqueville, who expressed profound respect for American institutions, believed that the death penalty was indispensable to the support of social order. The United States Constitution, widely admired as one of the seminal achievements in the history of humanity, condemns cruel and inhuman punishment, but does not condemn capital punishment.

7. The death penalty is state-sanctioned murder. This is the defense with which Messrs. Willie and Shaw hoped to soften the resolve of those who sentenced them to death. By saying in effect, "You're no better than I am," the murderer seeks to bring his accusers down to his own level. It is also a popular argument among opponents of capital punishment, but a transparently false one. Simply put, the state has rights that the private individual does not. In a democracy, those rights are given to the state by the electorate. The execution of a lawfully condemned killer is no more an act of murder than is legal imprisonment an act of kidnapping. If an individual forces a neighbor to pay him money under threat of punishment, it's called extortion. If the state does it, it's called taxation. Rights and responsibilities surrendered by the individual are what give the state its power to govern. This contract is the foundation of civilization itself.

Everyone wants his or her rights, and will defend them jealously. Not everyone, however, wants responsibilities, especially the painful responsibilities that come with law enforcement. Twenty-one years ago a woman named Kitty Genovese was assaulted and murdered on a street in New York. Dozens of neighbors heard her cries for help but did nothing to assist her. They didn't even call the police. In such a climate the criminal understandably grows bolder. In the presence of moral cowardice, he lectures us on our supposed failings and tries to equate his crimes with our quest for justice.

The death of anyone – even a convicted killer – diminishes us all. But we are diminished even more by a justice system that fails to function. It is an illusion to let ourselves believe that doing away with capital punishment removes the murderer's deed from our conscience. The rights of society are paramount. When we protect guilty lives, we give up innocent lives in exchange. When opponents of capital punishment say to the state: "I will not let you kill in my name," they are also saying to murderers: "You can

kill in your own name as long as I have an excuse for not getting involved."

It is hard to imagine anything worse than being murdered while neighbors do nothing. But something worse exists. When those same neighbors shrink back from justly punishing the murderer, the victim dies twice.

An Exercise in Generating Solid Reasons: Death Penalty Debate

Key to successful arguments are solid reasons. Follow the steps and form the basis for an argument regarding the death penalty. You may even form teams and hold an in-class debate.

1. Review the following cites and articles: www.deathpenaltyinfo.org (search for Supreme Court Justices statements); www.innocenceproject.org; and the following Argument by Edward Koch, for mayor of New York City.
2. Form an opinion with four specific reasons for your position.
3. Begin with a working thesis stated at the top of your page, then outline briefly each of your four reasons. For each of your four reasons, include two pieces of evidence you might use to support each reason, citing them in parentheses as you would if you included them in an essay.

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6.3.9: Sample Student Essays

Penny Grimes

Prof. Polliard

English 101

28 April 2016

Restrooms for All

On June 26th 2016 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality, making same sex marriage legal in all 50 states (Somander). This was a huge step for the LGBTQ+ community, giving may individuals the courage to "come out," many also felt encouraged to publically identify with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth. While marriage equality has opened many doors for change and the ability to raise social consciousness and awareness, there are still many unresolved issues.

One of the most overlooked communities in the LGBTQ+ acronym is the transgender community. "Transgender is an umbrella term for person whose gender identify, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth" ("Answers to Your Questions"). Above many issues and discriminations that the transgender community faces, one has caused much of a controversy over the past couple of years. Should transgender individuals be allowed to use the bathroom of their choice? Many argue that allowing transgender individuals to choose bathrooms based on their personal gender identification could be a dangerous advantage to predators and although it is a reasonable concern, the reasons why transgender individuals should be allowed to use the bathroom of their choice outweigh this concern. Helping them with transition, paving the road to end discrimination against the transgender community, and ending the stigma that surround transgender individuals are just a few of the reasons why we should give them the right to choose the bathroom of the gender they identify with.

According to Lambda Legal, for a transgender individual in transition, using a public restroom is an essential part of transitioning.

The most critical aspect of gender transition, according to the internationally- recognized medical protocol set by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, is to ensure that a transgender person is able to live, be seen and be treated by others in a matter consistent with the person's gender identity. Getting used to using the appropriate restroom is an important part of this process. Moreover, transgender people must take this step well before proceeding—if at all—to medical interventions involving hormones or surgery. ("FAQ")

Before a transgender individual decides to seek medical intervention, it is essential for them that society sees them as the gender they identify as. By not allowing them to choose the bathroom they feel the most comfortable in, we are adding to the psychological damage the misgendering can cause; it is a reminder that the world doesn't see them as the gender they feel comfortable in.

By giving the transgender community the right to choose, society would be taking a big step forward in paving the road to ending the discrimination that the transgender community faces daily. According to a survey held in 2011 by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, it was found that "26 percent of transgender students had been denied restroom access in educational settings, and 22 percent of transgender employees reported being denied restroom access at work" (Stringer). Highlighting and eliminating the discrimination that the transgender community faces would be an enormous step to creating an accepting and welcoming society to not only transgender individuals, but also every other community that falls in the LGBTQ+ acronym.

Additionally, by giving transgender individuals the right to choose, we would be helping destroy the negative stigma that surrounds this community. Many people often fear things that they do not understand, and when this fear is let run rampant, the actions that lead are in many cases severe. "In 2009, 17 percent of all reported violent hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people were directed against those who identified themselves as transgender, with most (11 percent of all hate crimes) identifying as transgender women. The remainder identified as transgender men, gender-queer, gender questioning, or intersex" ("Responding to Transgender Victims"). It is vital, for the safety and overall well-being of transgender individuals, that society takes action sooner than later. It is time to destroy this box that we have placed the LGBTQ+ community in and move forward into a more

accepting society.

Eighteen states, including California, Colorado, and Oregon, have “employment laws that explicitly protect employees on the basis of gender identity” (“FAQ”). However, it does not mean that the fight is over. There are still many concerns from the general public; some believe that giving the transgender community the right to choose will give predators an advantage, and that women will be at a higher risk of being sexually harassed, but these myths can easily be debunked; “there is no evidence that gender-segregated bathrooms are ‘safer’ for cisgender women than unisex bathrooms. And besides, there are laws protecting people from criminal conduct in public restrooms” (FAQ). These harassment concerns that the general public have about gender neutral bathrooms are incidents that transgender individuals face every day of their lives; “53% of 6,450 transgender people reported being harassed or disrespected in a place of public accommodation in a recent survey conducted by the National Center of Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force” (FAQ). Though fear of the unknown and bigotry can be hard to correct, it is time society starts making more of an effort to improve the everyday life of transgender individuals.

By taking this monumental step forward, we will open a million and one opportunities to bring social consciousness and awareness to the numerous amounts of flaws the system has when it comes to members of the LGBTQ+ community. We will help eliminate the stigma surrounding the transgender community and pave the road to ending overall discrimination for transgender individuals. This step is essential if we want to evolve as a society. Discrimination is harmful; equality is not.

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*This student essay includes access dates and URLs which MLA 8th edition leaves up to the writer or instructor.

Grader’s Comments:

- Good use of a two-paragraph introduction strategy
- Strong thesis with corresponding topic sentences to direct the flow of ideas.
- Although a rebuttal is present, the writer could have expanded on it.
- Minor errors in conventions—commas, apostrophes, representation of dates/days (e.g. change “12th” to 12)
- Avoid first person (e.g. “We”)

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. Where is the thesis statement and is it placed effectively?
2. What opposing viewpoints are included in the essay? How could the writer have countered those concerns more effectively?
3. Evaluating the writer’s use of sources, were the scholarly and credible? Why or why not?

Paulina Garcia

Prof. Marianne Botos

ENG101

5 May 2016

Denied Justice for All

A Wisconsin man, Jeffrey Dahmer, “removed [his victims] flesh with acid, bleached the skeleton and kept it in his wardrobe, he also kept the victims biceps and placed them in a freezer for later consumption” (Blanco, “Jeffrey”). Another Wisconsin man, Edward Gein, decapitated a woman, then hung her upside down by ropes at her wrists in his shed, only to later stash her head in a burlap sack in his house along with human face masks, skulls on bedposts, organs in the refrigerator, and a lampshade made from the skin of a human face (Blanco, “Edward”). Then, there is also the case of Robert Hansen, a man from Idaho who abducted woman and released them naked into the Alaskan woods, only to hunt them down and kill them (D’Oro). All three were cases where the defendant did not receive the capital punishment. Instead, two were given a life sentence for the 38 known victims’ lives that they took, and the second Wisconsin man was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Those cases and similar cases have caused massive controversy throughout American history. Was the punishment appropriate? Could they have been deterred? Should their past be taken into consideration? It’s fair to say there has been no common ground regarding cases as extreme as those mentioned before.

Capital punishment means inevitably taking someone else’s life and speculating about what a life is worth and how much value it truly possesses. Is life really priceless or is it in the range of $7 million to $9 million as the U.S. Office of Management and Budget states (Partnoy)? Taking into account Dahmer’s 17 victims would mean he took an equivalent of $119 million to $153 million worth of human life. In Arizona, that would have made him worthy of capital punishment 43 times since the death row cost according to the Arizona Department of Corrections is $3,523,012.85 (Rummell). Even though the death penalty puts into question a person’s values and morals, the benefits it produces and the awareness it brings to a person’s life is ultimately more significant.

Those against allowing capital punishment to be permitted view it as a heinous crime, and in a way it is. It’s robbing individuals of their right to live a long and meaningful life. Then, there exists the possibility of rehabilitation, giving the defendants a second chance at life and steering them into the right direction. That would be the ideal outcome of every situation, having criminals reevaluate their lifestyles and becoming model citizens within their society. Supreme Court Justice Stephen G. Breyer has been vocal on his standpoint, in which he argues that the death penalty is “flawed, expensive, subject to manipulation, applied disproportionately to minorities, not an effective deterrent and, at the end of the day, irreversible” (Qtd in Sainz). However, there have been proven studies in Texas from Duke University that affirm “from 1994 through 2005, each execution… was associated with… a decrease of up to 2.5 murders” (Mulhausen).

That being the case, Edward Koch, who served as mayor of New York City for three terms, stated, “If government functioned only when the possibility of error didn’t exist, government wouldn’t function at all.” Even though there’s a small chance of someone getting convicted by error, it does not stand on enough grounds to stop the death penalty all together. Koch later on conducted a study of 7,000 executions throughout 78 years in this country, concluding that the record fails to show a case of an innocent person being executed. This type of punishment gives a certain value to the defendant of the victims’ life and what could have been of it. Therefore, if there is no example set as to the value people’s rights have or their life value, then a murderer might not think twice about the decision to kill, thus causing families to not receive the closure or justice they hope for and deserve. Koch highlights how much “Human life deserves special protection, and one of the best ways to guarantee that protection is to assure that convicted murderers do not kill again.” In part it produces a greater outcome for the community as it deters criminals from repeating heinous crimes and bringing harm to others.

Then there are those who use the Eighth Amendment against using capital punishment. The amendment states that “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted” (U.S. Const. Amend XIII). The lethal injection that is given consists of three drugs: “sodium thiopental (a barbiturate to induce anesthesia), pancuronium bromide (a muscle relaxant that paralyzes all the muscles of the body) and potassium chloride (a salt that speeds the heart until it stops)” (Greenemeier). At one point the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “lethal injection did not create an unacceptable risk of severe pain and did not violate the Eighth Amendment…” (Hudson). Later on, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia pointed out how “If the death penalty did not violate the 8th Amendment when the 8th Amendment was adopted, it doesn’t violate it today” (Qtd in Sainz). All death row inmates go through a trial and are indicted by a jury of their peers, meaning they are given the same rights as any other defendant. Also, death row inmates are typically given the choice of their capital punishment unless the state they reside in only has one option for capital punishment. For example, Arizona provides the option of lethal injection or the gas chamber. Lethal injection consists of the exact same three drugs used in euthanasia (“Methods”). Lethal injection is legal in four states and various countries (“Where”). Thus, it should not be considered a cruel nor unusual punishment.

The death penalty is not something light and simple that any case should be eligible for. There are factors that have to be met for eligibility for the death penalty. First, at least in the state of Arizona, there must be a first-degree murder, including pre-meditated and felony murder. Then, it must be accompanied by at least one of the considerable aggravating factors (Kirchmeier). A few of

the factors listed include committing the offense in an especially heinous or cruel manner, the murdered person was fifteen years of age or older than seventy, done with the intent of promoting criminal street gangs, there was no moral or legal justification, or it was committed for payment of anything of pecuniary value (Kirchmeier). The list goes on, and the factors mentioned do not paint the picture of a model citizen or the possibility of becoming one. Even when committing such a despicable crime, the Constitution ensures that no person shall be deprived of life without due process (U.S.Const. Amend V). It gives the defendant a chance to defend his actions against his peers, but nonetheless, some crimes are too barbarous to deserve a second chance when the victim was not given that equal opportunity.

Most importantly, people are punished for the crime(s) they committed, not for the person they claim to be after the incident. For example, a criminal can claim to be rehabilitated and a changed person after the crime has been done, but that does not necessarily mean it is true. It does not eliminate the fact that the crime has been done, a life has been taken, and there is no rehabilitation for bringing back a victim to their family, friends, or life. Criminals should be given a punishment proportional to their crime and actions. Robert Blecker, a New York Law School professor and death penalty advocate, constantly reaffirms in his documentary, Robert Blecker Wants Me Dead, that the past counts and defendants should be connected to their crime, serving whatever punishment seems proportional to the offense. This documentary portrays a Tennessee man, Daryl Holton, who murdered his three sons and their half-sister. All throughout the film Holton is visited by Robert Blecker and seems to ignore that what he did was wrong. In Holton's mind, his actions were justified because he would rather they go up to heaven than live in the horrible conditions they were in and possibly grow up to be criminals. Holton was a stern believer that he did the right thing; he never budged on his standpoint (Robert). For a case as extreme as Holton's, it is clear that rehabilitation would not have been the best option because it was tied into his values and morals. Capital punishment is not meant for just any criminal but neither is the opportunity of a second chance.

If a crime is so despicable and inhumane that capital punishment would be proportional then that is the justice that needs to be served. It is unjust for those who have to live in the aftermath of the crime, the victim's family and friends, to see their loved ones' murderer given more rights than the person they'll be putting in a coffin and lowering into the ground. Worse is the knowledge that after twenty-five years, the murderer might be released into society and live the life their victim did not get a chance to or even again bring heinous tragedy to others. It is an unjust non-punishment for criminals whose crimes are so heinous it makes them eligible for capital punishment. It gives them something their victim does not have nor will he or she ever have, a life.

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U.S. Constitution. Amend. V.

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Grader’s Comments:

- Good use of probing questions
- Excellent variety of sources
- Smart use of specific and graphic examples to gain readers’ attention
- When an error exists in the original source, MLA requires the writer acknowledge the error by inserting “[sic]” after the error

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. According to the essay, what is the definition of capital punishment?
2. What four reasons does the student argue in support of the thesis?
3. List three different types of experts used and cited in the essay.
4. After considering the argument, what is your position on capitol punishment? Explain, providing your own reasons.

Ima Student

Professor Good

English 101

18 June 2016

Stars and Stripes Forever and the Freedom to Light It on Fire

An artist sticks a U.S. flag in a toilet bowl and entitles her work “The American Dream Gone To Pot.” Another artist drapes a flag on the floor and asks the question “What is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?” while encouraging viewers to make a choice whether to step on the flag that is spread on the floor. In 1969, a man protests the shooting of civil rights activist James Meredeth, by publicly burning a flag while declaring, “If they did that to Meredeth, we don’t need an American flag” (qtd. in Ponessa, “Flag” 1510). Congress is upset by the lack of respect for the greatest symbol of this nation, and it now wants to pass an amendment which would prohibit flag burning or desecration. It proposes a constitutional amendment that would give Congress and the states the authority to pass laws prohibiting flag desecration (Ponessa, “House” 1646). Despite apparently overwhelming popular support, the measure still has many vocal critics who say it will infringe on the First Amendment right to free speech. “We’re going to the heart and soul of the right of freedom of expression as protected in the Constitution,” ranking Democrat John Conyers Jr. of Michigan said. “It is difficult to conceive of a more poorly drafted proposal” (qtd. in Ponessa, “House” 1646). Barney Frank, D-Mass., who has said that the Constitution should not be amended frivolously, added, “I think we are making a well- intentioned mistake” (qtd. in Ponessa, “House” 1646).

Just what is this well-intentioned mistake all about? It is about the American flag: a piece of material but more than just a vivid scrap of material; it is an icon of freedom, liberty, and justice for all. The American flag is a piece of cloth with thirteen red and white stripes and fifty white stars on a blue square, a piece of cloth that has been through two World Wars and numerous other battles; a piece of cloth that was even flown to the moon. The flag stands for everything America is. It is as American as America itself. The Stars and Stripes wave for both the respectful and disrespectful citizens of this country. It stands for liberty and justice

for all, for freedom of speech, freedom of expression, perhaps even freedom to burn and desecrate this beloved symbol. Although the American flag is worthy of great esteem, the government cannot take away the right to desecrate the flag without taking away all that it stands for – freedom.

Opponents of the amendment view physically defacing the flag as a despicable act, and indeed it is. It brings dishonor to the memory of those who have given their lives to defend its ideals. The flag stands for all that American has been through – its hopes and its dreams. It is a symbol of unity, or at least the stated desire to be united. "Mankind lives by symbols, and the flag is worth respecting. It represents our shared experience, our connection to America's past and future and our responsibility for one another, regardless of class, age or race" (Leo 17). However, flag desecration is a form of expression, and the government cannot strip away the right to express oneself, simply because the act is vulgar. As the Supreme Court stated in 1989, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable" (Apel).

Therefore, society must strive to see that flag burning and desecration cannot demolish the true glory of the flag. Attempts to mock the flag through crude art work and brazen acts of desecration cannot destroy the real power that stands behind this American symbol. The Webster's Dictionary definition of desecration is to take away the sacredness of, to treat as not sacred; to profane. Setting "Old Glory" on fire, or stuffing it in a toilet bowl and calling it "art" are acts of desecration. However, as the Arizona Republic observes, "It takes more than harsh words and nasty graphic art to dilute [the flag's] power. It is clearly one of the strongest symbols ever created" ("Old Glory").

Furthermore, people are burning the flag less and less frequently. Talk of banning flag desecration seems to be happening more than actual flag burnings. Thus, it would be easier to just ignore the occasional flag burnings, rather than write a prohibition against it into the constitution. For example, there are only 45 such occurrences on record since 1969... and since the Supreme Court in 1989 overturned a verdict against a flag burner in Texas v. Johnson, not more than eight occurrences per year have been recorded (Buckley 75). William F. Buckley, Jr. sarcastically cracked, "Why go to the Constitution to prohibit something that happens as rarely as an eclipse of the sun?" (75). The number of people eager to burn a flag to call attention to a cause or to themselves is very small. By one account, only three flag burnings are known to have occurred since 1993 (Leo 17). As John Leo, reporting for U.S. News & World Report points out, "It is politically much smarter to ignore the occasional flag burner. Without an arrest and big emotional reaction, the burning comes to nothing" (17). "We need to be explaining to people that amending the Constitution is a radical solution to a very small problem," said Paul McMasters, Freedom Forum's First Amendment ombudsman (qtd. in Hernandez 13).

Beyond being merely a radical solution, the proposed amendment to prohibit flag burning and desecration would suffocate freedom of speech. This right is guaranteed to anyone on U.S. soil (including illegal immigrants). "...the anti-flag amendment violates the right to free expression guaranteed of the First Amendment (Hernandez 13). The Supreme Court considers burning the American Flag an act which is protected by the First Amendment right to free speech. The only way Congress could make such anti-flag desecration laws pass constitutional muster is to amend the very document that protects these rights (Apel). Senator Ted Kennedy stated, "The words of the first amendment are simple and majestic: 'Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech.' The proposed constitutional amendment would undermine that fundamental liberty" (Apel). "It [the proposed amendment] would devalue the Bill of Rights that for two centuries has encouraged tolerance of all views and the freedom to speak one's mind without fear of going to jail," states Bill Ketter, editor of the Qunicy, Mass., Patriot Ledger (qtd. in Hernandez 13).

The most important argument for not banning flag desecration is that respect for the flag cannot be legislated. It has to grow out of the lives of its citizens (Leo 17). For example, not everyone in America loves, respects, and honors their country, but that is what makes this nation so dynamic. People can be who they want to be and think what they want to think. The very essence of America is that people are not stifled or bound by chains to love her. People have freedoms. And the right to free speech and free-expression is one of those freedoms. Sen. Bob Kerrey, D-Neb. Observes that "...although flag burning is a despicable act, respecting the right of individuals to express themselves is part of patriotism" (qtd. in Ponessa, "Flag" 1510). The proposed amendment would not change anyone's thinking concerning the flag, for rules do not change minds – rules just set new standards. Those that want to desecrate the flag will continue to do so, and those that respect the flag will continue to do so. "...the critics fail to recognize that the United States was born on dissent. Our country is great, unlike other nations, because we have allowed our government to be criticized and we safeguard freedom of speech for everyone" ("Old Glory" B6). The irony behind saying that people cannot deface the flag is that the government has to come up with a rule, a ban, a law – whereas the whole philosophy behind the flag is liberty and justice for all.

To see someone blasphemously "rip" the flag to pieces can be shocking and quite sad, but by passing an amendment to prohibit flag burning, the government unravels all that the flag stands for. An amendment would only punish those that desecrate the flag, it would not change their hearts or sway them to view the flag in a more respectful manner. It is only a "Grand Old Flag' as long as

it waves for the free and the brave, and both the respectful and disrespectful citizens of this nation. It is stars and stripes forever as long as those stars and stripes represent true freedom.

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Grader’s Comments:

- Strong opening with good attention grabber
- Clear thesis with strong assertion of position
- Well organized progression of four reasons
- Respectful tone throughout essay with food pathos, logos and ethos
- Conclusion could be stronger

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. What is the thesis of the essay?
2. Look up and write down the definition of “desecrate.” What is your opinion about whether or not an individual or group has the right to desecrate the American flag?
3. Of the reasons presented, which is the strongest? The weakest? Explain why.

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6.3.10: Model Texts by Student Authors

Model Texts by Student Authors

The Advertising Black Hole[119]

The little girl walked along the brightly lit paths of vibrant colors and enticing patterns. Her close friends watched her as she slowly strolled by. She made sure to inspect each one of them as she moved through the pathways, seeing if there was anything new about them, and wondering which one she was interested in bringing home. She did not know, however, that these so-called friends of hers had the potential to be dangerous and possibly deadly if she spent too much time with them. But she was not aware, so she picked up the colorful box of cereal with her friend Toucan Sam on the outside, put it in the cart and decided that he was her top choice that day. Many children have similar experiences while grocery shopping because numerous large corporations thrive on developing relationships between the young consumer and their products; a regular food item can become so much more than that to children. Due to the bonds that children and products are forming together, early-life weight issues have become an increasingly large issue. While marketing is not the leading or only cause of the obesity epidemic affecting children and teenagers, it does aid in developing and endorsing preferences of unhealthier food options sold in grocery stores, which can lead to higher weights if not controlled.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that up to 17% of children and adolescents, from ages zero to seventeen, are overweight in the United States. This comes out to approximately 12.7 million young individuals who are affected by the obesity epidemic (“Childhood Obesity”), and there is no projection of this number getting smaller any time soon, as the general population continues to increase. Without any significant changes with how food products are marketed to children and its influence on their food choices, one might predict that there will most likely not be a decline in obesity in kids and teens as populations continue to rise.

Today, large corporations like Oreo, Trix, and Yoplait, amongst others, spend great sums of money marketing to younger generations in hopes that they will want their products and, more importantly, grow an attachment to them. In 2009 alone, companies spent about $1.79 billion on the endeavor (“FTC Releases”). Leading businesses in the food industry spend a lot of money on advertising so that they can establish an emotional connection between their products and fledgling consumers. They try to inspire feelings of familiarity, comfort, "coolness," adventure, warmth, excitement, and many others that will attract kids and teenagers.

Through trials and studies, leading advertising agencies have found what types of pictures, words, and designs resonate the most with the younger audiences. It is not about selling a product, but creating an experience of joy and wonder for the child. While younger children especially are not aware of the premeditated enticements from the corporate end, they can still become highly engrossed in the products. Some research has shown that a child's attraction to certain brand characteristics may actually be out of their conscious control (Keller 380).

Young children pick up on things very easily, whether something is specifically taught to them or not, and food preferences are no different. Toddlers as early as two or three can be affected by advertising (McGinnis 376) and can develop bonds to certain products. This shows that even without outside pressures from society or a knowledge of advertising, children can bond with food items just like they do people. This makes sense, as brands are created to be as relatable and welcoming as possible, just like a human being.

With this in mind, developing a specific personality for a brand is extremely important. Many advertising authorities believe that without a brand personality that a company would have an extremely hard time standing out from the crowd. In “Brand Personalities Are Like Snowflakes,” David Aaker, a well-known expert in his field, gives examples of large corporations that use branding to bring a likeability or specific personality type to the business in order to identify with certain groups of people, or to have a larger mass appeal. For example, Betty Crocker comes across as motherly, traditional, and “all-American” (Aaker 20). It makes sense why children and adolescents would develop a fondness for a product that seems homey and loving. If a company succeeds in gaining the interest of a child and creating an emotional connection with them, then it is not impossible or unusual that the individual could stay a brand loyalist into adulthood. But with unhealthy food companies being the source of some of the most intelligent marketing techniques, it is easy for them to entice children to eat foods that are not good for them, all the while making them feel content about their choices.

Once a company comes up with a good branding technique or personality, they can start marketing their products, and the avenues in which companies share them is almost as important as the products themselves. In order for the item to become popular and generate high revenue, they need to reach as many people as possible. If the wrong methods are chosen and there is less of a consumer response, then money has been wasted. While marketing food to children has been very successful in the past, it is even more so now in the 21st century because of the prevalence of mobile devices. Kids and teens are very frequently exposed to advertising through websites, games, or applications that they are using on cell phones, tablets, and laptops. Corporations even collect meta-data from sites or applications that kids access on the device in order to figure out what their preferences are, and to further expose them to ads within their frame of interest, hopefully boosting their sales and likeability through repeated exposure ("Should Advertising"). Television has not been phased out by the internet, however, and it is still a huge contributor to advertising success, accounting for almost half of marketing costs (Harris 409). Movies, magazines and other print sources, sporting events, schools, displays in grocery stores, the boxes themselves, and many other routes are taken in order to create as much of a product "buzz" as possible.

Within these avenues, there are countless techniques that are used in order to gently sway a child or adolescent into wanting a product. Some of these methods are direct, but others are hardly recognizable. I decided to do a little investigating of my own at Fred Meyer's, one of the leading supermarkets in the Portland area, and found many trends and practices that were used to promote kids' food. One of the main techniques used is called cross-branding. Also called cross-promoting, this is where a specific product, like cereal for example, will sign an agreement with another company so that they can use each other's popularity in order to sell more merchandise. The picture shown is a perfect example of this. Kellogg's teamed up with Disney and Pixar in order to create a one-of-a-kind *Finding Dory* cereal. This example is actually different than most of the cross-promoting cereals or products, because this is a whole new item made just for the movie; it is not just a picture on a box for a cereal that had already existed. Both companies will come out ahead in this case, since *Finding Dory* is beloved by children and so will bring revenue to both. Celebrity and sports endorsements are other forms of cross-branding, since they are promoting themselves and the product at the same time. While cartoon characters may be better suited for younger kids, movie and television stars, singers, and athletes help to drawn in the pre-teen and teenage crowds.

Other identified advertising tools from the packages themselves might include sweepstakes to win prizes, toys inside, free games or applications with purchase, and collecting UPC codes for gifts. The picture shown to the right is another example from my personal research, which shows a Go-Gurt box. It not only shows cross-branding with the movie *Trolls*, but it also includes something for free. The top right-hand corner displays that inside of the box there is a special link for a free *Trolls* Spotify playlist. Prizes that used to be included with purchased goods before the onset of the internet were typically toys, stickers, puzzles, or physical games, whereas they are now mostly songs, videos, digital games, or free applications which generally include either the company's branding mascot or the cross-promotion character they are using at the time. As a child, I remember that getting free gifts was a huge incentive for me to ask my parents for something at the store, and can vouch for how strong of an effect this can have on a kid's mind.

Not all tactics to gain consumer interests are as noticeable though, yet still appear to have positive effects on children. Bright colors, boldness of design, cartoon mascots, and catch phrases are all part of the overall enjoyable experience that corporations try to create for young customers. The location of the product on the shelves is also important. Most children's products are kept on bottom shelves, especially in aisles of grocery stores where adult and child products are mixed. This way the items are in their direct line of sight and reach, creating a higher probability for purchase. Another method that is not so heavily researched, but is extremely convincing, comes from "Eyes in the Aisles: Why is Cap'n Crunch Looking Down at My Child?", an article by Aviva Musicus and other scholars. This article breaks down the research study of whether eye contact with cartoon characters on cereal products creates a sense of comfort and trust, and if it affects the item's purchase. Many cereal characters' eyes look down (as shown), typically looking at the product that pictured on the box—but also at the smaller people perusing the aisles, like children. Researchers wanted to determine if this tactic is intentional, and if so, if it is effective in selling more product. This tactic appears to be used mostly for cereal, but I was able to find similar artistry on Danimals yogurt drinks and some fruit snacks as well. It was concluded through the study that eye-contact by a friendly face in general creates feelings of trust and friendship. In applying this to product branding, the study confirmed with many of its subjects, that a welcoming glance for a child can essentially create positive feelings that make him or her feel more connected to the product and in turn choose it over others. The findings of the study for whether or not characters are designed to make eye contact were inconclusive, however (Musicus et al. 716-724).

While the amount of money that is spent on food advertising for children seems exorbitant to most, it is not necessarily the amount of money or the advertising in itself that is the problem for many Americans; instead, it is the type of food that is being promoted with such a heavy hand. Soda, fruit snacks, donuts, cereal, granola bars, Pop-Tarts, frozen meals, sugary yogurts, cookies, snack cakes, ice cream, and popsicles are some of the most branded items for children at grocery stores. Most of the things listed are not adequate snacks or meals, and yet it is proven that children want them the most due to their appealing containers. Depending on the age of the child, they may not even know what the product is but still want it, because of the color of the package or because their favorite character is on it. Experts agree that the majority of the highly advertised and branded food

products are unhealthy and that they can contribute to higher weights if consumed in too large of quantities or too often. One such expert is Kathleen Keller, along with her research partners from various universities in the United States. They have found that the most marketed food items at the grocery store are generally high in fat, sodium, and sugar, which is easily confirmed with a look in your city's popular supermarkets. Keller also determined that children who are enticed by "good" marketing and branding for unhealthy products often keep going back for more due to the addictive nature of those three main ingredients (409).

Keller and her team also conducted three different experiments, two of which I will discuss. It is important to add that Keller is not the only one that has conducted these studies, but is being used as an example of the type of tests that have been executed in regards to branding, and the movements that have been made in the scientific field to try to help with the obesity epidemic. In the first study, Keller sought to determine whether actively watching commercials made young people eat more. She found that all of the children, regardless of age and weight, ate more food while watching advertisements about food than when they were not. Others researchers however, have had opposing viewpoints based on their collected data in similar studies, and the issue is that there are too many variables with this type of test. Age, type of food offered, advertisements watched, familiarity with the ads or characters used, and other factors all come into play and can skew the data. Some studies found that none of the children ate more while watching television advertisements about food, while others concluded that despite some children eating more, not all of them did like in Keller's experiment. The issue with the variables are still being worked out in order to have more accurate data (Keller 380-381).

In the second trial, one test group was offered raw fruits and vegetables in containers with characters on the outside, such as Elmo, and included a sticker inside like many of the products that come with free gifts. Both groups consisted of children of different ages that regularly ate below the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables, which is one to three cups a day depending on age. The kids who had containers with the characters increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables by approximately three servings from where they were before the test started, while the intake for the second group with the plain containers did not go up at all.

The most interesting part of the study is that when the experiment was over the children who were in the character test group continued on eating more fruits and vegetables despite the fact that they no longer had the original containers. This could potentially mean that once a child makes a connection with a product, that it becomes engrained in their minds and that they no longer need stickers, toys, or package designs in order to appreciate or crave a certain food. However, more testing would have to be done to confirm this (Keller 383-384). While this could be a negative thing in the context of unhealthy food product advertising, it also shows that cross-branding could be used to promote healthier alternatives. Keller's results along with the responses of the scientists that conducted like-studies, appear to have a general consensus that while there is correlational data between advertising, branding, and obesity, it is not a direct one, which is encouraging (Breiner 5). Advertising itself does not increase obesity, but rather the products being advertised and the methods by which they are advertised.

The good news is that since advertising and branding does not have a straight link to obesity then it should be possible to prevent some occurrences from happening, either from the government and food companies themselves, or from inside the home. On the governmental side, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) continue to partner up with each other, along with the leading food manufacturers, to discuss ways that companies can promote healthier eating. Some companies have already joined the fight by offering lower calorie, sugar, fat, or sodium versions of their popular foods by using whole grains or by limiting portion sizes (Wilks 66).

Another example of governmental efforts was in 2010, when Michelle Obama launched the campaign for "Facts Up Front" with the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA). The goal of this movement was to encourage food distributors to voluntarily put nutrition information on the front of the package. The act is to encourage label reading and awareness of what is being consumed, with labels being monitored by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ensure that customers get accurate information ("Facts"). There are still many companies, however, that do not state their health facts on the front of the container though, and the FTC, HHS, and GMA are always pushing for more participation. As you can see in the picture I took at Fred Meyer's, even companies that have sought action can have the same product with and without nutrition labeling sitting right next to each other on the shelves. In the photo, the nutrition label is on the bottom left of the package of Pop-Tarts in the right-hand photo, but is absent from the one on the left. It seems like this could occur if a company either began or stopped their contribution to the "Facts Up Front" movement and older stock was being sold alongside newer stock. It is possible as well that there could be inconsistent procedures in the company with packaging; however, this seems unlikely since companies would have to set up their machines to create varying products. Hopefully, as more years pass, front-labeling will become the overall standard in the marketplace.

Another governmental organization that joined in the battle against obesity is the Institute of Medicine (IOM) at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). While the IOM does not have any direct say on what types of policies are enacted, they do conduct studies on childhood obesity and ways to prevent it, including advertising's effects on eating

patterns and weight. After they summarize their findings, they submit the information in a report to agencies like the FDA to see if they can encourage any change. In their report from 2009, they witnessed a correlation between advertising and early weight gain and acknowledged that advertising practices are not in line with healthy eating. The IOM states that food manufacturers should be more aware of what types of foods that they are advertising to children and adolescents. They do also recognize the groups that are working to make a change, like the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (which works with the food industry to try to lower caloric content of current food products), as well as the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (a non-profit that encourages advertising for nutritionally dense foods only and inspires healthy eating habits within households) (Breiner 6-9). Examples of productive advertising could be using characters on packages of carrots, apples, milk, or any other healthy items, commercials that promote health and wellness for kids, and games or applications that are directed to teach kids about nutrition. However, many experts believe that any type of advertising and branding, even if it is to influence positive food choices, becomes negative as it continues to endorse a society based on consumerism. This is just a broad overview of what type of work is being done and what major players are involved, but because of the severity of the obesity epidemic, there is much more work going on behind the scenes than what is listed here.

The government is not the only entity that can make a change, however, and modifications can possibly be made inside the home to avoid excessive marketing control on young ones and their consumption of unhealthy food products. It is important to say, though, that not everyone may be able to make certain positive changes; those who can are encouraged to do so. As stated previously, there are many factors that go into children's eating habits. Some of the most common reasons are that unhealthier items are less expensive, and that fresh food goes bad faster, so purchasing nutritional options may not be possible for lower-income families. There is also the issue of research and education: some parents or guardians may not be well-informed of advertising's effects on younger minds or how to serve well-rounded meals, and they may also not have a lot of access to resources that could help. It is unwise to say that all people in the United States have access to the same information, as this is just not the case.

But families that do have the means to purchase healthier products and are knowledgeable on the subjects of advertising and nutrition (or have ways learn about these subjects) are greatly encouraged to take small or big steps to implementing change at home. Some steps could be to limit time spent on mobile devices, so that kids and teens are not viewing as many advertisements each day, or to completely eliminate television viewing and the use of internet-based devices if a more extreme option was needed or wanted. If the cost of groceries is not a major issue, then encouraging the consumption of new fruits and vegetables each week is an easy place to start, as well as offering more lean proteins, healthy fats like olive oil and coconut oil, and less processed starches. Probably the most crucial element is to talk to kids about consumerism: how to be a smart and mindful customer, and how to not let advertisements influence our decision-making. They can also make a point to discuss portion control, and what healthy eating means for our bodies and our longevity of life. Since children develop preferences as early as two years old, it is best to start implementing healthier eating habits and interactive conversations as early as possible—but it is never too late to start.

It is encouraging to know that companies are making changes to their policies and product ingredients, and that governmental organizations, non-profits, and families continue to strive for a healthier country. There should be better protection of our youth, but what is hindering a more drastic movement for change of advertising techniques targeted to children and adolescents is the amount of variables in studies due to age, weight, background, mental health and capacity, etc. Because of these differences amongst children, studies are not consistent, which creates feeble evidence for marketing and branding's effects on childhood obesity. But there is still hope for the future of our country, as scientists continue to strive to establish better research techniques that can either solidly prove or deny the correlation between the two. In the meantime, households at the least can start having conversations with their children and teenagers about marketing's effect on their preferences and choices, and can proactively work on breaking the hold that food corporations have over so many of them.

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Teacher Takeaways

"I like how this essay combines extensive research with the author's own direct observations. Together, these strategies can produce strong logos *and* ethos *appeals, respectively. However, the author too often wants the information speak for itself, and because the findings of many of the studies were inconclusive or contradictory, they don't support the author's central claim. These studies certainly could still be used effectively, but this essay demonstrates the importance of actively engaging in argument—the author cannot just present the information, but needs to interpret it for the audience to demonstrate how the evidence supports the thesis."*

– Professor Dunham

A Changing Ball-Game[120]

LaVar Ball is changing the National Basketball Association's shoe- and player-branding culture without playing a single NBA minute. His son, Lonzo, is a few short weeks away from hearing his name among the first few called in the NBA Draft after a standout year playing basketball at UCLA. Lonzo has two younger brothers as well, one of whom, LiAngelo, will play at UCLA in the 2017-2018 season, and another, LaMelo, who committed to the same university as his brothers two years ago even though he was just an eight-grader (Calle). The three Ball children played on the same high school team in Chino Hills, California, setting the world alight in early 2016 with their high-powered, free-flowing offense centered around the brothers. They would jack shots that "traditionalists would argue against" but after winning a national championship, "Chino Hills [had] proved its effectiveness in ways never seen before" (Calle). Since then, as the Balls have started to transition out of the world of children playing basketball and entered into the more adult level of college sports (and, soon, the NBA), the attention has shifted from the boys to their father. His outspokenness and demands for respect and inclusion are making waves across the basketball world, even possibly having lasting effects on athletes in every sport.

LaVar is attempting to influence everything around his sons, particularly Lonzo as he goes into the league: he is claiming his son will only play for certain teams and, most controversially, distancing himself and his sons from the major shoe companies in a way that an athlete's camp rarely does at such an early stage in their professional career. What he is doing is undoubtedly risky, but it has clear upside too. If it works, it could clear a path for future athletes to be successful building and monetizing a brand that is not dependent on the sneaker industry. Even if it does not work, it will provide a rough blueprint upon which others can improve in order to become as big as the major signature athletes without having to depend on the corporations backing them.

Attacking the status quo is LaVar's forte. When he and his family first moved into their home in the Alterra neighborhood in Chino Hills, he received grief from the homeowner's association for attempting to paint his home white and not sticking with the peach color mandated by the association's guidelines. Fast-forward to now, and President of the Alterra Homeowner's Association LaVar Ball lives in a white home, proclaiming, "If Obama can have the White House, Goddamnit Big Baller can have a white house!" (Calle). LaVar's haughty yet sometimes wildly ambitious statements about his family and esteemed symbols like the president have become a bit of a… thing, too. To date, he has said that Lonzo would make the best team in the league (the Golden State Warriors) better if they somehow swapped him with Steph Curry, the back-to-back and first-ever unanimous NBA Most Valuable Player. Lavar has called Lonzo the best player in the world; he said that Lonzo would only play for the Los Angeles Lakers. Lavar said that he himself would beat Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest human basketball player to live on the planet Earth, in a one-on-one game. These comments, along with Lonzo's campaign on the court and LaMelo's highly controversial 92-point game at Chino Hills, have all coalesced into making the Balls the most (in)famous family in the basketball world's recent memory. They have created a name for the family that is extraordinarily atypical in a time where players are coming in as more and more nondescript products to the league each passing year.

The Balls' need to have creative control has not stopped at the painted house, either. In fact, the largest dispute surrounding their branding with shoe companies today is centered around their need for creative control. The types of deals that are available to NBA players are very structured and limited to three tiers. According to *Yahoo! Sports'* NBA shoe insider Nick DePaula, undrafted rookies and fringe NBA players typically receive "merchandise" or "merch" deals from shoe companies that gives them sneakers and gear for them to play in. These deals amount to products around $50,000 to $100,000. That is just a baseline though—effectively the minimum wage a professional hooper can be paid to promote a brand like Nike, adidas, or Under Armour, rather than the player cutting a check from their own wallet for footwear.

The next tier of deal is called a "cash" deal, "where the majority of the league falls" (DePaula). Players with these deals will get a certain amount of cash, essentially a salary, over a set number of years according to the contract they sign with the company. On top of that, though, many of the best players in the league will get their own logos, phrases or ad campaigns along with colorways, known as player exclusives, of the shoes that Nike is running out that season to match their team's jerseys or something connected to the player. The salaries are negotiated by agents and depend on how marketable the player is. Usually, "a rookie will sign a shoe deal with a brand that'll last three or four years" and the "current shoe deal range for a marketable lottery pick [such as Lonzo Ball] can be anywhere to $200,000 to $700,000 [per year], with exceptions every so often for what brands consider to be 'can't-miss' endorsement stars" such as Andrew Wiggins, who signed an $11 million deal spread over five years with the bonus as being a key headliner for their new line of sneakers (DePaula). This is the same tier where Lonzo would probably find himself, given the fame the Balls have crafted for themselves coming into the draft. In an interview with ESPN Radio's The *Dan Le Batard Show with Stugotz*, Lonzo confirmed that Nike, adidas, and Under Armour offered fiveyear deals worth $2 million per year.

The most exalted compensation a player can get for partnering with a sneaker company, though, is a signature sneaker. A signature sneaker deal offers more money, the status as one of the company's premier athlete in the sport, and a shoe designed and marketed specifically for the individual player. This is only for the most elite of the elite and "will forever be the most sought after deal in basketball" (DePaula). There are only ten basketball players out of the current 450 active NBA players that have signature shoes with American brands: LeBron James, Kevin Durant, Kobe Bryant (now retired), and Kyrie Irving with Nike; Chris Paul, Russell Westbrook, and Carmelo Anthony with Nike's subsidiary Jordan Brand; Derrick Rose, Damian Lillard, and James Harden with adidas; and Stephen Curry with Under Armour. Most of these superstars came into the NBA with cash deals and player exclusives and worked their way up to a signature. Signature shoes are so hard-earned that rookies are rarely awarded them for their first professional game. The last two times it happened were John Wall's Reebok Zig Slash seven years ago and LeBron James' Nike Air Zoom Generation in 2003, nearly a decade-and-a-half ago (DePaula). The two were surefire commodities, John Wall becoming a multiple time All Star and one of the best players at his position and LeBron James cementing himself as one of the greatest players in the history of the game. So, for someone to waltz into negotiations with sneaker company powerhouses and expect anything more than a cash deal—maybe a player exclusive colorway or two without being billed as a bona fide superstar—would be like a player walking up the court and launching shots up from 20 feet beyond the three-point line.

Of course, shooting shots like this are exactly what the Balls do, whether that is figuratively in LaVar's comments or literally in LaMelo's shot selection in games. There exists a subset of players in the league with cult-like followings because of the shots

they shoot. Earl "J.R." Smith, Dion Waiters and others live in this beloved sphere despite their questionable added benefit to their teams. A wise man, Wayne Gretzky, once said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't shoot," essentially stating that no inherent harm exists in attempting the unimaginable. Even wiser and less accomplished men boiled this down to the phrases "If You Don't Hunt, You Don't Eat" and "Shooters Shoot." The Balls are shooters who walk into any room with two spoons in their holsters equipped to dine. In a widely circulated clip from a Chino Hills game earlier this year, LaMelo dribbled the basketball up from the backcourt, pointed at the half court line to indicate the spot he was going to shoot from and audaciously pulled up from the exact spot. The net subsequently swelled in the purest of ripples. LaVar did the same thing. He told the world that he would take nothing less than a billion—with a B—dollars for his sons to sign with a shoe company. The typical cash deal would not be enough, though, even if they met his billion dollar demands. Companies would need to absorb the family's business, Big Baller Brand (or 3 Bs), rather than simply adding a swoosh or three stripes onto Ball products. They required co-branding, a partnership that would be more akin to Jordan Brand's current relationship with Nike than to athletes like Kyrie Irving or Kevin Durant's relationships with Nike. LaVar has said, "[We] aren't looking for an endorsement deal.... We're looking for... a true partner" (Rovell). This is relatively unprecedented with Jordan Brand being the only real comparison in the sneaker world and that only became independent towards the end of Michael Jordan's esteemed career (Sole Man). Even LeBron, Jordan's only active peer in terms of greatness, operates wholly under Nike when it comes to shoes and athletic-wear.

Naturally, all three of the major shoe companies rejected the Balls' request (Rovell). Not only was the request itself unique but, "never in the history of modern-day shoe endorsements have the big companies all stepped away from a potential top pick nearly two months before the NBA draft" (Rovell). LaVar maintains that he does not care about the rejection and this is all for the greater good, part of the bigger plan. He said that he knew the companies would never agree to his terms but he had to get them to say no because he "wanted to make sure so when they make this mistake and they look back, they're going to say 'man, we should've just given that man a billion dollars'" (Le Batard). Some people, including *FOX Sports'* Lindsey Foltin, have claimed that despite the fact that "LaVar insists he's doing what's best for Lonzo, his behavior could end up costing his son millions." Unsurprisingly, LaVar replied, "you goddang right I'm costing him millions because it ain't about millions with us. It's about them Bs. Billions" (Le Batard).

Beyond the dollar figure and amount of zeros on the contract, the biggest and most important part of these public negotiations have been the extent of input the Balls have on their own brand. That is the essential aspect of co-branding: the retention of creative control. When it comes down to it, LaVar asserts that "as long as my son's got a shoe, if I only made 50 shoes, they're for him. It's his own shoe" (Le Batard). The pride that he has in Lonzo and that the Ball boys can have in their product is vital, and that is something he says his young, unproven sons would never get from the giants Nike, adidas, and Under Armour.

Besides a father's pride in his sons, an athlete's control over their own brand is increasingly becoming a point of contention between the players and the shoe companies. In his seminal piece examining how and why Stephen Curry walked away at the expiration of his deal with Nike, Ethan Strauss discusses Curry's own journey to create his own space in the sneaker and basketball worlds. A huge concern for Curry while negotiating a renewed deal with Nike, which he signed as a rookie before he became the superstar he is today, was whether he would get to lead his own Nikesponsored camp for elite youth players. This not only lets young players learn from the best, but it also allows the professionals to tangibly affect the best up-and-coming talents, something much "more meaningful than strangers clamoring for autographs on the street" (Strauss). Nike, though, did not value Curry enough to give him this and put him on their second tier of athletes, the athletes without their own signature. Now, though, with Under Armour, Curry has both his camp and a signature sneaker and is a bigger, more unique star than he ever would be under Nike.

Curry is not alone in this, either. A player's brand is inextricably linked to their footwear nowadays, perhaps more than the teams they play for and their on-court prowess. DePaula points out that shoe deals are actually negotiated in much the same way that free agent contracts are hashed out. He also writes, "[As] players of all levels enter the league, their eventual shoe deal continues to be secondary to team deals, but sneaker contracts have become more lucrative and incentivized." This has gotten so extreme that in the same offseason that LeBron signed a one-year contract with the Cleveland Cavaliers, he signed a lifetime deal with Nike worth more than half a billion (Strauss). *ESPN Radio* host Bomani Jones even argues that, because of this, many players' first loyalties lie with the shoe companies instead of their teams: "your primary employer is who pays you the most money.... LeBron was Team Nike before he was a Cleveland Cavalier or a member of the Miami Heat or any of those things. We contextualize guys around the teams they play for because that's the relevant variable for the kind of work that we do" (Strauss). In fact, Jones and Curry got into a minor spat on Twitter when Curry saw some jabs that Jones had poked at his Under Armour shoes. Curry took it very seriously and personally, said Jones, pointing out that "there doesn't seem to be much space in his mind between himself and Under Armour" (Strauss). This is why many athletes, the Balls foremost among them, are becoming more and more concerned with their role in crafting their own brand and how it is all integrated into their overall image as public figures: "Curry and James aren't just salvos in a battle between brands; it's a personal war.... It's a fight for something even bigger than a basketball career" (Strauss).

While this is all nice and well for players at the height of their basketball powers, LaVar is endeavoring to claim agency for himself

and his family before any of them have stepped on a professional basketball court, a fact few critics have failed to point out. They have not earned this yet. Nobody's ever tried to forge their own lane without already being great. But maybe this is not the case. In fact, LeBron began breaking out of the corporation-defined mold after just one year in the league, albeit an all-time great year. After his rookie year, "Mr. James did the almost unthinkable in the sometimes stuffy world of sports marketing — he handed his off-the-court businesses and marketing over to" his childhood friends Maverick Carter, Rich Paul, and Randy Mims (Thomaselli). LeBron was searching for the same self-definition that the Balls are now. Looking back, LeBron recalls, "I wanted to wake up in the morning and say I did it my way. I'm not being cocky and saying it's my way or the highway; I just wanted to make a decision" (Thomaselli). It is nearly the same exact notion that LaVar and Lonzo are currently pushing more than a decade later. At the time, LeBron "and his friends also wanted a new type of sports marketing. Rather than endorsements, he wanted partnerships" (Thomaselli). This reads almost verbatim to what LaVar is talking about now in the year 2017. History may not be repeating itself but it is, at the very least, rhyming.

Neither of these journeys—LeBron's and the Ball family's—are without speedbumps, though. LeBron and his people created their own management and media agency, LRMR, in Maverick Carter's mother's kitchen after firing LeBron's agent (Torre). LRMR's first major media project was "The Decision — the broadly consumed and deeply unpopular ESPN primetime special wherein James announced he was leaving the Cavs for the Heat" (Torre). This seemingly self-indulgent, look-at-me production made LeBron the most hated player in the league for quite some time (despite it raising tens of millions of dollars for charity). Similarly, the Ball family's notoriety is coming at the expense of many criticisms of LaVar's outspokenness. The resemblances between the two cases are uncanny; the Balls are just more pronounced in their desires while moving the timeline ahead a year. After all, LaVar did declare that they were never planning to "sign with a company and then wait around for five or six years for a shoe" (Rovell).

Now that LeBron has neared the mountaintop of basketball and dominates the sneaker world as well, he has set his sights to other avenues. He has continuously chosen partnerships—such as his with Warner Bros. that the studio called "unprecedented in scope"—that give greater creative control than their competing alternatives offered (Torre). LRMR has created Uninterrupted, a media outlet for players to connect directly with fans. Continuing to buck traditional sensibilities that hang on to the players' teams as their primary allegiance, he headlines and works closely in this effort with Draymond Green, "James' ostensible [Golden State] Warriors rival" (Torre). Notably, Draymond Green is also a Nike athlete, another hint to the waning importance of team conflicts as opposed to promotion of more personal undertakings. According to LeBron, the projects he is participating in now are all part of the "vision that [he] had 10- plus years ago" (Torre).

The Balls' sights, while lofty in their own rights, have only been set on the sneaker industry as of now. Still, with their "Shooters Shoot" mentality and their propensity to reject established and outdated standards, it is possible that their ventures will lead them to paths outside of shoes. They are branding themselves in a vastly different way than most everyone else has and, most importantly, they are doing it their own individual way. LaVar said a year-and-a-half ago that they are "doing some shit that has never been done before. We kind of march to our own beat in the fact that we make our own rules.... We jumped out the box and took a risk" (Calle). In a similar vein, LeBron cited the television show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, noting similarities between himself and Will Smith's titular character:

It was, [LeBron] admits, more than just a character on TV. More like an inspiration. 'The guy makes it out of Philadelphia? I treated that as Akron, Ohio [LeBron's hometown]. He makes it to Los Angeles with a rich family, but he can still be himself? That's what I wanted to be. With the blazer inside out... All of that.' (Torre)

The way players cling to this individuality within the often-starched backdrop is crucial and only growing in importance as values moves away from conventional team-based allegiances towards personal brands. LeBron's circle mentioned how different things were in the early 2000s, when he came into the league, from the '80s, when Michael Jordan made his name because of the uprise of mass media and its use in making wider audiences more accessible (Thomaselli). This applies even more aptly in 2017 with social media's advent, a huge advantage in marketing that has benefitted the viral-ness of many of the more eccentric shots LaVar has put up.

Frankly, the stakes are huge. It may be just sports, but the money exchanged on these playgrounds is massive. Stephen Curry's "potential worth to [Under Armour] is placed at more than a staggering $14 billion" and business experts "peg total sneaker sales somewhere north of $20 billion annually, and rising" (Strauss). Unsaid but assumed up until now, much of the Balls' potential as transcendent difference-makers depends upon at least one of the Ball brothers (Lonzo, LiAngelo, and LaMelo) being exceptional at the game that allowed them to get here. They are using what LeBron has been doing for nearly 15 years and refining the blueprint, but LeBron has a leg up as one of the few unequalled players in the game's history. So, let us hypothetically assume the worst—that the Balls all bust or wear upon the public's nerves to the point of no return: the fact that they have gotten this far is nevertheless remarkable. This phenomenon has not occurred in a vacuum. Even if they end up being nothing more than a small blip in Nike's, adidas's, and Under Armour's smooth-sailing Titanics, they matter. They have presented those who follow a longer runway to launch from than was there previously—a runway that does not rely on these major corporations' backing. When

recalling his time playing at Chino Hills High School, Lonzo reflected, “I felt like I helped change the culture over there” (Calle). Now, before he has had his name called at the NBA Draft, he and Big Baller Brand ~~are changing~~ have already changed the culture on an even larger scale.

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Teacher Takeaways

“This essay is an impressive exploration of a current issue: I can tell how passionate the student is, and they develop a nuanced thesis about the Ball family’s influence on sports marketing and branding. While the essay is fluid, segueing from idea to idea pretty smoothly, the overarching organizational logic seems arbitrary. In other words, the structure feels fine while reading, but taking a step back makes the train of ideas blurry. I would encourage this student to make a reverse outline to clarify this issue. On a local level, I would also emphasize that the student should spend more time unpacking the quotes they use, rather than moving on right away. (Generally, you should avoid ending a paragraph with a quote, which this author does often).”

– Professor Wihjlem

Vaccines: Controversies and Miracles[121]

Every year billions of people get vaccinated for protection from diseases and illnesses. Before vaccinations, the flu ran rampant; measles would kill thousands yearly; polio would paralyze upwards of 15,000 people a year, and many other diseases would devastate societies (Offit 3). Even with the wonderful advancement of vaccines, people still opt out of getting them, endangering themselves and everyone around them. I have observed that the two most common reasons why people choose not to vaccinate

are either that they claim vaccines do not work or that vaccines can even cause autism. These responses are derived from a place of being horribly misinformed. We will explore why these claims have become popular, and what the truth really is. Vaccines are essential for the health of an individual, the people directly around them, and societies overall. The evidence against the most common excuses is very strong and in large quantity. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence supporting the autism claim or misunderstanding of vaccines not "working", thus making these excuses invalid.

Sometimes misinterpreting something small can create a big wave of damage. When people say that vaccines do not "work", they think that vaccines are a definitive solution to their health, and when they or someone still gets sick, then the vaccine did not work. This is a fair statement; however, this is not what vaccines actually do. Getting vaccinated is not an absolute healing technique; rather, it is for reducing the chances one will get a disease. It is much like wearing pads while riding a bike: your chances of injury goes down, but there is still a chance of getting hurt. As for vaccines, the chances of getting the flu after being vaccinated is usually reduced by 40-60% ("Vaccine"). Pair that with healthy habits like frequent washing of hands, and the odds go even more in your favor. An example of a highly successful vaccine is the chickenpox vaccine. It is over 95% effective in preventing severe chickenpox. And only 10-30% of vaccinated children may catch a mild case of chickenpox if they are around someone who has the disease (Hammond). What these statistics show is the benefits of vaccines, but they also show the limitations of them as well. The math is simple: getting vaccinated reduces your chances of disease greatly, and in doing so, you are fulfilling your responsibility to be a healthy individual in society.

In 1998 Andrew Wakefield conducted research to see if there was a link between the measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. But he did not conduct honest research because he tampered with the medical records of all 12 of his test subjects to make the connection between autism and the MMR vaccine seem stronger (Chan). As if this weren't enough, Wakefield was paid by lawyers to create a result they could use in their case to sue vaccine manufacturers. Not only that, but nobody has ever replicated his findings (Gorski). It goes without saying that being paid to change records automatically terminates the authenticity of a study. Furthermore, if a result cannot be replicated, then the original finding is most likely incorrect. A good theory must be able to be tested and redone with the results being consistent. With Wakefield's study, there are no findings supporting his claims but countless studies refuting them. One example is a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* conducted in 2002 that had over 500,000 subjects. This large study followed half a million children for seven years and found no link between the MMR vaccine and autism. Wakefield had his medical license revoked in 2010 (Chan).

Even though the Wakefield hoax has been debunked countless times, some parents still believe that the vaccine causes autism. They often claim they noticed signs of autism after the vaccine, but they usually do not know when autism becomes apparent. Autism is a genetic disorder with signs that become visible at 18 months of age. The MMR vaccine is usually given at 12-15 months of age, before anyone would even know if a child has autism (Bhandari). So, if a child has autism and is given the vaccine at 15 months, it is reasonable for a parent to notice symptoms of autism a couple months later and link them to the vaccine. But if that child did not get the vaccine, those same signs would show due to the genetic factors that cause autism.

Vaccines are known as miracles of medicine; nothing short of a colossal impact on modern society. But a much larger impact is not vaccinating at all. Japan is an example of a country that banned a specific vaccine, and with no surprise, an epidemic broke out. "In 2013, the recent serious measles outbreak was fueled by children who weren't vaccinated a decade ago. The disease primarily affected teenagers but spread to infants who were too young to be vaccinated" (Larson). This is why vaccinating is a responsibility everyone has; one person has the disease, then passes it to the next, and on it passes to those who are too young to vaccinate. Would you be another stepping stone in the spreading of disease? Or would you be protected from the disease, thus slowing the spreading? Immunity is a group effort, and if a portion of the population is not participating in vaccination, then disease is bound to get out of control and infect individuals with no vaccine. This includes innocent infants who have not been vaccinated yet. Every individual is a part of the picture in group health.

Vaccines: the misinterpretations, conspiracies, and saved lives has sparked many of debates. Many believe that vaccines do not "work" and that they are for ultimate healing, but this is far from what vaccines do. Vaccines protect and reduce the chances of getting a disease and allow individuals to do their part in mass health. The conspiracy theory claiming that the MMR vaccine causes autism has been proven false by countless studies and rendered untrustworthy by the acts of the man who made the original claims. Vaccines are our tool in keeping ourselves and one another healthy. I challenge you to do your part in preventing outbreaks and maintaining public health by getting your vaccinations.

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Teacher Takeaways

“I appreciate the efforts this essay takes to establish a Rogerian argument: the author anticipates the current beliefs of their audience by organizing their exploration around common misconceptions about vaccines. In turn, the author does not reject these misconceptions as foolish, but just misinformed. This organizational choice could be made clearer, though, with stronger topic sentences and a thesis statement that previews the structure, like a road-map.”

– Professor Wihjlem

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7: AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

7.1: Avoiding Plagiarism
7.2: Incorporating Sources to Support your Thesis
7.3: Incorporating Sources
7.4: Principles
7.5: Integrating Source Material and Signal Phrases
7.6: Self Check on MLA citations and avoiding plagiarism

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7.1: Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism—the use of someone else's words or ideas as though they were your own— is a very serious offense. KCC counts plagiarism as a Violation of Academic Integrity. You can read more about disciplinary procedures in the Student Handbook .

If you've read this far into our handbook, you're most likely not the kind of student who is looking to turn in an eight-page research paper on cloning that you bought from www.lazywriter.com. However, you might still have some questions about what constitutes fair usage of a source. Here are some guidelines to follow when integrating outside material into your writing:

1. When in doubt, cite it—both in the body of the paper and on a Works Cited (MLA), References (APA), or Bibliography (CMS) page.
2. If it's fairly common knowledge (i.e. smoking causes cancer, over half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in Ford's Theatre in April of 1865), you don't need to cite it.
3. Most students realize that direct quotations must be credited to the original source or author. However, you also need to give credit for anything you've paraphrased or summarized. Merely changing a few words does not make someone else's work your own.
4. Try to strike a balance between quoting and paraphrasing; too much of either gets predictable and boring. Some situations call for a powerful direct quotation, but there are other times when a paraphrase allows you to exhibit your understanding of the material.
5. A successful paraphrase re-states a passage using different words and structure.

Case Study: Three Student Paraphrases of the Same Source

Original Passage

Scientific evidence increasingly suggests that, amid all the texting, poking and surfing, our children's digital lives are turning them into much different creatures from us—and not necessarily for the better... We know the dangers of texting or talking on the phone while operating a motor vehicle—but what about when forming a brain? A Kaiser Family Foundation report released last year found that on average, children ages 8 to 18 spend 7 hours and 38 minutes a day using entertainment media.

Dalton Conley from "Wired for Distraction: Kids and Social Media" / Time / 2011 / pages 55-56

Student 1

Writer Dalton Conley cites scientific evidence to suggest that children's online lives are turning them into very different animals than their parents—and this isn't necessarily a good thing. We know the perils of texting while operating a car, but what about when shaping a brain? One Kaiser Family Foundation report found that on average, children and adolescents spend over seven hours a day using electronic media (55).

Work Cited Conley, Dalton. "Wired for Distraction: Kids and Social Media." Time, 21 Feb. 2011, pp. 55-56.

VERDICT—Plagiarism: Despite a signal phrase identifying the author, and a parenthetical citation at the end, this student borrows far too much of the wording and structure of the original passage. This is often referred to as the "thesaurus paraphrase": you look up a few synonyms and replace words here and there. Simply put, this is a careless paraphrase.

Student 2

Just how prevalent have technology and social media become in the life of a young person? According to one study, children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend nearly one third of each day connected to some form of "entertainment media" (Conley 55). In turn, experts fear that so much multitasking could have some unintended cognitive effects on this particular generation (55).

Work Cited Conley, Dalton. "Wired for Distraction: Kids and Social Media." Time, 21 Feb. 2011, pp. 55-56.

VERDICT—Safe Use of Source Material in MLA Format: Although the second half of this is more summary than paraphrase, the writer has safely captured the main point and carefully converted the statistic. In addition, the parenthetical documentation clearly identifies the source both times it's used.

Student 3

As Conley (2011) reports, children and adolescents are now typically spending nearly eight hours of each day connected to some form of social or electronic media, according to one Kaiser Family Foundation study. Conley wonders what kind of effect such multitasking is having on this "wired" generation, a group whose "digital lives are turning them into much different creatures" than their parents (p. 55).

Reference Conley, D. (2011, March 19). Wired for distraction: Kids and social media. Time. Retrieved from content.time.com/time/magazine/ article/0,9171,2048363,00.html

VERDICT—Safe Use of Source Material in APA Format: The student has carefully reworded the original text but has kept key information and concepts. The material is presented in a different structure than the original, and the ideas and wording are safely attributed to the author of the article. Notice this student found the same article online.

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7.2: Incorporating Sources to Support your Thesis

Everyone knows that a thorough analysis and persuasive argument needs strong evidence. The credibility of sources, addressed in Chapter 4, is one key element of strong evidence, but it also matters how sources are used in the text of the paper. Many students are accustomed to thinking of sources simply as expert corroboration for their own points. As a result, they tend to comb texts to find statements that closely parallel what they want to say and then incorporate quotes as evidence that a published author agrees with them. That's one way to use sources, but there is a lot more to it.

Recall from prior chapters that writing academic papers is about joining a conversation. You're contributing your own original thinking to some complex problem, be it interpretive, theoretical, or practical. Citing sources helps situate your ideas within that ongoing conversation. Sometimes you're citing a research finding that provides strong evidence for your point; at other times you're summarizing someone else's ideas in order to explain how your own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation. Graff and Birkenstein[1] encourage you to think about writing with sources is a "They Say/I Say" process. You first report what "they" say; "they" being published authors, prevalent ideas in society at large, or maybe participants in some kind of political or social debate. Then you respond by explaining what you think: Do you agree? Disagree? A little of both?

This "They Say/I Say" approach can help student writers find balance in their use of sources. On one extreme, some students think that they aren't allowed to make any claims without citing one or more expert authors saying the same thing. When their instructors encourage them to bring more original thinking into their writing, they're confused about how to do it. On the other extreme, some students tend to describe, more or less accurately, what sources say about a topic but then go on to state opinions that seem unrelated to the claims they just summarized. For example, a student writer may draw on expert sources to explain how the prevention and early detection of cancer has saved lives[2] but then argue for more funding for curing advanced cancer without making any explicit link to the points about prevention and screening. On one extreme, the sources are allowed to crowd out original thinking; on the other, they have seemingly no impact on the author's conclusions.

How can you know when you're avoiding both of these extremes? In other words, what kinds of theses ("I Say") can count as an original claim and still be grounded in the sources ("They Say")? Here are five common strategies:

1. *Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a larger summary argument*. You might find that none of the sources you're working with specifically claim that early 20th century British literature was preoccupied with changing gender roles but that, together, their findings all point to that broader conclusion.
2. *Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a claim about their implications*. You might review papers that explore various factors shaping voting behavior to argue that a particular voting-reform proposal will likely have positive impacts.
3. *Identify underlying areas of agreement*. You may argue that the literature on cancer and the literature on violence both describe the unrecognized importance of prevention and early intervention in order to claim that insights about one set of problems may be useful for the other.
4. *Identify underlying areas of disagreement*. You may find that the controversies surrounding educational reform—and its debates about accountability, curricula, school funding—ultimately stem from different assumptions about the role of schools in society.
5. *Identify unanswered questions*. Perhaps you review studies of the genetic and behavioral contributors to diabetes in order to highlight unknown factors and argue for more in-depth research on the role of the environment.

There are certainly other ways authors use sources to build theses, but these examples illustrate how original thinking in academic writing involves making connections with and between a strategically chosen set of sources.

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7.3: Incorporating Sources

Here's a passage of academic writing (an excerpt, not a complete paper) that illustrates several ways that sources can figure into a "They Say/I Say" approach[3]:

> Willingham (2011) draws on cognitive science to explain that students must be able to regulate their emotions in order to learn. Emotional self-regulation enables students to ignore distractions and channel their attention and behaviors in appropriate ways. Other research findings confirm that anxiety interferes with learning and academic performance because it makes distractions harder to resist (Perkins and Graham-Bermann, 2012; Putwain and Best, 2011).
> Other cognitive scientists point out that deep learning is itself stressful because it requires people to think hard about complex, unfamiliar material instead of relying on cognitive short-cuts.
>
> Kahneman (2011) describes this difference in terms of two systems for thinking: one fast and one slow. Fast thinking is based on assumptions and habits and doesn't require a lot of effort. For example, driving a familiar route or a routine grocery-shopping trip are not usually intellectually taxing activities. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is what we do when we encounter novel problems and situations. It's effortful, and it usually feels tedious and confusing. It is emotionally challenging as well because we are, by definition, incompetent while we're doing it, which provokes some anxiety. Solving a tough problem is rewarding, but the path itself is often unpleasant.
> These insights from cognitive science enable us to critically assess the claims made on both sides of the education reform debate. On one hand, they cast doubt on the claims of education reformers that measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education. For example, the Center for Education Reform promotes "the implementation of strong, data-driven, performance-based accountability systems that ensure teachers are rewarded, retained and advanced based on how they perform in adding value to the students who they teach, measured predominantly by student achievement" (http://www.edreform.com/issues/teacher-quality/#what-we-believe). The research that Willingham (2011) and Kahneman (2011) describe suggests that frequent high-stakes testing may actually work against learning by introducing greater anxiety into the school environment.
> At the same time, opponents of education reform should acknowledge that these research findings should prompt us to take a fresh look at how we educate our children. While Stan Karp of Rethinking Schools is correct when he argues that "data-driven formulas [based on standardized testing] lack both statistical credibility and a basic understanding of the human motivations and relationships that make good schooling possible" (www.rethinkingschools.org/arc...6_03_karp.shtm), it doesn't necessarily follow that all education reform proposals lack merit. Challenging standards, together with specific training in emotional self-regulation, will likely enable more students to succeed.[4]

In that example, the ideas of Willingham and Kahneman are summarized approvingly, bolstered with additional research findings, and then applied to a new realm: the current debate surrounding education reform. Voices in that debate were portrayed as accurately as possible, sometimes with representative quotes. Most importantly, all references were tied directly to the author's own interpretative point, which relies on the quoted claims.

> I think the most important lesson for me to learn about sources was that the best way to use them is to create a new point. What I mean by this is instead of using them only to back up your points, create your own conclusion from what your sources say. As a psychology major, I look at a lot of data from researchers who have created a conclusion from a meta-analysis (a combination of many studies about the same thing). So that's how I like to think of using sources, I will look at many articles about the same subject and then come up with my own opinion. After using your sources, it is very important to cite them correctly. Personally, I want to be a respected and trustworthy scholar. However, if any of my papers were to be found without proper citations, all of my hard work would be for nothing and people would be wary about the rest of my work.
>
> Aly Button

As you can see, there are times when you should quote or paraphrase sources that you don't agree with or do not find particularly compelling. They may convey ideas and opinions that help explain and justify your own argument. Similarly, when you cite sources that you agree with, you should choose quotes or paraphrases that serve as building blocks within your own argument. Regardless of the role each source plays in your writing, you certainly don't need to find whole sentences or passages that express your thinking. Rather, focus on what each of those sources is claiming, why, and how exactly their claims relate to your own points.

The remainder of this chapter explains some key principles for incorporating sources, principles which follow from the general

point that academic writing is about entering an ongoing conversation.

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7.4: Principles

Principle 1: Listen to your sources

Have you ever had the maddening experience of arguing with someone who twisted your words to make it seem like you were saying something you weren't? Novice writers sometimes inadvertently misrepresent their sources when they quote very minor points from an article or even positions that the authors of an article disagree with. It often happens when students approach their sources with the goal of finding snippets that align with their own opinion. For example, the passage above contains the phrase "measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education." An inexperienced writer might include that quote in a paper without making it clear that the author(s) of the source actually dispute that very claim. Doing so is not intentionally fraudulent, but it reveals that the paper-writer isn't really thinking about and responding to claims and arguments made by others. In that way, it harms his or her credibility.

Academic journal articles are especially likely to be misrepresented by student writers because their literature review sections often summarize a number of contrasting viewpoints. For example, sociologists Jennifer C. Lee and Jeremy Staff wrote a paper in which they note that high-schoolers who spend more hours at a job are more likely to drop out of school.[5] However, Lee and Staff's analysis finds that working more hours doesn't actually make a student more likely to drop out. Instead, the students who express less interest in school are both more likely to work a lot of hours *and* more likely to drop out. In short, Lee and Staff argue that disaffection with school causes students to drop-out, not working at a job. In reviewing prior research about the impact of work on dropping out, Lee and Staff write "Paid work, especially when it is considered intensive, reduces grade point averages, time spent on homework, educational aspirations, and the likelihood of completing high school"[6]. If you included that quote without explaining how it fits into Lee and Staff's actual argument, you would be misrepresenting that source.

Principle 2: Provide context

Another error beginners often make is to drop in a quote without any context. If you simply quote, "Students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham, 2011, p.24), your reader is left wondering who Willingham is, why he or she is included here, and where this statement fits into his or her larger work. The whole point of incorporating sources is to situate your own insights in the conversation. As part of that, you should provide some kind of context the first time you use that source. Some examples:

Example 7.4.1:

Willingham, a cognitive scientist, claims that ...

Research in cognitive science has found that ... (Willingham, 2011).

Willingham argues that "Students begin preschool with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment" (Willingham, 2011, p.24). Drawing on findings in cognitive science, he explains "..."

As the second example above shows, providing a context doesn't mean writing a brief biography of every author in your bibliography—it just means including some signal about why that source is included in your text.

Even more baffling to your reader is when quoted material does not fit into the flow of the text. For example, a novice student might write,

> Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. "We conclude that intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (Lee and Staff, 2007, p. 171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

The reader is thinking, who is this sudden, ghostly "we"? Why should this source be believed? If you find that passages with quotes in your draft are awkward to read out loud, that's a sign that you need to contextualize the quote more effectively. Here's a version that puts the quote in context:

> Schools and parents shouldn't set limits on how much teenagers are allowed to work at jobs. Lee and Staff's carefully designed study found that "intensive work does not affect the likelihood of high school dropout among youths who have a high propensity to spend long hours on the job" (2007, p. 171). Teens should be trusted to learn how to manage their time.

In this latter example, it's now clear that Lee and Staff are scholars and that their empirical study is being used as evidence for this argumentative point. Using a source in this way invites the reader to check out Lee and Staff's work for themselves if they doubt this claim.

Many writing instructors encourage their students to contextualize their use of sources by making a "quotation sandwich"; that is, introduce the quote in some way and then follow it up with your own words. If you've made a bad habit of dropping in unintroduced quotes, the quotation sandwich idea may help you improve your skills, but in general you don't need to approach every quote or paraphrase as a three-part structure to have well integrated sources. You should, however, avoid ending a paragraph with a quotation. If you're struggling to figure out what to write after a quote or close paraphrase, it may be that you haven't yet figured out what role the quote is playing in your own analysis. If that happens to you a lot, try writing the whole first draft in your own words and then incorporate material from sources as you revise with "They Say/I Say" in mind.

Principle 3: Use sources efficiently

Some student writers are in a rut of only quoting whole sentences. Some others, like myself as a student, get overly enamored of extended block quotes and the scholarly look they give to the page.[7] These aren't the worst sins of academic writing, but they get in the way of one of the key principles of writing with sources: shaping quotes and paraphrases efficiently. Efficiency follows from the second principle, because when you fully incorporate sources into your own explicit argument, you zero in on the phrases, passages, and ideas that are relevant to your points. It's a very good sign for your paper when most quotes are short (key terms, phrases, or parts of sentences) and the longer quotes (whole sentences and passages) are clearly justified by the discussion in which they're embedded. Every bit of every quote should feel indispensable to the paper. An overabundance of long quotes usually means that your own argument is undeveloped. The most incandescent quotes will not hide that fact from your professor.

Also, some student writers forget that quoting is not the only way to incorporate sources. Paraphasing and summarizing are sophisticated skills that are often more appropriate to use than direct quoting. The first two paragraphs of the example passage above do not include any quotations, even though they are both clearly focused on presenting the work of others. Student writers may avoid paraphrasing out of fear of plagiarizing, and it's true that a poorly executed paraphrase will make it seem like the student writer is fraudulently claiming the wordsmithing work of others as his or her own. Sticking to direct quotes seems safer. However, it is worth your time to master paraphasing because it often helps you be more clear and concise, drawing out only those elements that are relevant to the thread of your analysis.

For example, here's a passage from a hypothetical paper with a block quote that is fully relevant to the argument but, nevertheless, inefficient:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman concludes our brains are prone to error:[8]

System 1 registers the cognitive ease with which it processes information, but it does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable. Intuitive answers come to mind quickly and confidently, whether they originate from skills or from heuristics. There is no simple way for System 2 to distinguish between a skilled and a heuristic response. Its only recourse is to slow down and attempt to construct an answer on its own, which it is reluctant to do because it is indolent. Many suggestions of System 1 are casually endorsed with minimal checking, as in the bat-and-ball problem.

> While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Even a passage that is important to reference and is well contextualized in the flow of the paper will be inefficient if it introduces terms and ideas that aren't central to the analysis within the paper. Imagine, for example, that other parts of this hypothetical paper use Kahneman's other terms for System 1 (fast thinking) and System 2 (slow thinking); the sudden encounter of "System 1" and "System 2" would be confusing and tedious for your reader. Similarly, the terms "heuristics" and "bat-and-ball problem" might be unfamiliar to your reader. Their presence in the block quote just muddies the waters. In this case, a paraphrase is a much better choice. Here's an example passage that uses a paraphrase to establish the same points more clearly and efficiently:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments.[9] We have the capacity to stop and examine our assumptions, Kahneman points out, but we often want to avoid that hard work. As a result, we tend to accept our quick, intuitive responses. While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests that the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Not only is the paraphrased version shorter (97 words versus 151), it is clearer and more efficient because it highlights the key ideas, avoiding specific terms and examples that aren't used in the rest of the paper. If other parts of your paper did refer to Kahneman's System 1 and System 2, then you might choose to include some quoted phrases to make use of some of Kahneman's great language. Perhaps something like this:

> Drawing on a lifetime of research, Kahneman summarizes that our brains are prone to error because they necessarily rely on cognitive shortcuts that may or may not yield valid judgments.[10] System 1, Kahneman explains, "does not generate a warning signal when it becomes unreliable." [11] System 2 can stop and examine these assumptions, but it usually wants to avoid that hard work. As a result, our quick, intuitive responses are "casually endorsed with minimal checking." [12] While people can get better at recognizing and avoiding these errors, Kahneman suggests, the more robust solutions involve developing procedures within organizations to promote careful, effortful thinking in making important decisions and judgments.

Whether you choose a long quote, short quote, paraphrase or summary depends on the role that the source in playing in your analysis. The trick is to make deliberate, thoughtful decisions about how to incorporate ideas and words from others.

Paraphrasing, summarizing, and the mechanical conventions of quoting take a lot of practice to master. Numerous other resources (like those listed at the end of this chapter) explain these practices clearly and succinctly. Bookmark some good sources and refer to them as needed. If you suspect that you're in a quoting rut, try out some new ways of incorporating sources.

Principle 4: Choose precise verbs of attribution

It's time to get beyond the all-purpose "says." And please don't look up "says" in the thesaurus and substitute verbs like "proclaim" (unless there was actually a proclamation) or "pronounce" (unless there was actually a pronouncement). Here's a list of 15 useful alternatives:[13]

- Claims
- Asserts
- Relates
- Recounts
- Complains
- Reasons
- Proposes
- Suggests (if the author is speculating or hypothesizing)
- Contests (disagrees)
- Concludes
- Shows
- Argues
- Explains
- Indicates
- Points out
- Offers

More precise choices like these carry a lot more information than "says", enabling you to relate more with fewer words. For one thing, they can quickly convey what kind of idea you're citing: a speculative one ("postulates")? A conclusive one ("determines")? A controversial one ("counters")? You can further show how you're incorporating these sources into your own narrative. For example, if you write that an author "claims" something, you're presenting yourself as fairly neutral about that claim. If you instead write that the author "shows" something, then you signal to your reader that you find that evidence more convincing. "Suggests" on the other hand is a much weaker endorsement. As I'll discuss in Chapter 8, saying more with less makes your writing much more engaging.

> Sources are your best friend. They either help you reaffirm your thesis or offer a differing opinion that you can challenge in your paper. The biggest thing to worry about, when it comes to sources, is citing. However, there are a multitude of resources to help you cite properly. My personal favorite is called Knightcite.com. You just pick the type of resource, fill in the information on it and voila, you have a perfectly cited resource!
>
> Kaethe Leonard

Conclusion

Like so many things in adult life, writing in college is often both more liberating and burdensome than writing in high school and before. On the one hand, I've had students tell me that their high-school experiences made it seem that their own opinions didn't matter in academic writing, and that they can't make any claims that aren't exactly paralleled by a pedigreed quotation. Writing papers based on their own insights and opinions can seem freeing in contrast. At the same time, a college student attending full time may be expected to have original and well considered ideas about pre-Columbian Latin American history, congressional redistricting, sports in society, post-colonial literatures, and nano-technology, all in about two weeks. Under these conditions, it's easy to see why some would long for the days when simple, competent reporting did the job. You probably won't have an authentic intellectual engagement with every college writing assignment, but approaching your written work as an opportunity to dialogue with the material can help you find the momentum you need to succeed with this work.

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7.5: Integrating Source Material and Signal Phrases

Using source material effectively is a major part of academic writing—whether you're quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing. One of the easiest assignments any professor can give you is to have you read and respond to an article or essay. Your role as a writer will often involve having a written "conversation" with your source(s).

If done well, a signal phrase can accomplish three things:

1. it can smoothly set up the context of the material you're about to use
2. it can add credibility to your writing
3. it can show your readers where your ideas end and your source material

begins (which helps you avoid plagiarism)

The following examples illustrate the power of the signal phrase:

- As one writer points out,... (citation).
- A recent cover story in Newsweek reveals that... (citation).
- Writer Naomi Wolf contends that... (citation).
- According to Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015),...
- Multiple studies confirm how... (citation).
- The Journal of the American Medical Association has noted this trend:... (citation).

PERSUADING INFORMING argues reports contends reveals asserts suggests questions points out believes illustrates maintains concludes

claims

acknowledges refutes

observes insists

notes affirms

explains dismisses

states denies

shows

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7.6: Self Check on MLA citations and avoiding plagiarism

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8: HANDBOOK - SENTENCE VARIETY AND GRAMMAR

8.1: Fragments and Run-Ons

8.2: Coordination and Subordination

8.3: Subject-Verb Agreement

8.4: Verb Tense

8.5: Active vs. Passive Voice

8.6: Voice

8.7: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

8.8: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

8.9: Parallelism

8.10: Word Choice

8.10.1: Homonyms

8.10.2: Homonyms

8.10.3: Commonly Confused Words

8.10.4: Commonly Misspelled Words

8.10.5: Slang, Cliche, and Overly General Words

8.10.6: The Dilemma of Gendered Language in English

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8.1: Fragments and Run-Ons

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a piece of a sentence, not a complete thought. Remember, a sentence must contain a subject and a verb, and it must make sense by itself. Here are three fragments:

- After John and Julie saw the way their daughter was dancing at the prom.
- Feeling a lot like an inflated Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon.
- Something I had wanted to say to her for a long time.

To correct a fragment, add what is missing (a subject and/or a verb):

- After John and Julie saw the way their daughter was dancing at the prom, they grounded her for a year.
- I ate so much at dinner that I felt a lot like an inflated Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon.
- That was something I had wanted to say to her for a long time.

Many fragments can be fixed by linking the incomplete group of words to a nearby sentence, or by adding words to create a complete thought.

Incorrect (three sentence fragments):

Technology has definitely changed human behavior. But not always in positive ways. Cell phone usage in public spaces and during social situations is now accepted by many people. Thinking they aren't being rude. Even though it has become normal to hold both digital and face-to-face conversations simultaneously. Some users are making a conscious effort to minimize this kind of "self-splitting," as MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls it (58).

Corrected (fragments are fixed):

Technology has definitely changed human behavior but not always in positive ways. Cell phone usage in public spaces and during social situations is now accepted by many people who think they aren't being rude. Even though it has become normal to hold both digital and face-to-face conversations simultaneously, some users are making a conscious effort to minimize this kind of "self-splitting," as MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls it (58).

Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence keeps on going when it should stop. Without the proper punctuation, having more than one thought jammed together will produce a run-on sentence:

- The Pueblo cliff dwellings of northern New Mexico served as winter residences they could accommodate large families.
- Some students study every night, others study only when they have to.

To correct a run-on sentence, you have multiple options (see page 18):

Create two sentences:

- The Pueblo cliff dwellings of northern New Mexico served as winter residences. They could accommodate large families.

Join the two thoughts with a coordinating conjunction (and, so, but, etc.):

- Some students study every night, but others study only when they have to.

Link the ideas with a subordinating conjunction (because, if, when, although, etc.):

- The Pueblo cliff dwellings of northern New Mexico served as winter residences because they could accommodate large

families.

Add a semi-colon alone, or add a semi-colon with a transitional word:

- Some students study every night; others study only when they have to.
- Some students study every night; however , others study only when they have to.

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8.2: Coordination and Subordination

Writers use three major methods of joining their ideas together in one sentence: coordination and subordination. Learning use coordination and subordination well is foundational to creating cohesion (or a smooth flow) in your writing, as well as to express how your ideas relate to each other logically.

Definitions

Coordination: Joining two related ideas of equal importance

Subordination: Joining two related ideas of unequal importance

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs, and in turn, produces more effective writing. In this section, you will read excerpts from an essay by Noemi, who drafted an essay about wine production, as she revises her writing for coordination and subordination. Read this excerpt from Noemi's essay.

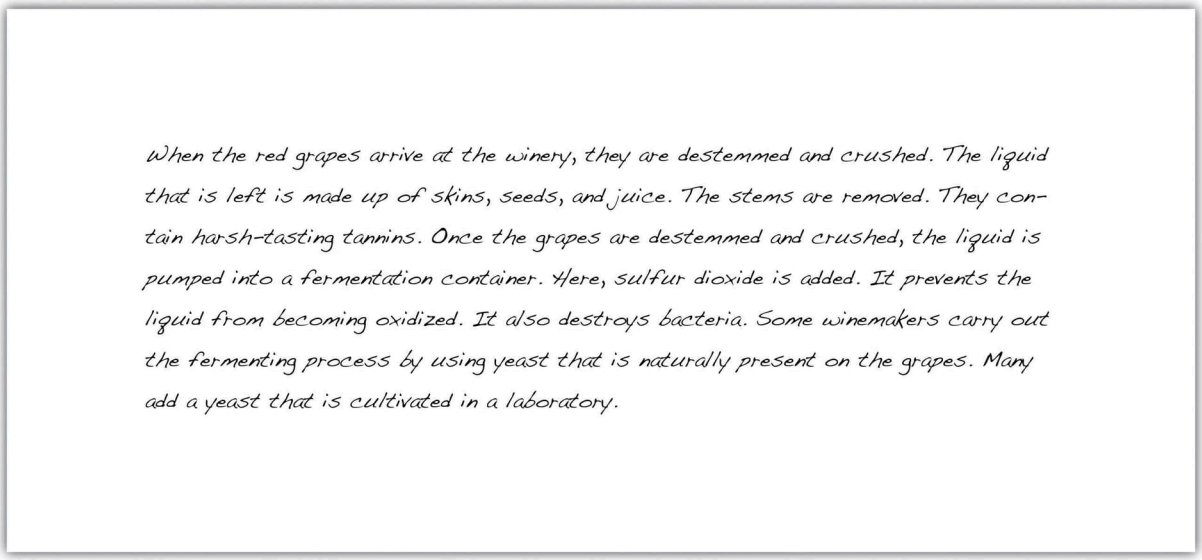

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Figure: Noemi's first draft feels a little choppy and disconnected because we don't know if some ideas are more important than others or how the ideas relate to each other logically. To begin her revision process, she started looking at coordinating ideas of equal importance.

Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

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 coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. These can be memorized by the acronym FANBOYS. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses but not when joining a phrase (such as in this sentence).

The following table explains the logic that each coordinating conjunction represents.

Function/Logic	Coordinating Conjunction	Example
cause	for	I had to bring my car to the body shop, for I had run into a pole.
addition	and	I strive to find balance in my life and my best friend tries to find balance also.
choice/alternative (negative)	nor	I have never been to Europe, nor have I been to Australia.
contrast	but	She had packed all her bags for vacation, but the flight was late.
choice/alternative	or	Next summer, I can either take a longer RV trip, or I can travel for a shorter period of time and take a train somewhere.
contrast	yet	I had tied a scarf around my luggage to find it at the baggage carousel, yet I couldn't find my bag when I disembarked the plane.
effect	so	I had packed almost everything in there, so I felt distraught.

The next table gives an example for how you might join two clauses with each type of coordinating conjunction.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	and (adds another ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there*.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	but (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	yet (indicates contrast)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

* When using nor, you must change the sentence structure of the second clause you are joining. Notice that when joining the following two clauses with "nor," the subject and the linking verb in the second clause are switched around and the negative "not" is removed because the negative is conveyed through "nor."

Original: I **did not go** shopping this weekend. **I did not watch** any sports on TV.

Combined: I **did not go** shopping this weekend, *nor* **did I watch** any sports on TV.

YouTube Video

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

View this YouTube Video online

Video 8.2.1

The Coordinating Conjunctions Song (FANBOYS). **Provided by:** Anchor Creative. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 1

Join the following sentence pairs with the coordinating conjunction that you feel reflects the logic that holds the two ideas together.

1. Ray likes EDM. Kelvin likes rap.

2. The book has been on the bestseller list for months it's one of the most boring novels I have ever read.

3. In an earthquake, buildings sway back and forth, many rattle and groan.

4. My living room is very small, I should not buy any more furniture.

5. Dedicated ecologists do not kill wildlife they shoot with cameras instead of guns.

6. Jane is my best friend, she is always there for me when I need her.

7. She is not only an excellent student, she is also and outstanding athlete.

8. John and Mike enjoyed the movies they wished the seats had been more cozy.

9. The TV wasn't working, I walked over to a friend's house to watch the game.

10. The telephone was ringing, someone was knocking at the front door as well.

11. I like action movies, he likes comedies.

12. I missed the 8 am bus, I slept through my alarm.

13. Something was obviously wrong with the meatloaf, it was glowing in the dark.

14. Harry was a good musician he could never keep a steady job in a band.

15. Mark is not very interested in sports, he does however, like to water ski.

16. I was happy with my new apartment it was in a good location and the rent was low.

Exercise 2

Fix the coordinating conjunction punctuation where needed in the following sentences. Remember that coordinating conjunctions that join two complete ideas (clauses) must have a comma before them. Coordinating conjunctions that join a phrase (part of a sentence) to another sentence structure do not need a comma before them.

1. He was amazed by the selection of items he could find when shopping online yet he had a hard time picturing how clothes would look on him.

2. Beth was horrified, but fascinated by the effects of consumer culture on people.

3. He was fearful of COVID-19 but he still went out and protested as he felt it was more important.

4. Pandemics are more likely to happen because of global warming, and increasing pressure on wild animals.

5. Change can happen when people of all races, and creeds stop treating each other in ways they wouldn't treat themselves.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.A conjunctive adverb is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. The punctuation of a conjunctive adverb varies depending upon where in the sentence the adverb appears. Once joined, the following sentences show cause and effect.

Original sentences: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

Revised sentence: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget's desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following chart of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	also, furthermore, moreover, similarly, likewise	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Contrast	instead, however, otherwise	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, as a result, consequently, hence, thus, therefore	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	finally, next, subsequently, then, after	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.
Condition	otherwise	The hotel room will hopefully be ready when I arrive; otherwise, I will have to leave my luggage in the car.
Choice/ Alternative	alternatively, on the other hand, conversely	I can continue with my current job and try to make it a better situation; alternatively, I can quit and try to find a new position.

Take a look at Noemi's essay on wine production and identify some areas in which he might use coordination.

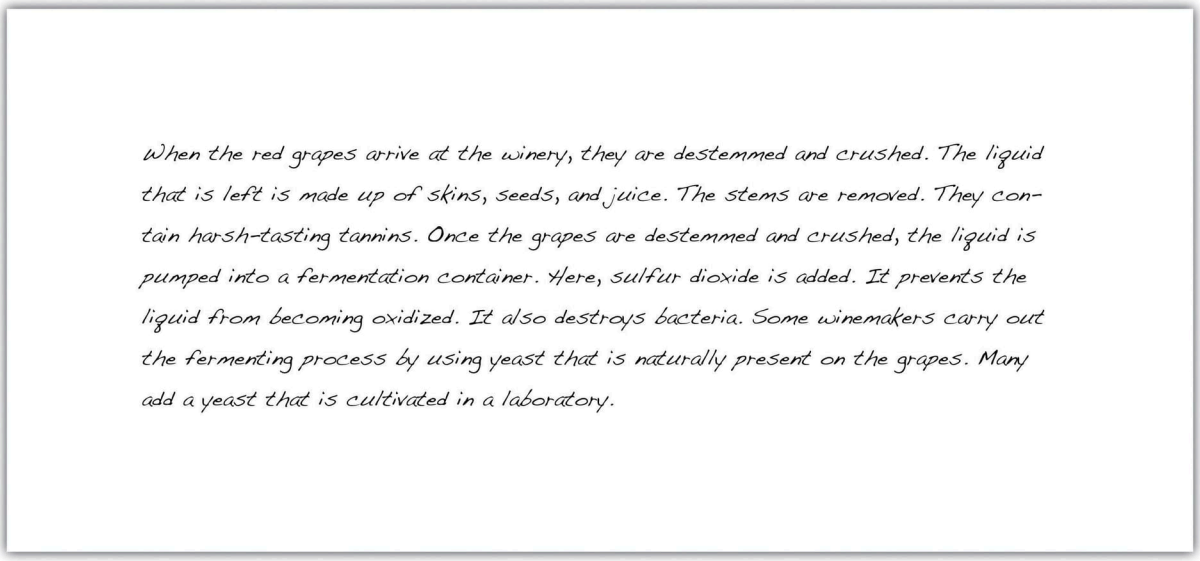

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Figure: Now look at Noemi's revised essay. Did you coordinate the same sentences? You may find that your answers are different because there are usually several ways to join two independent clauses.

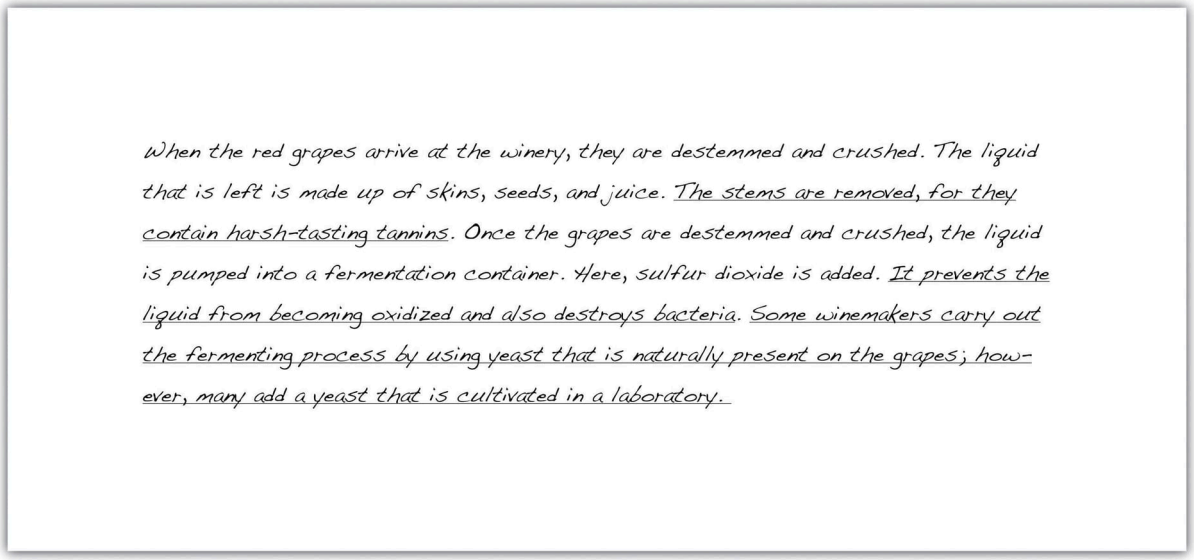

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Figure: Tip: Punctuating Transitional Adverbs

Transitional adverbs can be tricky to punctuate. If the transitional adverb is used between the two clauses, place a semi-colon before the transitional adverb and a comma after, such as in the following sentence:

- They were looking forward to going home for the semester break; however, they had to finish finals first.

If the transitional adverb appears in the middle of the second clause of the sentence (it should never appear in the first), it should be punctuated with commas on both sides, as in the following sentence.

- They were looking forward to going home for the semester break. They, however, had to finish finals first.

Finally, if the transitional adverb appears at the end of the second clause, it should be punctuated with a comma before and a period after (the end of the sentence).

- They were looking forward to going home for the semester break. They had to finish finals first, however.

Exercise 3

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a conjunctive adverb. Then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

When writing an essay or a report, it is important that you do not use excessive coordination. Workplace documents should be clear and concise, so only join two clauses that are logically connected and can work together to make one main point. If you repeat the same coordinating conjunction several times in a sentence, you are probably including too many ideas. This may make it difficult for readers to pick out the most important information in each sentence.

Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a main clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Unlike coordination, which 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 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: Subordination Punctuation

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma between the two clauses. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is needed.

YouTube Video

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Video 8.2.1

The Subordinating Conjunctions Song. **Provided by:** Anchor Creative. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following chart of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	although, while, though, whereas, even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if, unless, until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	as if, as, though	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where, wherever	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Cause	because, since, so that, in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after, before, while, once, when	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Take a look at the excerpt from Noemi's essay and identify some areas in which she might use subordination.

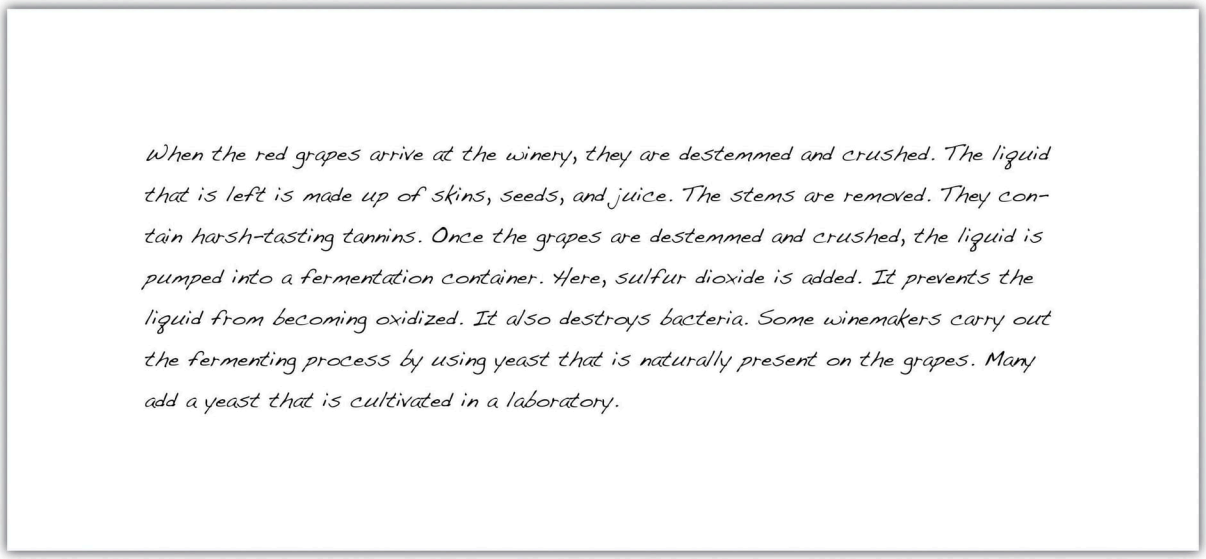
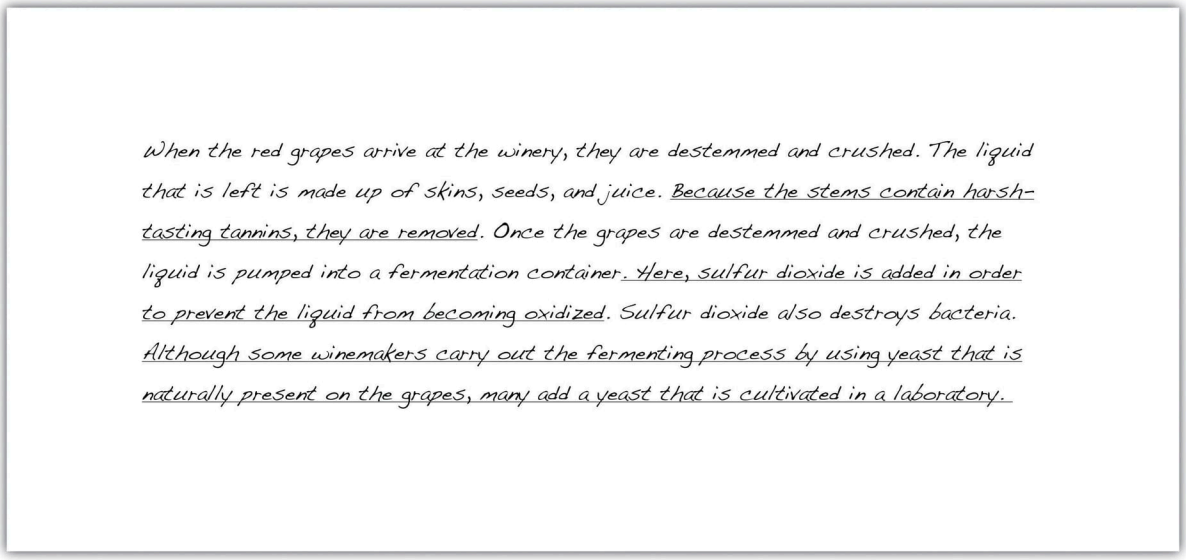


Figure: Now look at Noemi's revised essay and compare your answers. You will probably notice that there are many different ways to subordinate sentences.



Exercise 4

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction and then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Check your revised sentences for correct punctuation.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches there.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the East Coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Jordan marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

Exercise 5

Copy the paragraph from Joshua's essay onto your own sheet of paper. Then edit using the techniques you have learned in this section. Join the underlined sentences using coordination or subordination. Check your revised sentences for punctuation.

Answer available at the end of this section.

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Answers

Exercise 2

Exercise 5

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8.3: Subject-Verb Agreement

Learning Objectives

- Define subject-verb agreement.
- Identify common errors in subject-verb agreement.

In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. 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.

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.

- **Number.** All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
- **Person.** All parts must match in first person (*I*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he, she, it, they*) forms.
- **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. For more information on pronoun case agreement, see Section 2.5.1 “Pronoun Agreement”.
- **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. For more information on subjects and verbs, see Section 2.1 “Sentence Writing”.

Singular: The cat *jumps* over the fence.
Plural: The cats *jump* over the fence.

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*. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I do.	We do.
Second Person	You do.	You do.
Third Person	He/She/It does.	They do.

Exercise 8.3.2

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct present tense form of *be*, *have*, or *do*. Use your own sheet of paper to complete this exercise.

1. I _____ sure that you will succeed.
2. They _____ front-row tickets to the show.
3. He _____ a great Elvis impersonation.
4. We _____ so excited to meet you in person!
5. She _____ a fever and a sore throat.
6. You _____ not know what you are talking about.
7. You _____ all going to pass this class.
8. She _____ not going to like that.
9. It _____ appear to be the right size.
10. They _____ ready to take this job seriously.

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.

Two singular subjects: Alicia and Miguel *ride* their bikes to the beach.
Two plural subjects: The girls and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.
Singular and plural subjects: Alicia and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

Two singular subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor Rianna *want*s to eat at that restaurant.
Two plural subjects: Neither the kids nor the adults *want* to eat at that restaurant.
Singular and plural subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor the kids *want* to eat at that restaurant.
Plural and singular subjects: Neither the kids nor Elizabeth *want*s to eat at that restaurant.

Two singular subjects: Either you or Jason *take*s the furniture out of the garage.
Two plural subjects: Either you or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.
Singular and plural subjects: Either Jason or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.
Plural and singular subjects: Either the twins or Jason *take*s the furniture out of the garage.

Tip

If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

Separation of Subjects and Verbs

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.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The students with the best grades *win* the academic awards.
The puppy under the table *is* my favorite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The car that I bought *has* power steering and a sunroof.
The representatives who are courteous *sell* the most tickets.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. 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. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	All
each	Any
everybody, everyone, everything	None
much	Some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

Singular: Everybody in the kitchen *sings* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *everybody* takes a singular verb form because *everybody* refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.

Plural: All the people in the kitchen *sing* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *all* takes a plural verb form because *all* refers to the plural noun *people*. Because *people* is plural, *all* is plural.

Singular: All the cake *is* on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *all* takes a singular verb form because *all* refers to the singular noun *cake*. Because *cake* is singular, *all* is singular.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are *group*, *team*, *army*, *flock*, *family*, and *class*.

Singular: The class *is* going on a field trip.

In this sentence, *class* is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

Here or There

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here *is* my wallet!
There *are* thirty dolphins in the water.

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.

My wallet *is* here!
Thirty dolphins *are* in the water.

Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, or *how*) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Who *are* the people you are related to?
When *am* I going to go to the grocery store?

Tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked.

When *am* I going to the grocery store? I *am* going to the grocery store tonight!

Exercise 8.3.3

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 8.3.4

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph. Copy the paragraph on a piece of notebook paper and make corrections.

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 e-mail or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.
Thanks,
Felicia Fellini

Writing at Work



Terra Services are dedicated to serving our clients' needs. We settles for nothing less than high quality work, delivered on time. The next time you needs assistance getting your project off the ground, contact Terra Services, where everybody know how important it is that you get the job done right.

Figure 8.3.1 - Advertisement

Imagine that you are a prospective client and that you saw this ad online. Would you call Terra Services to handle your next project? Probably not! Mistakes in subject-verb agreement can cost a company business. Paying careful attention to grammatical details ensures professionalism that clients will recognize and respect.

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.
- Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, *each*, *everyone*, *many*, *no one*, and *something*, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with *here* and *there*, the subject follows the verb.
- In questions, the subject follows the verb.

Writing Application

Use your knowledge of subject-verb agreement to write one of the following:

1. An advertisement for a potential company
2. A memo to all employees of a particular company
3. A cover letter describing your qualifications to a potential employer

Be sure to include at least the following:

- One collective noun

- One irregular verb
- One question

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8.4: Verb Tense

Learning Objectives

- Use the correct regular verb tense in basic sentences.
- Use the correct irregular verb tense in basic sentences.

Suppose you must give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this.

It is important to use the proper verb tense. Otherwise, your listener might judge you harshly. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader with a negative impression.

Regular Verbs

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in the past, present, or future using tenses. Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add *-ed* or *-d* to the end of a verb. You can avoid mistakes by understanding this basic pattern.

Verb tense identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,
- an action or state of being in the past,
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as *be* and *have,* also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.

Present Tense: Time *walks* to the store. (Singular subject)
Present Tense: Sue and Kimmy *walk* to the store. (Plural subject)
Past Tense: Yesterday, they *walked* to the store to buy some bread. (Singular subject)

Exercise 8.4.1

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tenses. Write the corrected sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. The Dust Bowl (is, was, will be) a name given to a period of very destructive dust storms that occurred in the United States during the 1930s.
2. Historians today (consider, considered, will consider) The Dust Bowl to be one of the worst weather of events in American history.
3. The Dust Bowl mostly (affects, affected, will affect) the states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.
4. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to occur in these dry regions, but not to the devastating degree of the 1930s.
5. The dust storms during The Dust Bowl (cause, caused, will cause) irreparable damage to farms and the environment for a period of several years.
6. When early settlers (move, moved, will move) into this area, they (remove, removed, will remove) the natural prairie grasses in order to plant crops and graze their cattle.
7. They did not (realize, realized, will realize) that the grasses kept the soil in place.
8. There (is, was, will be) also a severe drought that (affects, affected, will affect) the region.
9. The worst dust storm (happens, happened, will happen) on April 14, 1935, a day called Black Sunday.
10. The Dust Bowl era finally came to end in 1939 when the rains (arrive, arrived, will arrive).

11. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to affect the region, but hopefully they will not be as destructive as the storms of the 1930s.

Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow. Study Table 2.1 “Irregular Verbs”, which lists the most common irregular verbs.

Tip

The best way to learn irregular verbs is to memorize them. With the help of a classmate, create flashcards of irregular verbs and test yourselves until you master them.

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
be	was, were	lose	lost
become	became	make	made
begin	began	mean	meant
blow	blew	meet	met
break	broke	pay	paid
bring	brought	put	put
build	built	quit	quit
burst	burst	read	read
buy	bought	ride	rode
catch	caught	ring	rang
choose	chose	rise	rose
come	came	run	ran
cut	cut	say	said
dive	dove (dived)	see	saw
do	did	seek	sought
draw	drew	sell	sold
drink	drank	send	sent
drive	drove	set	set
eat	ate	shake	shook
fall	fell	shine	shone (shined)
feed	fed	shrink	shrank (shrunk)
feel	felt	sing	sang
fight	fought	sit	sat
find	found	sleep	slept
fly	flew	speak	spoke
forget	forgot	spend	spent

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
forgive	forgave	spring	sprang
freeze	froze	stand	stood
get	got	steal	stole
give	gave	strike	struck
go	went	swim	swam
grow	grew	swing	swung
have	had	take	took
hear	heard	teach	taught
hide	hid	tear	tore
hold	held	tell	told
hurt	hurt	think	thought
keep	kept	throw	threw
know	knew	understand	understood
lay	laid	wake	woke
lead	led	wear	wore
leave	left	win	won
let	let	wind	wound

Here we consider using irregular verbs.

Present Tense: Lauren *keeps* all her letters.
Past Tense: Lauren *kept* all her letters.
Future Tense: Lauren *will keep* all her letters.

Exercise 8.4.2

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the irregular verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tense. Copy the corrected sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Marina finally (forgived, forgave, will forgive) her sister for snooping around her room.
2. The house (shook, shaked, shakes) as the airplane rumbled overhead.
3. I (buyed, bought, buy) several items of clothing at the thrift store on Wednesday.
4. She (put, putted, puts) the lotion in her shopping basket and proceeded to the checkout line.
5. The prized goose (layed, laid, lay) several golden eggs last night.
6. Mr. Batista (teached, taught, taughted) the class how to use correct punctuation.
7. I (drink, drank, will drink) several glasses of sparkling cider instead of champagne on New Year's Eve next year.
8. Although Hector (growed, grew, grows) three inches in one year, we still called him "Little Hector."
9. Yesterday our tour guide (lead, led, will lead) us through the maze of people in Times Square.
10. The rock band (burst, bursted, bursts) onto the music scene with their catchy songs.

Exercise 8.4.3

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence using the correct form of the verb tense shown below.

1. Throw (past)

2. Paint (simple present)
3. Smile (future)
4. Tell (past)
5. Share (simple present)

Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

Inconsistent tense:
The crowd *start*s cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.
Consistent tense:
The crowd *started* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.
Consistent tense:
The crowd *start*s cheering as Melina *approache*s the finish line.

Tip

In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I *wanted* to be a fire fighter, but not I *am studying* computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.

Exercise 8.4.4

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the inconsistent verb tense. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and work as agricultural laborers, or peasants. Every village has a “lord,” and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produce go to the lord and his family. What little food was leftover goes to support the peasants’ families. In return for their labor, the lord offers them protection. A peasant’s day usually began before sunrise and involves long hours of backbreaking work, which includes plowing the land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages is usually demanding and exhausting.

Writing at Work

Read the following excerpt from a work e-mail:

I would like to highlight an important concern that comes up after our meeting last week. During the meeting, we agree to conduct a series of interviews over the next several months in which we hired new customer service representatives. Before we do that, however, I would like to review your experiences with the Customer Relationship Management Program. Please suggest a convenient time next week for us to meet so that we can discuss this important matter.

The inconsistent tense in the e-mail will very likely distract the reader from its overall point. Most likely, your coworkers will not correct your verb tenses or call attention to grammatical errors, but it is important to keep in mind that errors such as these do have a subtle negative impact in the workplace.

Key Takeaways

- Verb tense helps you express when an event takes place.
- Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Using consistent verb tense is a key element to effective writing.

Writing Application

Tell a family story. You likely have several family stories to choose from, but pick the one that you find most interesting to write about. Use as many details as you can in the telling. As you write and proofread, make sure your all your verbs are correct and the tenses are consistent.

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8.5: Active vs. Passive Voice

Active and Passive Voice

Voice is a nebulous term in writing. It can refer to the general "feel" of the writing, or it can be used in a more technical sense. In this section, we will focus on the latter sense as we discuss active and passive voice.

You've probably heard of the passive voice—perhaps in a comment from an English teacher or in the grammar checker of a word processor. In both of these instances, you were (likely) guided away from the passive voice. Why is this the case? Why is the passive voice so hated? After all, it's been used twice on this page already (three times now). When the passive voice is used to frequently, it can make your writing seem flat and drab. However, there are some instances where the passive voice is a better choice than the active.

So just what is the difference between these two voices? In the simplest terms, an active voice sentence is written in the form of "A does B." (For example, "Carmen sings the song.") A passive voice sentence is written in the form of "B is done by A." (For example, "The song is sung by Carmen.") Both constructions are grammatically sound and correct.

Let's look at a couple more examples of the passive voice:

- I've been hit! (*or*, I have been hit!)
- Jasper was thrown from the car when it was struck from behind.

You may have noticed something unique about the previous two sentences: the subject of the sentence is not the person (or thing) performing the action. The passive voice "hides" who does the action. Despite these sentences being completely grammatically sound, we don't know who hit "me" or what struck the car.

The passive is created using the verb *to be* (e.g., the song **is** sung; it **was** struck from behind). Remember that *to be* conjugates irregularly. Its forms include *am, are, is, was, were,* and *will be*, which we learned about earlier in the course.

Remember, *to be* also has more complex forms like *had been*, *is being*, and *was being*.

- Mirella **is being** pulled away from everything she loves.
- Pietro **had been** pushed; I knew it.
- Unfortunately, my car **was being** towed away by the time I got to it.

Because *to be* has other uses than just creating the passive voice, we need to be careful when we identify passive sentences. It's easy to mistake a sentence like "She was falling." or "He is short." for a passive sentence. However, in "She was falling," *was* simply indicates that the sentence takes place in the past. In "He is short," *is* is a linking verb. If there is no "real" action taking place, *is* is simply acting as a linking verb.

There are two key features that will help you identify a passive sentence:

- Something is happening (the sentence has a verb that is not a linking verb).
- The subject of the sentence is not doing that thing.

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Video 8.5.1

Active vs Passive Voice in Your Writing. **Provided by:** GCFLearnFree.org. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Usage

As you read at the two sentences below, think about the how the different voice may affect the meaning or implications of the sentence:

- **Passive voice:** The rate of evaporation is controlled by the size of an opening.
- **Active voice:** The size of an opening controls the rate of evaporation.

The passive choice slightly emphasizes "the rate of evaporation," while the active choice emphasizes "the size of an opening." Simple. So why all the fuss? Because passive constructions can produce grammatically tangled sentences such as this:

Groundwater flow is influenced by zones of fracture concentration, as can be recognized by the two model simulations (see Figures 1 and 2), by which one can see . . .

The sentence is becoming a burden for the reader, and probably for the writer too. As often happens, the passive voice here has smothered potential verbs and kicked off a runaway train of prepositions. But the reader's task gets much easier in the revised version below:

Two model simulations (Figures 1 and 2) illustrate how zones of fracture concentration influence groundwater flow. These simulations show . . .

To revise the above, all I did was look for the two buried things (simulations and zones) in the original version that could actually *do* something, and I made the sentence clearly about these two nouns by placing them in front of active verbs. This is the general principle to follow as you compose in the active voice: Place concrete nouns that can perform work in front of active verbs.

Exercise 1

Are the following sentences in the active or passive voice?

1. Jayden drank more sodas than anyone else at the party.
2. The samples were prepared in a clean room before being sent out for further examination.
3. Karen was dancing with Joshua when she suddenly realized she needed to leave.
4. Carlos was a very serious scientist with unique interests.
5. When I returned to my room, my luggage had been stolen.

Show Answer

Answer available at the end of this section.

Revising Weak Passive-Voice Sentences

As we've mentioned, the passive voice can be a shifty operator—it can cover up its source, that is, who's doing the acting, as this example shows:

- **Passive:** The papers **will be graded** according to the criteria stated in the syllabus.
  - *Graded by whom though?*
- **Active: The teacher** will grade the papers according to the criteria stated in the syllabus.

It's this ability to cover the actor or agent of the sentence that makes the passive voice a favorite of people in authority—policemen, city officials, and, yes, teachers. At any rate, you can see how the passive voice can cause wordiness,

indirectness, and comprehension problems.

Passive	Question	Active
Your figures **have been reanalyzed** in order to determine the coefficient of error. The results **will be announced** when the situation is judged appropriate.	Who analyzes, and who will announce?	**We** have reanalyzed your figures in order to determine the range of error. **We** will announce the results when the time is right.
With the price of housing at such inflated levels, those loans **cannot be paid** off in any shorter period of time.	Who can't pay the loans off?	With the price of housing at such inflated levels, **homeowners** cannot pay off those loans in any shorter period of time.
After the arm of the hand-held stapler **is pushed** down, the blade from the magazine **is raised by** the top-leaf spring, and the magazine and base.	Who pushes it down, and who or what raises it?	After **you** push down on the arm of the hand-held stapler, **the top-leaf spring** raises the blade from the magazine, and the magazine and base move apart.
However, market share **is being lost by** 5.25-inch diskettes as is shown in the graph in Figure 2.	Who or what is losing market share, who or what shows it?	However, **5.25-inch diskettes** are losing market share as the graph in **Figure 2** shows.
For many years, federal regulations concerning the use of wire-tapping **have been ignored**. Only recently **have** tighter restrictions **been imposed** on the circumstances that warrant it.	Who has ignored the regulations, and who is now imposing them?	For many years, **government officials** have ignored federal regulations concerning the use of wire-tapping. Only recently has **the federal government** imposed tighter restrictions on the circumstances that warrant it.

Exercise 2

Convert these passive voice sentences into the active voice. Why is the active voice a better choice for each of these sentences?

1. The process, which was essential for the experiment's success, was completed by Enzo.
2. The cake that I worked on all day long is being eaten by Justin.
3. After the pattern has been applied to the fabric, work on the embroidery can be started.

Answer available at the end of this section.

Don't get the idea that the passive voice is always wrong and should never be used. It is a good writing technique when we don't want to be bothered with an obvious or too-often-repeated subject and when we need to rearrange words in a sentence for emphasis. The next page will focus more on how and why to use the passive voice.

Using the Passive Voice

There are several different situations where the passive voice is more useful than the active voice.

- When you don't know who did the action: *The paper had been moved.*
  - The active voice would be something like this: "Someone had moved the paper." While this sentence is technically fine, the passive voice sentence has a more subtle element of mystery, which can be especially helpful in creating a mood in fiction.
- When you want to hide who did the action: *The window had been broken.*
  - The sentence is either hiding who broke the window or they do not know. Again, the sentence can be reformed to say "Someone had broken the window," but using the word *someone* clearly indicates that someone (though we may not know who) is at fault here. Using the passive puts the focus on the window rather than on the person who broke it, as he or she is completely left out of the sentence.
- When you want to emphasize the person or thing the action was done to: *Caroline was hurt when Kent broke up with her.*
  - We automatically focus on the subject of the sentence. If the sentence were to say "Kent hurt Caroline when he broke up with her," then our focus would be drawn to Kent rather than Caroline.

- A subject that can't actually *do* anything: *Caroline was hurt when she fell into the trees.*
  - While the trees hurt Caroline, they didn't actually do anything. Thus, it makes more sense to have Caroline as the subject rather than saying "The trees hurt Caroline when she fell into them."

Note: It's often against convention in scholarly writing to use *I*. While this may seem like a forced rule, it also stems from the fact that scholars want to emphasize the science or research as opposed to the author of the paper. This often results in the passive voice being the best choice. This is not the case in other formal settings, such as in resumes and in cover letters.

Exercise 3

Consider the following instances. In each case, determine why the writers might want to use active or passive voice. Write an example sentence based on their circumstances.

1. Antonella made an error in her calculations that ruined an experiment. This error ended up costing both time and materials. She has to write a report to her boss. What might she say about the experiment?
2. Isabel is writing a supernatural thriller. Her main character, Liam, notices that his keys aren't where he left them. How might Isabel word this realization?
3. Thiago is writing a cover letter to apply for a new job. He is listing out tasks that he does at his current job. How would he want to word these items?

Answer available at the end of this section.

Using the Passive

Now that we know there are some instances where passive voice is the best choice, how do we use the passive voice to it fullest? The answer lies in writing direct sentences—in passive voice—that have simple subjects and verbs. Compare the two sentences below:

- Photomicrographs were taken to facilitate easy comparison of the samples.
- Easy comparison of the samples was facilitated by the taking of photomicrographs.

Both sentences are written in the passive voice, but for most ears the first sentence is more direct and understandable, and therefore preferable. Depending on the context, it does a clearer job of telling us what was done and why it was done. Especially if this sentence appears in the "Experimental" section of a report (and thus readers already know that the authors of the report took the photomicrographs), the first sentence neatly represents what the authors actually did—took photomicrographs—and why they did it—to facilitate easy comparison.

Exercise 4

Read the following sentences. Are they using the passive effectively? If there are any errors, rewrite the sentences accordingly.

1. The machine needs to be reset at 10:23, 11:12, and 11:56 every night.
2. The final steps, which need to be finished before the sun sets over the mountains, are going to be completed by Kajuana.
3. The difficult task of measuring minute fluctuations in weight was made easier by the use of a new digital scale.

Answer available at the end of this section.

As we mentioned in **Participles**, the passive voice can also be used following relative pronouns like *that* and *which*.

- I moved into the house **that was built** for me.
- Adrián's dog loves the treats **that are given** to him.
- Brihanna has an album **that was signed** by the Beastie Boys.

In each of these sentences, it is grammatically sound to omit (or *elide*) the pronoun and *to be*. Elision is used with a lot of different

constructions in English; we use it shorten sentences when things are understood. However, we can only use elision in certain situations, so be careful when removing words! You may find these elided sentences more natural:

- I moved into the house **built** for me.
- Adrián's dog loves the treats **given** to him.
- Brihanna has an album **signed** by the Beastie Boys

Additional Practice Exercises

Exercise 5

Convert these passive voice sentences into the active voice:

1. Alana's toes were crushed by the garage door.
2. The passive voice has likely been heard of by you.
3. Rebeca's favorite spot in the lecture hall had been taken by the time she got to class.
4. When the passive voice is overused, you often end up with flat writing.

Answer

The garage door crushed Alana's toes. You've likely heard of the passive voice. Because there's a descriptive phrase, there are a few options when revising this sentence:

- Someone had taken Rebeca's favorite spot in the lecture hall by the time she got to class.
- By the time Rebeca got to class, someone had taken her favorite spot in the lecture hall.

When you overuse the passive voice, you often end up with flat writing.

Exercise 6

Read the following sentences. Are they using the passive effectively? Or should they be rewritten as active sentences?

- Maren was hit by several branches as she slid down the hill.
- A lot of discussion about whether technology is hurting or helping our ability to communicate has been inspired by this increase in technology.
- Listeners are encouraged by the lyrics to cast aside their fear and be themselves.

Answer

Yes, this sentence uses the passive effectively. Since the subject of this sentence—*several branches*—can't actually do anything, it's best to put the emphasis on *Maren*, the person the actions were done to. This sentence does not use the passive well. The passive voice has made the sentence a lot more complicated then it needs to be. The active would read something like this:

- This increase of technology has inspired a lot of discussion about whether technology is hurting or helping our ability to communicate.

Either voice could be appropriate here. If you want to focus on the listeners, the passive voice is correct. If you want to focus on the lyrics, the sentence should be changed to the active voice.

- **Passive:** Listeners are encouraged by the lyrics to cast aside their fear and be themselves.
- **Active:** The lyrics encourage listeners to cast aside their fear and be themselves

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Answers

Exercise 1

This sentence uses the active voice. **Jayden** does the action (**drank**) to the object (**more sodas**). If this sentence were written in the passive it would read "More sodas were drunk by Jayden than by anyone else at the party." This sentence uses the passive voice. The action (**prepared**) was done to the subject of the sentence (**samples**). If this sentence were written in the active it would be something like this: "[Actor] prepared the samples in a clean room before sending them out for further examination." Since we do not know who prepared the samples, the active sentence is incomplete. This sentence uses the active voice. In this case *was* indicates that the sentence happened in the past; it does not indicate the passive voice in this instance. This sentence uses the active voice. In this case *was* is acting as a linking verb. It links **Carlos** with the phrase *very serious scientist*. The introductory phrase to the sentence (When I returned to my room) is in the active voice. The second phrase (my luggage had been stolen) uses the passive voice.

Exercise 2

Enzo completed the process, which was essential for the experiment's success.

- In the passive sentence, the *which*-clause makes the subject of the sentence excessively long. By converting the sentence to the active voice, the clause is moved to the predicate, which makes the sentence easier to understand.

Justin is eating the cake that I worked on all day long.

- The active voice works better in this sentence for the same reasons as sentence one. It is also likely that you would want to put emphasis on Justin in this sentence. After all, he's doing something that is (most likely) inconsiderate.

After you apply the pattern to the fabric, you can start working on the embroidery.

- This sentence is likely found in a set of instructions, which are usually written directly to the reader. Addressing "you" and avoiding the passive voice will make the instructions feel more natural and accessible.

Exercise 3

Antonella would likely want to write in the passive voice. Even if her boss knows she made the error, writing in the passive will draw attention away from that fact. She might say something like this:

- An error was made that ended up costing time and resources. The experiment will have to be repeated with new materials.

Isabel could use either the passive or the active. It depends on the emphasis she wants. The passive voice subtly hints at a mysterious actor. The active voice blatantly states it:

- Liam's keys had been moved when he wasn't looking.
- Something—or someone—had moved Liam's keys when he wasn't looking.

Thiago would want to use the active voice. Since he's apply for a job, he would want to emphasize the fact that he is accomplishing the tasks: the fact that he's doing them is more important than the simple fact that the things were done. He might write something like the following:

- I currently work as a teaching assistant for a linguistics professor. I organize her mail, flagging important items so she knows what needs immediate attention; I aid her in her research, finding interesting articles and studies; and I often help her students when her attention is needed elsewhere.

Exercise 4

Yes. In this case, it doesn't matter who accomplishes the action; it simply needs to be done. If this sentence appears in an academic article, the passive may be even more appropriate, as that style often demands the actor be left out of the sentence. No. This would be better in the active voice. There are a lot of different parts to the sentence, and by converting the sentence to the active voice, they come in a more logical order that is easier to understand:

- Kajuana is going to complete the final steps, which need to be finished before the sun sets over the mountains.

No. This passive construction is very convoluted. An active sentence would serve well here:

- A new digital scale made it easier to measure minute fluctuations in weight.

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8.6: Voice

Languages have different levels of formality that vary with the purpose, the audience, and the situation.

Informal voice or first person, is much more relaxed. In informal voice, slang is often used. In many instances, the writer's opinion is evident. "Voice" can be defined as "how the writer's personality and attitude toward the topic are revealed to the audience." Voice, in this definition, is what makes one writer sound different from another.

Formal voice or third person, is professional. Think *Newsweek* rather than *People* magazine. This "voice" is more formal than spoken English and the writer usually only uses first person in quotes. Often, outside sources are used to prove points.

Active and Passive Voice

In the **active voice**, the subject performs the action. A clause with an active, transitive verb will be in the form of subject-verb-object.
Example: The student *finished* the exercise.

In the **passive voice**, the subject receives the action. For a passive verb, the tense and subject-verb agreement are always shown through the auxiliary verb "to be."
Example: The exercise *was finished* by the student.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
The teacher *referred to* "voice" as a grammatical term.	"Voice" **was referred to** as a grammatical term by the teacher.
The man *yelled at* the waiter.	The waiter *was yelled at* by the man.
Millions of people *lived in* the houses.	The houses *were lived in* by millions of people.

Uses of "That"

That in the English language serves four different syntactic functions.

1. Demonstrative determiner
   Example: *That* house is for sale.
2. Demonstrative pronoun
   Example: *That* is my car.
3. Demonstrative pronoun functioning as a noun
   Example: *That* works for me.
4. Relative pronoun
   Example: The book *that* I read was interesting.

Using "A" and "An"

Determining which word to use, either *a* or *an*, is based on the first sound of the word that follows it. When a word starts with a **consonant sound**, use *a* before it. When the word begins with a **vowel sound**, use *an* before it. Be careful; sometimes the first letter of the word is not the first sound of the word (see *hour* and *unicorn* below).

Example 8.6.1:

- *a* show
- *an* amazing show
- *an* octopus

- *a* huge octopus
- *an* hour (the h is silent)
- *a* house
- *an* apple
- *a* red apple
- *a* unicorn *(unicorn begins with a 'y' sound)*
- *an* angry unicorn

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8.7: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Learning Objectives

- Identify modifiers.
- Learn how to correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that clarifies or describes another word, phrase, or clause. Sometimes writers use modifiers incorrectly, leading to strange and unintentionally humorous sentences. The two common types of modifier errors are called misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. If either of these errors occurs, readers can no longer read smoothly. Instead, they become stumped trying to figure out *what* the writer meant to say. A writer's goal must always be to communicate clearly and to avoid distracting the reader with strange sentences or awkward sentence constructions. The good news is that these errors can be easily overcome.

Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

Incorrect: She wore a bicycle helmet on her head *that was too large*.

Correct: She wore a bicycle helmet *that was too large* on her head.

- Notice in the incorrect sentence it sounds as if her head was too large! Of course, the writer is referring to the helmet, not to the person's head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer's meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

Incorrect: They bought a kitten for my brother *they call Shadow*.

Correct: They bought a kitten *they call Shadow* for my brother.

- In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the brother's name is *Shadow*. That's because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is *kitten*.

Incorrect: The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

Correct: The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

- The incorrect sentence reads as if it is the physician who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

Tip

Simple modifiers like *only*, *almost*, *just*, *nearly*, and *barely* often get used incorrectly because writers often stick 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 8.7.1

On a separate sheet of paper, 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 and owns a car.
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 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, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

Correct: As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

- 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 this year, 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

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an *-ing* modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

   Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (*Painting* is the *-ing* modifier.)

2. Underline the first noun that follows it:

   Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

3. Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.

After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.

Painting for three hours at night, Maggie finally finished the kitchen.

Exercise 8.7.2

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper 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 8.7.3

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.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

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.

Writing Application

See how creative and humorous you can get by writing ten sentences with misplaced and dangling modifiers. This is a deceptively simple task, but rise to the challenge. Your writing will be stronger for it. Exchange papers with a classmate, and rewrite your classmate's sentences to correct any misplaced modifiers.

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8.8: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Modifier Mistakes

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Incorrect: The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

Correct: The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

- The incorrect sentence reads as if it is the physician who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

TIP: SIMPLE MODIFIERS

Simple modifiers, such as *only, almost, just nearly,* and *barely* often get used incorrectly because writers often stick 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 1

On a separate sheet of paper, 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 and owns a car.
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

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Video 8.8.1

Grammar: Dangling Modifiers. **Provided by:** OWL Purdue. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

A dangling modifier 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, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

Correct: As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

- 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 this year, 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: Identifying Dangling Modifiers

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an *-ing* modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

   Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (*Painting* is the *-ing* modifier.)

2. Underline the first noun that follows it:

   Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

3. Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.

   After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.

   Painting for three hours at night, Maggie finally finished the kitchen.

Exercise 2

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper 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

Writing at Work 8.8.1

Modifying phrases, especially verbal phrases (most of the modifiers in the above exercise are verbal phrases because they describe an action), are used often in business writing. In business writing, writers need to describe two actions or processes that occur at the same time. Because much business writing is also abstract, such situations are rife for dangling modifiers to occur. Be alert for dangling or misplaced modifiers in these situations!

Exercise 3

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.

Collaboration available at the end of this section.

Share your results with a classmate.

Exercise 4

See how creative and humorous you can get by writing ten sentences with misplaced and dangling modifiers. This is a deceptively simple task, but rise to the challenge. Your writing will be stronger for it. Exchange papers with a classmate, and rewrite your classmate's sentences to correct any misplaced modifiers.

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Answers

Exercise 3

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8.9: Parallelism

What Is 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:

- Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.
- Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.
- 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.

- Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.
- Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.
- 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.



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	**Correct Parallelism**
When I walk the dog, I like to listen to music and talking to friends on the phone.	When I walk the dog, I like listening to music and talking to friends on the phone.

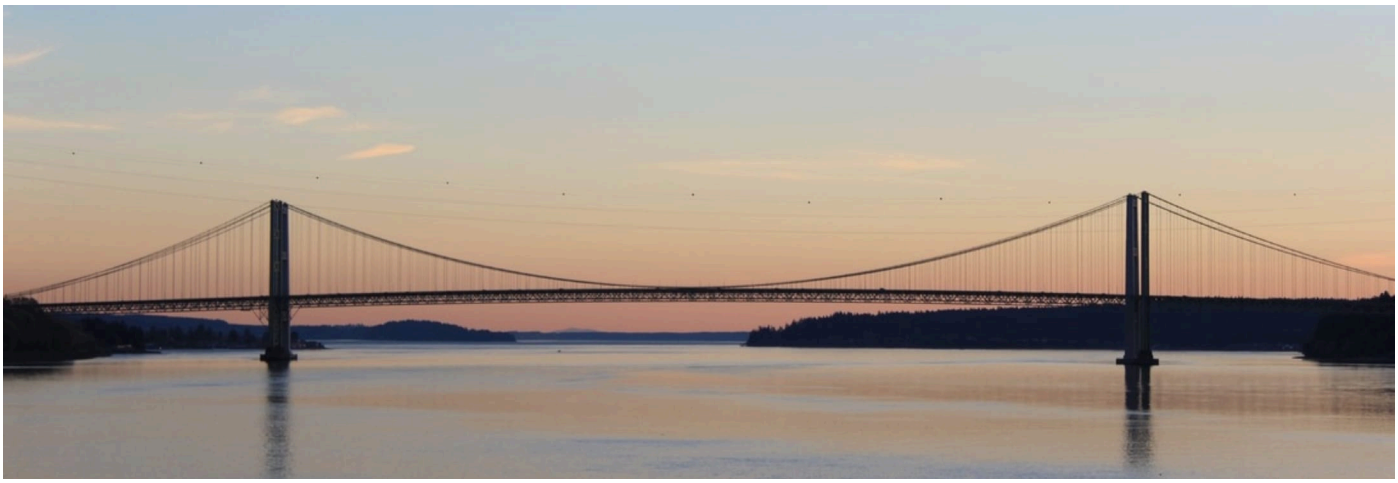
The first sentence uses two different verb forms (to listen, talking). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (and) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series.

Faulty Parallelism	**Correct Parallelism**
This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.	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: Revise for Parallel Structure



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	**Correct Parallelism**
Swimming in the ocean is more difficult than a pool.	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	**Correct Parallelism**
A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.	Going for a brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run. - or - A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as a run.

Exercise: Revising for Parallel Structure Using Than or As



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.

Key Takeaways



Parallelism

- 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.

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8.10: Word Choice

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some free writing exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words. The danger of being picky about your words as you draft (especially during your first draft) is that you may end up forgetting what you want to write while you search for that perfect word. This can cripple your writing process and create writer's block. One way to make sure that -- at some point in your writing process -- that you do choose the exact word that you mean is to place question marks "?" by the word you can't think of or that you think you might want to change, and then continue to draft. Once you are ready to edit your work at the sentence level (all of your content development and organization are complete) then you can search for question marks to find the places where you wanted to consider the word choice more carefully. Also, you may receive feedback from readers about word choice they find confusing or that you may want to re-consider.

Use the following strategies to help you with your word choice. Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely on dictionaries and thesauruses to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and their multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries and thesauruses.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling.** How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- **Pronunciation.** How to say the word.
- **Part of speech.** The function of the word.
- **Definition.** The meaning of the word.
- **Synonyms.** Words that have similar meanings.
- **Etymology.** The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry and see which of the preceding information you can identify:

Definition

myth, mith, *n.* [Gr. *mythos*, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—**myth • ic**, **myth • i • cal**

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly.

Definition

precocious *adj*, *She's such a precocious little girl!*: uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

Ant. slow, backward, stupid.

Exercise 1

Choose the correct synonym.

a. lenient _____ (relaxed, callous)

b. abandon _____ (vacate, deceive)

c. berate _____ (criticize, encourage)

d. experienced _____ (callow, matured)

e. spiteful _____ (malevolent, mellow)

f. tame _____ (subdued, wild)

g. tasty _____ (savory, bland)

h. banal _____ (common, interesting)

i. contradict _____ (deny, revolt)

j. vain _____ (boastful, simple)

Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word. Using a thesaurus can be difficult sometimes if one doesn't know the connotations of a word because you risk using a word in the wrong way. If you aren't sure whether you are using a word with the right connotation, look up the word in sentences on the internet and see how its used in context. You can also ask your instructor or a tutor but if you are not sure about the connotation of a word, do a little research to figure it out.

The three following words (scrawny, skinny, and lean) all describe someone who weighs less than average, but they all have different connotations.

Scrawny

- **Denotation:** Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- **Word used in a sentence:** Although he was a premature baby and a **scrawny** child, Martin has developed into a strong man.
- **Connotation:** (Negative) In this sentence the word *scrawny* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

Skinny

- **Denotation:** Lacking sufficient flesh or meat, very thin or narrow.
- **Word used in a sentence: Skinny** jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.

- **Connotation:** (Neutral) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive or negative connotations of the word *skinny*.

Lean

- **Denotation:** Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- **Word used in a sentence:** My brother has a **lean** figure whereas I have a more muscular build.
- **Connotation:** (Neutral) In this sentence, *lean* has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word *scrawny*, nor does imply the positive cultural impressions of the word *skinny*. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ. This video explains it more.

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Video 8.10.1

Word Choice. **Authored by:** Prof Myhen. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 2

In each of the following word sets, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

1. curious, nosy, interested
2. lazy, relaxed, slow
3. courageous, foolhardy, assured
4. new, newfangled, modern
5. mansion, shack, residence
6. spinster, unmarried woman, career woman
7. giggle, laugh, cackle
8. boring, routine, prosaic
9. noted, notorious, famous
10. assertive, confident, pushy

Positive	Negative	Neutral

Positive	Negative	Neutral

Avoiding Slang

Hey guys, let' learn about slang and other cool stuff like that! It will be awesome, trust me. This section is off the hook!

What do you notice about the previous paragraph? You might notice that the language sounds informal, or casual, like someone might talk with a friend or family member, but with the purpose of this chapter, that seems odd, doesn't it? The paragraph also uses a lot of slang. Slang is a type of language that is informal and playful. It often changes over time. The slang of the past is different than the slang of today, but some slang has carried over into the present. Slang also varies by region and culture. There are literally thousands of slang words and expressions. The following table explains just a few of the common ones.

Slang Expressions	
Slang Word or Phrase	***Meaning***
check it out, check this out	look at, watch, examine
chocoholic, workaholic, shopaholic	a person who loves, or is addicted to chocolate, work, or shopping
stuff	things
have some tea	gossip
crack up	to laugh uncontrollably
veg, kick it	relax and do nothing
dude, man	person, man
cool, hip, bad	good, fashionable
gross, nasty	disgusting
pig out	overeat
screw up	make a bad mistake
awesome	great, terrific
the shit	the best

Words are the basis of how a reader or listener judges you, the writer and speaker. When you write an academic paper or speak in a business interview, you want to be sure to choose your words carefully. In our casual, everyday talk, we often use a lot of "ums," "likes," "yeahs," and so on. This everyday language is not appropriate for formal contexts, such as academic papers and business interviews. You should switch between different ways of speaking and writing depending on whether the context if formal or informal. Ultimately, this is part of the message that is a result of the rhetorical context in which you are writing or speaking (see "The Art of Rhetoric").

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing. It is also not appropriate to use profanity in academic writing, unless -- of course -- you are quoting a profane word from an assigned reading. However, when writing expository writing, another word will almost always fulfill the meaning and emphasis that a profane word may provide in other contexts.

Writing at Work 8.10.1

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture desensitizes many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional e-mails or during meetings may convey the wrong message or even mistakenly offend someone.

Exercise 3

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 4

Edit the business email by replacing any slang words with more formal language.

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

I am writing to follow up on my interview from last week. First of all, it was awesome to meet you. You are a really cool lady. I believe I would be a pro at all the stuff you mentioned that would be required of me in this job. I am not a workaholic, but I do work hard and "take care of business." Haha. Please contact e if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

M. Ernest Anderson

Answer available at the end of this section.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- **Clichéd:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my **blood boil**.
- **Plain:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
- **Original:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.
2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
3. Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.
5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.
6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"
9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.
10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.

Idioms

Idioms are expressions that have a meaning different from the dictionary definition of the individual words in the expression. Because English contains many idioms, newer English speakers have difficulties making logical sense of idioms and idiomatic expressions. The more you are exposed to English, however, the more idioms you will come to understand. Until then, memorizing the more common idioms may be of some help.

Idioms	
Idiom	***Definition***
A blessing in disguise	A good thing you do not recognize as "good" at first
A piece of cake	Easy to do
Better late than never	It is better to do something late than not at all
Get over it	Recover from something (a perceived insult)
I have no idea	I don't know
Not a chance	It will definitely not happen
On pins and needles	Very nervous about something that is or may be happening
On top of the world	Feeling great
Pulling your leg	Making a joke by tricking you
The sky is the limit	The possibilities are endless

What if you come across an idiom you do not understand? Context clues that can help you. Context clues are words or phrases around the unknown word or phrase that may help you decipher the meaning.

1. **Definition or explanation clue.** An idiom ay be explained immediately after its use.

- **Sentence:** I felt like I was sitting on *pins and needles*, **I was so nervous.**

2. **Restatement or synonym clues.** An idiom may be simplified or restated.

- **Sentence:** The young girl felt as though she had been *sent to the dog house* when her mother **punished her** for fighting in school.

3. **Contrast or antonym clues.** An idiom may be clarified by a contrasting phrase or antonym that is near it.

- **Sentence:** Chynna thought the 5k race would be a *piece of cake,* **but it turned out to be very difficult.**

Pay attention tot he signal word *but*, which tells the reader that an opposite thought or concept is occuring.

Using Specific Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring yours words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- **General:** My new puppy is cute.
- **Specific:** My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.

- **General:** My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
- **Specific:** My teacher, Ms. Atwater, explained how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

Exercise 6

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.
2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
5. The dog walked up the street.
6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
7. The tropical fish are pretty.
8. I sweat a lot after running.
9. The goalie blocked the shot.
10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.

Choose Strong, Descriptive Verbs

When used as main verbs, the following words are weak and almost meaningless: have, do, make, went/gone, and the "to be" verbs. Some of these verbs are just fine as linking verbs, but not as main verbs. Choose a more descriptive verb to replace these weak, almost meaningless verbs. This video will explain.

YouTube Video

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Video 8.10.1

Strong Verbs. Authored by: Curriculum Pathways. License: *All Rights Reserved*. License Terms: Standard YouTube License.

Exercise 7

In this exercise, replace the weak verbs with stronger, more descriptive verbs. You may need to replace more than one weak verb in a sentence.

1. Bethany's mother made her do her homework before Bethany could go out to play.

2. Michael went to play video games with his buddy, Pat, at Pat's house.

3. Chris and Sam went to prom and then hung out with friends afterward. They didn't get home until 3 a.m.!

4. Donna was doing her best, but it was sometimes hard to keep up and balance work and school.

5. The three-year-old was being childish when throwing her sibling's toy across the rooom.

Exercise 8

Rewrite the following personal essay by replacing the slang, clichés, and overly general language with stronger, more precise language.

My biggest regret happened in high school. I had always felt like a fish out of water, so during my sophomore year I was determined to fit in with the cool people. Man, was that an uphill battle. I don't even know why I tried, but hindsight is 20/20 I guess. The first thing I did was change the way I dressed. I went from wearing clothes I was comfortable in to wearing stuff that was so not me. Then I started wearing a ton of makeup, and my brother was all like, "What happened to your face?" Not only did my looks change, my personality changed a lot too. I started to act all stuck up and bossy with my friends, and they didn't know how to respond to this person that used to be me. Luckily, this phase didn't last more than a couple of months. I decided it was more fun to be me than to try to be someone else. I guess you can't fit a square peg in a round hole after all.

Collaboration

Compare your changes with a classmate.

Exercise 9

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences with slang, clichés, or overly general words and rewrite them using stronger language.

Synonyms

Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word. You can say an "easy task" or a "simple

task" because *easy* and *simple* are synonyms. You can say Hong Kong is a "large city" or a "metropolis" because *city* and *metropolis* are synonyms.

However, it is important to remember that not all pairs of words in the English language are so easily interchangeable. The slight but important differences in meaning between synonyms can make a big difference in your writing. For example, the words *boring* and *insipid* may have similar meanings, but the subtle differences between the two will affect the message your writing conveys. The word *insipid* evokes a scholarly and perhaps more pretentious message than *boring*.

The English language is full of pairs of words that have subtle distinctions between them. All writers, professionals and beginners alike, face the challenge of choosing the most appropriate synonym to best convey their ideas. When you pay particular attention to synonyms in your writing, it comes across to your reader. The sentences become much more clear and rich in meaning.

Writing at Work

Any writing you do at work involves a careful choice of words. For example, if you are writing an e-mail to your employer regarding your earnings, you can use the word *pay*, *salary*, or hourly *wage*. There are also other synonyms to choose from. Just keep in mind that the word you choose will have an effect on the reader, so you want to choose wisely to get the desired effect.

Exercise 10

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence with each of the following words that illustrates the specific meaning of each synonym.

1. leave, abandon
2. mad, insane
3. outside, exterior
4. poor, destitute
5. quiet, peaceful
6. riot, revolt
7. rude, impolite
8. talk, conversation
9. hug, embrace
10. home, residence

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Antonyms

Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of a given word. The study of antonyms will not only help you choose the most appropriate word as you write; it will also sharpen your overall sense of language. Table 4.3 "Common Antonyms" lists common words and their antonyms.

Table 4.3 - Common Antonyms

Word	Antonym		Word	Antonym
absence	presence		frequent	seldom
accept	refuse		harmful	harmless
accurate	inaccurate		horizontal	vertical
advantage	disadvantage		imitation	genuine
ancient	modern		inhabited	uninhabited

Word	Antonym		Word	Antonym
abundant	scarce		inferior	superior
artificial	natural		intentional	accidental
attractive	repulsive		justice	injustice
borrow	lend		knowledge	ignorance
bravery	cowardice		landlord	tenant
create	destroy, demolish		likely	unlikely
bold	timid, meek		minority	majority
capable	incapable		miser	spendthrift
combine	separate		obedient	disobedient
conceal	reveal		optimist	pessimist
common	rare		permanent	temporary
decrease	increase		plentiful	scarce
definite	indefinite		private	public
despair	hope		prudent	imprudent
discourage	encourage		qualified	unqualified
employer	employee		satisfactory	unsatisfactory
expand	contract		tame	wild
forget	remember		vacant	occupied

Tip

Learning antonyms is an effective way to increase your vocabulary. Memorizing words in combination with or in relation to other words often helps us retain them.

Exercise 11

Correct the following sentences by replacing the underlined words with an antonym. Write the antonym on your own sheet of paper.

1. The pilot who landed the plane was a coward because no one was injured.
2. Even though the botany lecture was two hours long, Gerard found it incredibly dull.
3. My mother says it is impolite to say thank you like you really mean it.
4. Although I have learned a lot of information through textbooks, it is life experience that has given me ignorance.
5. When our instructor said the final paper was compulsory, it was music to my ears!
6. My only virtues are coffee, video games, and really loud music.
7. Elvin was so bold when he walked in the classroom that he sat in the back row and did not participate.
8. Maria thinks elephants who live in freedom have a sad look in their eyes.
9. The teacher filled her students' minds with gloomy thoughts about their futures.
10. The guest attended to every one of our needs.

Contributors

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Answers

Exercise 4

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8.10.1: Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound alike but that two words that don't always have the same meaning. The most often commonly confused words are provided here with examples. If you are ever in doubt which one to use, check your dictionary.

Affect, Effect

Affect is most commonly a verb, usually meaning "influence." (An easy way to remember this is that *affect* starts with an "a," as does *action*.) As a noun, it is a psychological term for emotion.

Effect is most common as a noun meaning "result." *Effect* used as a verb means to "bring about" some kind of change.

Example 8.10.1.1:

The game *affected* the standings. Its *effect* was overwhelming. It *effected* a change in the *affect* of the winning team's captain.

Afterward, Afterwards, Afterword

Afterward and **afterwards** are synonymous adverbs meaning that an event occurs later than another. An **afterword** is an epilogue.

Aid, Aide

Aid is a noun meaning "assistance" or a verb meaning "assist."

An **aide** is a person who serves or offers assistance.

Example 8.10.1.2:

The aide will aid the victim.

It's, Its

It's is a contraction, short for either "it is" or "it has."

Its is the possessive form of "it." This usually means that the following noun phrase belongs to "it." It is important to recognize that "its" in the possessive form does not have an apostrophe; it is in the same category as "his."

Example 8.10.1.3:

- *It*'s [It is] my dog.
- What is *its* [possessive pronoun] name?
- The computer crashed a few minutes ago, and it's [it has] done it again.

Lay, Lie

Lay is the action word.

Lie is the state of being or a telling someone something untruthful on purpose.

Example 8.10.1.4:

- I will *lay* the book on the desk.
- I plan to *lie* in bed most of Saturday.
- Jim will probably *lie* to get out of being punished for breaking the window.

To, Too, Two

To is generally used to describe a relationship between things. It is also used as an infinitive verb, as in "I love **to** eat."

Example 8.10.1.5:

Matt is going *to* the doctor.

Too is usually used when you are describing an excess or is used when noting something is in addition.

Example 8.10.1.6:

- I usually eat *too* much on Thanksgiving.
- Joe cleaned the house, washed the car, and mowed the lawn, *too*.

Two is the word you use for the number **2**.

Example 8.10.1.7:

You have *two* minutes left before class starts.

Then, Than

Then indicates time.

Example 8.10.1.8:

First we went to dinner, and *then* we went to the show.

Than is comparative.

Example 8.10.1.9:

I would rather see the comedy *than* see the horror movie.

Versus, Verses

Versus indicates opposition.

Verses is the plural of verse, as related to poetry.

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8.10.2: Homonyms

Homonyms



Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

Commonly Misused Homonyms

principle	principal
Definition: principle (noun). A fundamental concept that is accepted as true. **Example:** The principle of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.	Definition: principal (noun). The original amount of debt on which interest is calculated. Example: The payment plan allows me to pay back only the principal amount, not any compounded interest. --- **Definition:** principal (noun). A person who is the main authority of a school. **Example:** The principal held a conference for both parents and teachers.

where	wear	ware
Definition: where (adverb). The place in which something happens. **Example:** Where is the restaurant?	**Definition:** wear (verb). To carry or have on the body. **Example:** I will wear my hiking shoes when go on a climb tomorrow morning.	**Definition:** ware (noun). Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, wares). **Example:** When I return from shopping, I will show you my wares.

lead	
Definition: lead (noun). A type of metal used in pipes and batteries. **Example:** The lead pipes in my homes are old and need to be replaced.	**Definition:** led (ve **Example:** After th

which	
Definition: which (pronoun). Replaces one out of a group. **Example:** Which apartment is yours?	Definition: witch (**Example:** She thi

peace	
Definition: peace (noun). A state of tranquility or quiet. **Example:** For once, there was peace between the argumentative brothers.	**Definition:** piece **Example:** I would

passed	
Definition: passed (verb). To go away or move. **Example:** He passed the slower cars on the road using the left lane.	**Definition:** past (**Example:** The arg

lessen	
Definition: lessen (verb). To reduce in number, size, or degree. **Example:** My dentist gave me medicine to lessen the pain of my aching tooth.	**Definition:** (noun **Example:** lesson

patience	patients
Definition: patience (noun). The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly). **Example:** The novice teacher's patience with the unruly class was astounding.	**Definition:** (plural noun). Individuals under medical care. **Example:** The patients were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.

sees	seas	seize
Definition: sees (verb). To perceive with the eye. **Example:** He sees a whale through his binoculars.	**Definition:** (plural noun). The plural of sea, a great body of salt water. **Example: The** tidal fluctuation of the oceans and seas are influenced by the moon.	**Definition:** (verb). To possess or take by force. **Example: The** king plans to seize all the peasants land.

threw	
Definition: threw (verb). The past tense of throw. **Example:** She threw the football with perfect form.	**Definition:** thro **Example:** She w

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8.10.3: Commonly Confused Words

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:

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.

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.

List of Commonly Confused Words



a	an	and
a (article) Used before a word that begins with a consonant. **Example:** a key, a mouse, a screen	an (article) Used before a word that begins with a vowel. **Example:** an airplane, an ocean, an igloo	and (conjunction) Connects two or more words together. **Example:** peanut butter and jelly, pen and pencil, jump and shout

accept	except
accept (verb) **Definition:** to take or agree to something offered. **Example:** They accepted our proposal for the conference.	except (conjunction) **Definition:** only or but. **Example:** We could fly there except the tickets cost too much.

affect	effect
affect (verb) **Definition:** to influence or cause changes. **Example:** Hurricane winds affect the amount of rainfall.	effect (noun) **Definition:** an outcome or result. **Example: The heavy rains will have an effect on the crop growth.** --- effect (verb) **Definition:** *to cause something to happen.* **Example:** The computer virus effected a collapse of the entire system

are	our
are (verb) A conjugated form of the verb "to be." **Example:** My cousins are all tall and blonde.	our (pronoun) Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun "we." **Example:** We will bring our cameras to take pictures.

by	buy
by (preposition) **Definition:** next to. **Example:** My glasses are by the bed.	buy (verb) **Definition:** to purchase. **Example:** I will buy new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

its	it's
its (pronoun) A form of "it" that shows possession. **Example:** The butterfly flapped its wings.	it's (contraction) Joins the words it and is. **Example:** It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

know	no
know (verb) **Definition:** to understand or possess knowledge. **Example:** I know the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.	no Used to make a negative. **Example:** I have no time to visit the zoo this weekend.

loose	lose
loose (adjective) **Definition:** something that is not tight or is detached. **Example:** Without a belt, her pants are loose on her waist.	lose (verb) **Definition:** to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something. **Example:** She will lose even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

of	have
of (preposition) **Definition:** from or about. **Example:** I studied maps of the city to know where to rent a new apartment.	have (verb) **Definition:** to possess something. **Example:** I have many friends to help me move. --- have (linking verb) Used to connect verbs. **Example:** I should have helped her with that heavy box.

quite	quiet	quit
quite (adverb) **Definition:** really or truly. **Example:** My work will require quite a lot of concentration.	quiet (adjective). Definition: not loud. **Example:** I need a quiet room to complete the assignments.	quit (verb). **Definition:** to stop or to end. **Example:** I will quit when I am hungry for dinner.

right	write
right (adjective) **Definition:** proper or correct. **Example:** When bowling, she practices the right form. --- right (adjective) **Definition:** the opposite of left. Example: The ball curved to the right and hit the last pin.	write (verb) **Definition:** to communicate on paper. **Example:** After the team members bowl, I will write down their scores.

set	sit
set (verb). **Definition:** to put an item down. **Example:** She set the mug on the saucer. --- set (noun) **Definition:** a group of similar objects. **Example:** All the mugs and saucers belonged in a set.	sit (verb) **Definition:** to lower oneself down on a chair or another place. **Example:** I'll sit on the sofa while she brews the tea.

suppose	supposed
suppose (verb). **Definition:** Means to think or to consider. **Example:** I suppose I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe. --- It can also mean to suggest. **Example:** Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.	supposed (verb) The passive form of *suppose*. **Definition:** something *must, should,* or *is expected to* happen. **Example:** John was supposed [by his boss] to empty the fryers at the end of his shift. The experiment was supposed [by the scientists] to create a cure for cancer. The "by" phrase [shown in brackets] is usually left out, so it is easy to forget that *suppose* in these cases always requires an *ed* ending. **Wrong:** Susan was suppose to do her homework. **Right:** Susan was supposed to do her homework.

than	then
than (conjunction) Used to connect two or more items when comparing **Example:** Registered nurses require less schooling than doctors.	then (adverb) **Definition:** next or at a specific time. **Example:** Doctors first complete medical school and then obtain a residency.

their	they're	there
their (pronoun) **Definition:** Pronoun that shows possession. **Example:** The dog walker feeds their dogs everyday at two o'clock.	they're (contraction) **Definition:** combination of "they" and "are." **Example:** They're the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.	there (adverb) **Definition:** a particular place. **Example:** The dogs' bowls are over there. --- there (pronoun) **Definition:** Indicates the presence of something **Example:** There are more treats if the dogs behave.

to	two	too
to (preposition) **Definition:** Indicates movement. **Example:** Let's go to the circus. --- **Definition:** a word that completes an infinitive verb. **Example:** to play, to ride, to watch.	two (adj.) **Definition:** The number after one. It describes how many. **Example:** Two clowns squirted the elephants with water.	Too (adverb) **Definition:** also or very. **Example:** The tents were too loud, and we left.

use	used
use (verb) **Definition:** to apply for some purpose. **Example:** We use a weed wacker to trim the hedges.	used (verb) **Definition:** The past tense form of the verb "to use." **Example:** He used the lawnmower last night before it rained. --- used to (verb) **Definition:** something done in the past but not in the present. **Example:** He used to hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

who's	whose
who's (contraction) **Definition:** Joins the words who+is, or who+has. **Example:** Who's the new student? Who's met him?	whose (pronoun) **Definition:** A form of who that shows possession. **Example:** Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

your	you're
your (pronoun) **Definition:** A form of "you" that shows possession. **Example:** Your book bag is unzipped.	you're (contraction) **Definition:** Joins the words you+are. **Example:** You're the girl with the unzipped book bag.

Key Takeaways

Commonly Confused Words

- 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.

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8.10.4: Commonly Misspelled Words

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.

Table of Commonly Misspelled Words

across	address	answer
argument	athlete	beginning
behavior	calendar	career
conscience	crowded	definite
describe	desperate	different
disappoint	disapprove	doesn't
eighth	embarrass	environment
exaggerate	familiar	finally

government	grammer	height
illegal	immediately	important
integration	intelligent	interest
interfere	jewelry	judgment
knowledge	maintain	mathematics
meant	necessary	nervous
occasion	opinion	optimist
particular	perform	perhaps
personnel	possess	possible
prefer	prejudice	privilege
probably	psychology	pursue
reference	rhythm	ridiculous
separate	similar	since
speech	strength	success
surprise	taught	temperature
thorough	thought	tired
until	weight	written

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8.10.5: Slang, Cliche, and Overly General Words

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: Avoiding Slang



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 Cliches



Cliches are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused.

Writing that uses cliches often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding cliches in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

1. **Cliche:** 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



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 unethical.

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8.10.6: The Dilemma of Gendered Language in English

What to do about gender with an unspecified subject? In the past, the consensus was to always use "he" and readers were supposed to understand that the subject might be female. As you know, that's no longer accepted. The culture of formal academic writing hasn't settled on a widely supported solution yet, which creates a pervasive problem for the student writer.

Informally, using "they/their" as the neutral singular is becoming a common practice. For example, if a Facebook friend hasn't specified a gender, Facebook used to exhort you to "write on their timeline" for "their birthday." I hear this more and more in spoken language as well. For example, most people who hear this sentence spoken wouldn't note a glaring problem: "A doctor who makes a mistake is often too scared to admit their slip-up." However, in an academic paper, that sentence would be considered a pronoun-antecedent error because "doctor" is singular and "their" is still considered plural. Most of your professors still don't accept they/their as a gender-neutral singular possessive. Hopefully in coming years, academic writing will come to accept this perfectly reasonable solution to the gendered language problem, but we're not there yet.

> My first semester in college, it was my standard practice to rotate back and forth between the male and female pronouns. I did not want to appear sexist and was unsure how to avoid doing so. Referring to the same hypothetical person in one of my papers I wrote, "When one is confronted by new information that does not fit tidily onto her personal map…" Later in the paragraph I referred to the same individual by saying, "This new information demands that he forsake the world of the Cave in which he had been raised." Obviously, in retrospect, that was confusing and certainly not the best option. But it illustrates the point that this can be a challenging dilemma. Thankfully for you, three more appropriate solutions are provided in this chapter.
>
> Peter Farrell

So what to do? Here are three possible solutions.

1. *Choose plurals when possible*. For example, "Doctors who make mistakes are often too scared to admit their slip-ups."
2. *Write "he or she" or "his or her" if it's not too repetitive*. You don't want to have more than two or three such "ors" in a paragraph, but a couple wouldn't be tedious for the reader. For example, one might write, "A doctor who makes a mistake is often too scared to admit his or her slip-up. He or she might be forbidden from doing so by hospital attorneys."
3. *Consider whether a real-life example is better than a hypothetical subject*. Long passages about hypothetical people and situations often lack argumentative force. If you're writing a paper about medical errors, you might do better to replace hypothetical claims like the above example with real-life examples of physicians who have made mistakes but were reluctant or forbidden to acknowledge them. Better yet, discuss the results of studies of medical errors and their outcomes. In addition to solving the gendered language problem, real examples are more persuasive.

Remember, it's about precision and respect. Whatever you do, don't just write "he" for doctors, attorneys, and construction workers and "she" for nurses, social workers, and flight attendants. You also shouldn't just write "he" or "his" for everything, expecting your readers to mentally fill in the "or she" and "or her" themselves. Doing so seems lazy, if not actively sexist. Showing respect through precise language about gender makes you seem much more credible.

Conclusion

This chapter does not (and could not) provide a complete run-down of formal English language usage. You would do well to bookmark a couple good reference sources to consult when questions arise. If your writing usually has a lot of errors in it, don't despair. Identify one or two practices to master and then learn them, using the feedback from your instructors as a guide. You can't become a flawless writer overnight (and no one writes flawlessly all the time). But over the course of a few semesters, you can certainly produce more precise text that presents your ideas in their best light.

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9: HANDBOOK - PUNCTUATION, CAPITALIZATION, AND MECHANICS

9.1: Italics and Quotation Marks

9.2: Semi-Colon

9.3: Colon

9.4: Apostrophe

9.5: Capitalization

9.6: Capitalization

9.7: Commas

9.8: Comma—Six Main Uses

9.9: Semicolons and Colons

9.10: Apostrophes

9.11: Quotation Marks

9.12: Hyphens and Dashes

9.13: Parentheses and Capitalization

Parentheses, Dashes, and Hyphens

The following video explains how to work with parentheses and dashes.

YouTube Video

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

View this YouTube Video online

Video 9.1

Parentheses and Dashes. **Authored by:** Warner JordanEducation. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Parentheses

Parentheses ( ) are punctuation marks that are always used in pairs and contain material that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence. Parentheses must never contain the subject or verb of a sentence. A sentence should make sense if you delete the parentheses and any text within them. Words in parentheses can also indicate thoughts that writers are thinking to themselves when writing dialog. They can also be used to distinguish asides that are less important to the meaning of a sentence than descriptive words surrounded by commas might be.

Attack of the Killer Potatoes has to be the worst movie I have seen **(**so far**)**.

Your spinach and garlic salad is one of the most delicious **(**and nutritious**)** foods I have ever tasted!

Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, clarify the following sentence by adding parentheses. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Are you going to the seminar this weekend I am?

2. I recommend that you try the sushi bar unless you don't like sushi.

3. I was able to solve the puzzle after taking a few moments to think about it.

4. Please complete the questionnaire at the end of this letter.

5. Has anyone besides me read the assignment?

6. Please be sure to circle not underline the correct answers.

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 if the part of the sentence that is set off also ends the sentence. To create a dash in Microsoft Word or Google Docs, type two hyphens together. Do not put a space between dashes and text.

Arrive to the interview early**—**but not too early.

Any of the suits**—**except for the purple one**—**should be fine to wear.

Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, 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 of 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.

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 (usually adjectives) that work together to form a single description.

The fifty**-**five**-**year**-**old athlete was just as qualified for the marathon as her younger opponents.

My doctor recommended against taking the medication, since it can be habit**-**forming.

My study group focused on preparing for the mid–year 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.

My supervisor was concerned that the team meet–

ing would conflict with the client meeting.



Figure: Unsplash

Note of Caution: Phrases set apart with parentheses or dashes interrupt the flow of the sentence. Use them sparingly, and be careful not to interrupt yourself to much with such asides. It can make your writing harder to read. However, they can also add style by allowing your voice to shine through by creating pacing and emphasis.

Exercise 3

Using what you learned in this chapter, correct the punctuation errors and fix the style in the following sentences.

a. On the day of the wedding, the bride looked more beautiful than ever and I've known her for fifteen years.

b. All the details were perfect in my opinion.

c. Everyone danced at the wedding except my mother.

d. It was to be expected she just had hip surgery.

e. The groom danced with his new mother in law.

f. It was a spectacular, fun filled day for everyone.

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9.1: Italics and Quotation Marks

Generally speaking, you should punctuate the following items with either quotation marks or italics—depending on the level of specificity. As a rule of thumb, the bigger item or source name gets the italics; the smaller item or specific article gets the quotation marks. Think of it this way: the source contains the item. Note the “bigger/smaller” pattern in the columns below:

SOURCE ITALICS QUOTATION MARKS

Newspaper USA Today “Ohio Roads Worst in Nation”

Magazine Rolling Stone “Pixies to Reunite for Fall Tour”

Journal Journal of Athletic

Training

“Study: Most Football Helmets Unsafe”

Book Fast Food Nation “Behind the Counter”

Anthology Emily Dickinson’s

Collected Poems “Wild Nights –Wild Nights”

Movie or Documentary

The Kellogg Brothers: Cornflake Kings

“My Brother, My Boss”

Album Thriller “Billie Jean”

TV Show Family Guy “Save the Clam”

Note that titles of works of art and ships also get italics: Records indicate that Blondel’s La Circassienene au Bain went down with the S.S. Titanic .

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9.2: Semi-Colon

The two primary uses of the semi-colon are to connect two closely-related sentences and to separate items in a list in which commas are used:

- My father majored in economics; my mother majored in biology.
- The band's tour included stops in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Detroit, Michigan; Seattle, Washington; and Austin, Texas.

The main use of the semi-colon is to connect closely-related sentences for more effective presentation of material. This is done in two ways. The easiest is to take two sentences, which will probably be next to each other anyway, and replace the period with a semi-colon. Make the next letter lower case, but avoid conjunctions like "and, but, for, so, yet, nor" with the semi-colon. It wants to do everything!

- I have to get to Macy's; that sale on raincoats won't last forever.

There is a type of sentence writers use frequently, the kind of sentence that says one thing (It's a nice day.) but in the middle, adds some information that alters the meaning. (However, the forecast says rain.):

- It's a nice day; however, the forecast says rain.

Readers like this construction. It lets them know that the writer is looking for exact description.

The semi-colon is also a great cure for the run-on sentence. To place the semi-colon correctly, you need a complete thought on both sides of it. The semi-colon likes for things to be equal:

- Michigan is beautiful in the fall; however, its winters are miserable.
- Her phone bill rose; her grades plummeted.

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9.3: Colon

Think of the colon as the Vanna White of punctuation: it's used almost exclusively to present the sentence's really important content. A colon can introduce a list, a direct quotation, or an explanation (see, for example, the first sentence above). A colon almost always needs to follow a complete thought:

- The treasures he found were impressive: rubies, diamonds, and the original VW Beetle. [complete thought followed by list]
- Herman Melville begins his novel Moby-Dick with a simple yet intriguing sentence: "Call me Ishmael." [complete thought followed by direct quotation]
- The candidate lacks one of the most essential traits of an effective leader: integrity. [complete thought followed by explanation]

You can't use "such as" or a "be" verb like "is" or "are" in front of a colon. Like the semi-colon, it prefers to work alone.

- Many school districts struggle to fund important programs such as: music and art. [incorrect —colon disrupts the flow]
- Many school districts struggle to fund important programs such as music and art. [correct]
- My favorite pizza toppings are: peppers, onions, and ham. [incorrect — colon disrupts the flow]
- My favorite pizza toppings are peppers, onions, and ham. [correct]

Be careful when writing letters. A comma after "Dear Jane," is friendly; a colon after "Dear Jane:" means business.

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9.4: Apostrophe

The apostrophe either shows possession (Meg's cat) or replaces letters or numbers you've left out (I don't know anyone in the class of '13).

Sometimes if nouns end in "s" already, they can show possession by simply adding an apostrophe.

- The students' papers were exceptional. (i.e. all of the students turned in really good papers!)

However, if the "s" is pronounced, that should be reflected on the page.

- The Harris's house was blue.

Bonus information : there are only two ways i-t-s can be punctuated. With nothing, "its" shows possession.

- Its fur was covered in briars.

"It's" shows that a letter has been left out:

- it's = "it is" (It's getting cold.) or "it has" (It's been so cold.)

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9.5: Capitalization

Proper nouns are capitalized. A proper noun is the formal name of a person, month, building, pet, day of the week, product, language, title, state, and many other things.

Common nouns are not capitalized. They are everyday, generic words like the list in the sentence above: “person,” “month,” “pet.”

Sometimes writers think nouns that are important to them should be capitalized, but feelings don’t matter in grammar. “My elementary school” is lower case unless you write “Oakhill Elementary School.” Then it is a title and a proper noun.

The same is true of family members. Once you write “my” in front of “grandma,” she becomes a common noun. If you write her as “Grandma,” the name you actually call her, then she is a proper noun.

Using proper nouns in your writing gives specificity to what you’re saying. If you say, “I went to a movie and it was good,” I know nothing except you went to some movie. But if you say, “I went to Moonrise Kingdom , and I loved it!” I know one interesting thing about you.

If you are not sure, dictionaries will tell you if nouns are proper or common and should be capitalized or not. If you are unsure, at least be consistent. It’s better to make one mistake three times than three separate mistakes.

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9.6: Capitalization

Capitalization

The following are some capitalization rules. You probably know most of them, but it's very possible you may be unclear on a couple of them.

- Always capitalize the first letter of a sentence. This gives a visual signal to your reader that a new idea is beginning.
- Always capitalize "I" when referring to yourself. Don't fall into the texting lowercase "i" habit.
- Always capitalize proper nouns. This may be a little trickier than you think. See this video for some tips.

The following video will tell you more.

Free English Lesson -- Capitalization and Proper Nouns. **Authored by:** The Nardvark. **License:** *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

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Video 9.6.1

Capitalize	Don't Capitalize
• Names of people • A particular river or mountain • Brands • Company/organization names • Days of the week • Months of the year • Street and square names • Departments of the government • Historical eras • Holidays • Institutions • Man-made structures • Geographical and geopolitical locations (countries, counties, etc.) • Landmarks • Planets when referred to as their name • Races, nationalities and tribes • Religions and names of deities • Books that are the basis of a religion • Special events and occasions • The genus of an organism	• Types of animals, unless it's named after a person or a place • Just the words river or mountain • Elements off the periodic table of elements (no exceptions) • Types of companies • Food, unless it's a brand name or has someone's name in it • Medical conditions, unless they are named after someone • Plants, vegetables, and fruits unless they are named after someone (and only capitalize the name) • Use of department and other generic terms without titles • Chemicals and minerals • Seasons and times of day • Heavenly bodies that aren't planets • The species of an organism

Note:

Capitalize adjectives when the adjective pertains to "X," and "X" is a proper noun. For instance, *French* refers to *France*, which is a proper noun. So *French* in *French fries* should be capitalized.

Writing at Work

When working with legal documents, capitalization rules differ from the standard. Defined terms may be capitalized throughout legal documents.

Exercise 1

Correct the capitalization errors in the following fictional story. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

lance worthington signed a Recording Contract with Capitol records on june 15, 2007. Despite selling two million copies of his Debut Album, nothing to lose, lance lost quite a bit as his tax returns from the irs revealed. lance did not think it was fair that the Record Company kept so much of his earnings, so he decided to hire robert bergman, a prominent music Attorney with a Shark-like reputation. bergman represented lance all the way to the supreme court, where lance won the case against capitol records. Lance worthington was instrumental in changing intellectual property rights and long standing Record Company practices. All artists and musicians can thank him for his brave stance against record companies. Lance subsequently formed his own independent record label called worthy records. worthy is now a successful Label based out of chicago, illinois, and its Artists have appeared on well known shows such as The tonight show and Saturday night live. Lance worthington is a model for success in the do-it-yourself World that has become the Music Industry.

Capitalization of Titles (Title Case)

Capitalization of titles can be confusing because we see this done in different ways (styles) in different publication.

The traditional method of capitalizing a title involves:

- Capitalizing the first letter of the first and last words in a title.
- Capitalizing the first letter of all words that aren't articles or coordinating conjunctions that are less than five letters.

The following video illustrates this with particular examples.

YouTube Video

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Video 9.6.1

Capitalization Rules: Capitalization of a Title. **Authored by:** Union Test Prep. **License:** *All Rights Reserved.* **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License.

Note:

Some style guides treat the title as a sentence and only capitalize the first word. This is not generally acceptable in college classes, however.

In particular, when you list the title on your Works Cited or Bibliography page, even if the original title used sentence case capitalization, change the capitalization to title case.

Exercise 2

Capitalize the following titles according to standard title case.

1. the song remains the same
2. enter the wu-tang (36 chambers)
3. the dna drug revolution
4. the curious incident of the dog in the night time
5. so long, and thanks for all the fish
6. if life's a bowl of cherries, what am i doing in the pits?

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9.7: Commas

Commas *join, emphasize, contain*, and *separate*.

- They work with a coordinating conjunction to **join two independent clauses** within a sentence.
  Example: Latoya threw the basketball, and it sailed through the net.
- They **emphasize introductory elements** at the beginning of a sentence or clause.
  Example: Humiliated, she fled he diner.
- They **set off cumulative elements** at the end of a sentence or clause.
  Example: Nine senators changed their vote, passing the bill.
- They work in pairs to **contain restrictive modifiers** within a sentence.
  Example: The committee, heading by Dr. Suarez, met weekly to develop a budget.
- They work in pairs to **contain parenthetical expressions** within a sentence.
  Example: The candidate, much to the committee's surprise, voluntarily revealed her position on several key controversies.
- They **separate a dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence** from the independent clause following it.
  Example: When it started to rain, Sue wished she had her umbrella.
- They **separate two or more adjectives** that independently describe the same noun.
  Example: An open, exploratory, and inclusive spirit marked the meeting.
  If you can put the word "and" and it makes sense, the comma usage is correct.
- They **separate quotations** from their attributions.
  Examples: "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies," said Groucho Marx.
  "In a time of universal deceit," writes George Orwell, "telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act."
- They **separate items in a list**.
  Example: The position requires expertise in building consensus, formulating policy, and developing long-term goals.

The final comma, the one before "and" or "or," is known as the Oxford comma, Harvard comma, or serial comma. The Oxford comma should always be used where it is needed to avoid confusion (for example where one or more items in the list already include the word "and"). Otherwise it is optional.

Commas also separate elements in dates, numbers, personal titles, and addresses.

Use commas to separate the day of the week from the month and to set off a year from the rest of the sentence.

- On Friday, February 13, 2015, we will be having our annual Valentine's Day dance.
- On December 12, 1890, orders for the arrest of Sitting Bull were sent.
- Graduation is set for May 20, 2016.

You do not need to use a comma when giving only the month and the year:

- The next presidential election will take place in November 2016.

Use commas to separate numbers into groups of three when they are more than four digits long. The comma is optional when the number is four digits long:

- 2,400 (or 2400)
- 50,000
- 340,000

Do not use a comma in street numbers or page numbers.

- The table appears on page 1397.
- The fire occurred at 5509 Avenida Valencia.

When following a name with a title, use a comma (if the title is at the end of the sentence) or two (if the title is in the middle of the sentence) to separate the title from the rest of the sentence.

- Earnings far exceeded projections last quarter according to Hitomi Masamura, vice president.
- Paul Hjort, D.C., practices chiropractic medicine in Flagstaff.

Separate each element of an address with commas. However, do not use a comma before a ZIP or other postal code.

- Lady Gaga performed in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Write to the program advisor at 18401 N. 32nd Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85032.

While there are many different ways to use commas in writing, most comma usages fall into three situations. If you know the basic rule for these three cases, you should be set for comma usage.

- Put a comma before a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that separates two independent clauses.
  Example: I wanted to drive to the mall, but my car wouldn't start.
- Put a comma after introductory words, phrases, or clauses in a sentence.
  Example: Although it was a good offer, I felt that I needed to explore other options.
- Use commas to set off elements that interrupt or add information in a sentence.
  Example: Tommy, my older brother, loved to punch me for telling his secrets.

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9.8: Comma—Six Main Uses

1. To separate items in a series.

- I need to buy milk, bread, chicken, and potatoes for dinner. (Notice that the comma before the “and” is required.)

2. To set off introductory material.

- After several days, the fish in the refrigerator began to smell.
- Impatiently, the young mother jerked her son away from the store window.

3. On both sides of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence.

- The children, clean and dressed, were ready to meet the company.
- Mary Jones, who won the lottery, is my new best friend.

4. Comma between complete thoughts connected by a coordinating conjunction.

- Make sure that you have two complete thoughts. If you do not have a subject on both sides of the conjunction, no comma is needed. (Notice that the previous sentence made use of comma rule 2.)
- John and Mary used to live in Annapolis, but now they live in Seattle.

5. Comma with direct quotations.

- The exact words out of the speaker’s mouth are put in quotations and preceded by a comma.
- I hate it when paratroopers ask, “Is your chute folded correctly?”

6. Comma with everyday material.

- I think, Leo, that you are a wonderful person. Wendy, can you show me how to make donuts? [addressing people]
- We hit a deer on December 12, 2012, and again on January 1, 2013. [dates]
- My mother lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her address is 2910 Weston Avenue, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania 15229. [addresses]
- Dear Titus, / Sincerely, Kim [openings and closings of letters]
- Last year, Lou lost over $24,000 at FireKeepers Casino. [numbers]

Exercise 9.8.1

The following paragraph is missing five commas. Using the previous rules, consider where you would (and wouldn’t) add commas to individual sentences.

> Many people would not view the Industrial Revolution as a time of poverty. While the revolution was good for the economy of the United States it was not a solution for poverty or the poor. It changed people’s lives and although they were more mobile the impoverished moved from one poorhouse to another to find work. Life became easier for many citizens of course but factory life was often grueling and dangerous. The effects are still lingering today and movement between social classes is difficult for many to achieve.

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9.9: Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons

A semicolon is can be used in three different types of sentence structures.

- To **join** two independent clauses.
  Example: Several environmental organizations recognized the treaty; few endorsed it.
- To **join** two independent clauses when a conjunctive adverb is used.
  Example: Several environmental organizations recognized the treaty; however, few endorsed it.
- To **separate** items in a list if the items in the list already necessitate a comma.
  Example: She has a son, Mike Nach, of Arizona; a daughter, Emily Rosa, of Colorado; and a sister, Sara Evans, of Minnesota

Colons

Colons are used to draw attention to certain words. They are used after an independent clause to direct attention to a list, appositive, or quotation. They are used between independent clauses when the second clause summarizes or emphasizes the first clause or after the greeting in a formal letter.

Case	Example	Note
List	• I have three sisters: Catherine, Sarah, and Mary. • The sandwich requires several ingredients: bread, butter, cheese, ham, and tomatoes.	
Appositive	My mom just won an award: Mom of the Year.	
Answers the question	There was only one possible explanation: The train had never arrived.	
Quotation	Homer Simpson is famous for his grunted expression: "Doh!"	
Between independent clauses	Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get.	
Introduction of a definition	Hypernym of a word: a word having a wider meaning than the given one.	Is a special case of appositive.
After business salutation	Dear Sir or Madam:	
In a dialogue	• Patient: Doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains. • Doctor: Pull yourself together!	
Separation of title from subtitle	Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope	
Separation of the chapter and the verse numbers of religious scriptures	• John 3:14–16 (or John III:14–16) • The Qur'an, Sura 5:18	
Separation within time of the day	• The concert finished at 23:45. • This file was last modified today at 11:15a.m.	Standard time vs military time

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9.10: Apostrophes

The primary functions for apostrophes are to form possessives and to stand in for missing letters in a contraction. Apostrophes are only very rarely used to form plurals.

- Use **possessive forms** when you want to indicate ownership, or "belonging to." Possessives are almost always formed by adding an apostrophe and an "s" to the end of a noun (a person, place, or thing).

Example 9.10.1:

- Mike's bike is in the yard.
- Phoenix's temperatures bring lots of visitors in winter.
- The table's legs were broken.

- Remember, add an "'s" when the noun does not end in an "s" (driver's) or when the noun is singular and ends in an "s" (Lois's).
- If the noun is plural but not possessive and ends in "s," you don't need to add an apostrophe (diplomas instead of diploma's).
- Nouns also change to express possession (ownership) by using an apostrophe followed by the letter "s" ('s). This can denote singular or plural possessive.

Following are examples of possessive apostrophe use:

- The student's attempts to solve the problem were rewarded.
  The above sentence means one student made an attempt.
- The students' attempts to solve the problem were rewarded.
  The above sentence means more than one student made an attempt.

If you are making an irregular plural noun possessive, the apostrophe comes before the "s" because the word is already plural.

- children/children's (plural)

If a singular common noun ends in "s," add "'s."

- The *boss*'s temper was legendary among his employees.
- The *witness*'s version of the story has several inconsistencies.

Proper nouns ending in "s" differ depending on whether you refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style* or, say, the *Associated Press Stylebook*.

- *Chris*'s book was lost. (*Chicago Manual of Style*)
- *Chris*' book was lost. (*Associated Press Stylebook*)

Apostrophes with Compound Nouns

If a compound noun uses dashes, place the apostrophe after the last noun.

- My *brother-in-law*'s house backs up to Tonto National Forest.

Joint Possession

If there is a compound noun, add the possessive apostrophe to the last noun.

- I went to see *Anthony and George*'s new apartment.
  The apartment belongs to both Anthony and George.

If the compound noun indicates individual possession, add the apostrophe to both nouns. For example, if you have a compound subject, like Jose and Anna, and they own something together, it would look like this:

- *Jose and Anna's* home is on Third Street.

However, if Jose and Anna have different homes, it would look like this:

- *Jose's* and *Anna's* homes are on Third Street.

Here are a few more possessive examples:

- The *amendment's* language clarifies the terms left undefined in the original law.
  In this case, "language" corresponds to "amendment"; "terms" is plural.
- A review of the *month's* headlines reveals nine front-page pieces about the local school board election.
  Here, "headlines" correspond to "month"; "headlines" and "pieces" are plural.
- Sara *Jones's* study of language use and class is considered a classic in the field.
- "Study" corresponds to "Jones"; the apostrophe 's must be added to a proper noun that ends in "s"

A Word About Confusion with Plurals and Possessives

Plural words that end in "s" are not necessarily possessive so do not take apostrophes.

- Three key *ideas* emerged in the introduction.
- The organization was restructured after *decades* of poor performance.
- All *animals* have an innate evolutionary drive to pass along genes to offspring.

But plurals that are also possessive do use apostrophes. Notice how the position of the apostrophe moves depending on whether the plural ends with "s" or not.

- The book traces the *Kennedys'* influence on national politics.
- The library science degree offers a special emphasis in *children's* literature.
- The board changes the policy after the *stakeholders'* objections.

Apostrophes and Missing Letters

Apostrophes are also used to stand in for missing letters in a contraction:

- The conclusion *doesn't* [does not] follow from the evidence.
- Remove the test tubes from the sterilizer when the *cycle's* [cycle is] finished.
- This committee will file a final report when *we're* [we are] done with the applications.

In addition, apostrophes are used to stand for missing letters in "shortened" or slang words:

- *'Tis* [it is] the season to be jolly.

Common Mistakes

Do not use an apostrophe to form the plurals of numbers or acronyms.

- 1980s
- eights
- three CEOs
- these JPEGs

Distinguish between plural and possessive dates.

- The 1970s' music was the best.

The 1970s own that music.

- The 1970s are but a memory to many of us.
  The 1970s is plural but does not own a memory.

Exercise 9.10.1

Add apostrophes (or not) to the following sentences.

1. Johns book is on the floor.
2. The childrens playground is a next to the grocery store.
3. The 1990s was a time of turmoil.
4. The Smiths dog broke free from his leash.

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9.11: Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are used to mark direct quotations. This is to give the original writer or speaker credit for their work. If you are paraphrasing, you do not need quotation marks. (See Chapter 8 for additional explanation and examples.)

- If you are using a long quotation (long is constituted by four or more typed lines), instead of quotation marks, you should indent the quotation ten spaces (making it a block quote) and introduce with a colon.
- If your quote has a quote within it, the inner quote needs one quotation mark and the outer quote needs two quotation marks.
- Use quotation marks around the titles of short works such as newspapers and magazine articles, poems, short stories, songs and chapters.
- Periods and commas should be placed inside the quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points should be placed inside the quotation marks, unless the punctuation applies to the whole sentence (not just the quote). Colons and semicolons should be placed outside the quotation marks.
- You can set off words by using quotation marks instead of italicizing or underlining them.

Using Quoted Material within your Own Writing

- If a quotation is introduced formally, use a colon.
- If a quotation is being used with “he said” or “she said,” use a comma.
- If a quotation is blended into the writer's sentence, you can use a comma, although no punctuation may be more appropriate.
- If a quotation is used at the beginning of a sentence, use a comma after the quote unless the quote ends in a question mark or exclamation point.
- If you choose to break up the quotation with your own words, use commas to offset the quotation from your explanation.

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9.12: Hyphens and Dashes

Dashes (“—,”) are used to mark an interruption within a sentence, while **hyphens** (“-“) are used to join two parts of a compound word, or to indicate that a word has been split at the end of a line. A dash is approximately as long as two hyphens.

Dashes are used to mark an interruption within a sentence. They are used in much the same way as parentheses.
Example: Three unlikely companions—a canary, an eagle, and a parrot—flew by my window in an odd flock.

A **hyphen** joins two parts of a compound word.
Example: governor-elect, twenty-five, half-baked.

Hyphens can also be used to make compound words more understandable. Consider these words:

- Man-eating dog
- Man eating dog

The first example describes a particular type of dog (man-eating). The second example, alas, suggests that a man is eating a dog.

Or consider the case of the flaming-red pickup truck, as opposed to its more alarming cousin, the flaming red pickup truck.

In general, if the first of two adjectives is describing the second, and not the noun following, you should use a hyphen: deep-blue water, good-tasting hamburger, happy-faced child.

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9.13: Parentheses and Capitalization

Parentheses

Parentheses can be used to enclose an interjected, explanatory, or qualifying remark, mathematical quantities, etc. The words placed inside the brackets are not necessary for the interrupted sentence to be complete but instead set off incidental/accompanying information.

- Be sure to call me (extension 2104) when you get this message.
- Copyright affects how much regulation is enforced (Lessig 2004).
- Be sure to (1) brush your teeth, (2) floss, and (3) gargle with mouthwash.

Capitalization

Basic principles of capitalization dictate that common nouns are not capitalized; proper nouns are capitalized.

- **Proper nouns**: Capitalize nouns that are the unique identification for a particular person, place, or thing: Michael, Minnesota, North America.
- **Proper names**: Capitalize common nouns like party only when they are part of the full name for the person, place or thing. Consider the following examples:
  - I am a member of the Democratic Party.
  - The Democratic and Republican parties are the two major parties in the United States.
    The word parties would be lower-cased when being used in a plural setting
- **Sentences**: Capitalize the first word of every sentence including quoted statements and direct questions.
- **Composition**: Capitalize the first, last and most important words in the names of books, movies, plays, poems, operas, songs, radio and television programs, and the like: Family Guy, Game of Thrones, Phantom of the Opera.
- **Titles**: Capitalize formal titles only when used in front of a name, not when used after the name: Associate Professor John Doe / John Doe, associate professor.
- **Academic titles**: Capitalize and spell out formal titles only when they precede a name: Chancellor David Nachriener.

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INDEX

A

apostrophes
9.4: Apostrophe

argument essay
6.3.6: How to Write an Argument Essay

B

brainstorming
5.4.1.1.1: What Is Brainstorming?

C

Colon
9.3: Colon

D

dangling modifiers
8.7: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

E

ethos
6.3: Persuasion

L

logos
6.3: Persuasion

M

misplaced modifiers
8.7: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

N

narration
6.1.1: Narration

P

pathos
6.3: Persuasion

plagiarism
7.1: Avoiding Plagiarism

R

revision
5.6.1.1: General Revision Points to Consider

S

sentence fragments
8.1: Fragments and Run-Ons

V

verb tense
8.4: Verb Tense

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GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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